



Republic of Benin



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PORTO-NOVO

POPULATION:	12.4 Millions
REGION:	West Africa
CAPITAL:	Porto-Novo
ANNUAL GDP:	17.5 Billions USD
ASSESSMENT DATE:	April 2022

INTRODUCTION

In April 2022, the Government of the Republic of Benin, through the *Commission Nationale de Lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères* (CNLCPAL), in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), conducted a national (WAM) reference baseline assessment in Benin. The objective was to assess as comprehensively and systematically as possible the institutional and operational capacities, policies, processes, and procedures of WAM, in line with the obligations and commitments of international and regional instruments, as well as relevant standards and guidelines, in order to identify approaches and options for strengthening the national framework governing WAM in Benin.

This country insight presents the key findings of the WAM baseline assessment in Benin, covering the period until April 2022. This publication draws from the report prepared and transmitted by UNIDIR, in cooperation with ECOWAS, to the Government of Benin.¹ **This country insight does not take into account changes and developments since April 2022 regarding**

WAM in Benin. Nevertheless, most of the main findings and the options identified for further strengthening the national framework governing WAM in Benin remain valid. The country insight is structured as follows: after an introduction to the national context and the situation of WAM in the Republic of Benin, the main findings and observations are presented by key functional areas (see also Box 2). This is followed by the options identified and validated during the consultative process (see also Boxes 3 and 4) for each key functional area. The final section provides perspectives on how the results of the baseline assessment could be used and the options identified implemented to strengthen the national WAM framework in Benin.

This country insight is part of a series on States that have undertaken a WAM baseline assessment at national level using UNIDIR's Reference Methodology. It is complemented by an annual update on the progress made by these States in strengthening WAM frameworks, policies and practices at different levels.²

Box 1. What is WAM?

WAM is the exercise of governance and oversight, in application of the principle of accountability, exercised over weapons and ammunition throughout their life cycle, including the establishment of relevant national frameworks, processes and practices for acquisition, storage, transfers, tracing and end-use control,³ as well as the safe, secure and responsible final disposal of material.⁴ WAM covers conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and ammunition.

Box 2. WAM key functional areas covered by the national baseline assessment

UNIDIR's reference methodology for national WAM baseline assessments⁵ used for this assessment at the national level includes an assessment approach by key functional WAM areas. This approach and methodology aims to assess the entire life-cycle management of weapons and ammunition, to the extent possible, thereby promoting a holistic approach to understanding the institutions, capacities, practices, procedures, and actors including stakeholders involved in WAM.

The key functional areas are:

- National coordination mechanism;
- Legal and regulatory framework;
- Transfer controls;
- Stockpile management of weapons and ammunition;
- Marking of weapons;
- Recordkeeping;
- Weapons tracing and ammunition profiling;
- Processing of illicit weapons and ammunition;
- Collection (and civilian possession);
- Disposal, including destruction of weapons and ammunition. .

The integration of gender-responsive policies and practices in WAM is considered as a crosscutting issue, and strengthens the national security sector, oversight, accountability and governance of weapons and ammunition. A gender-sensitive approach to arms control and disarmament, as well as women's participation in WAM, is integral to the planning, design, implementation and monitoring process and to a national baseline assessment of WAM and WAM initiatives and activities.⁶

Box 3. Options and a national 'roadmap' towards a national framework governing WAM

One of the key results of a national WAM baseline assessment - which forms the basis for a follow-up assessment and activities to strengthen WAM - is the development of a national 'roadmap' on WAM. Such a roadmap sets out the current status of capacities and processes for WAM, WAM enhancement opportunities, as well as options for implementation by key functional areas, organised by prioritisation over a time-frame and actor-specific attribution of roles and responsibilities. Options may include international WAM support and assistance.⁷

Summary of options for strengthening the national WAM framework in Benin



National Coordination Mechanism



Legal and Regulatory Framework at National Level



Transfer Controls



Stockpile Management of Weapons and Ammunition



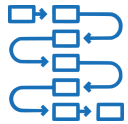
Marking of Weapons



Recordkeeping



Weapons Tracing and Ammunition Profiling



Processing of Illicit Weapons and Ammunition



Collection (and Civilian Possession)



Disposal, including Destruction of Weapons and Ammunition



Palais des Congrès, Cotonou, Benin - © "Congress palace in Cotonou, Benin" by Sophie Graubert licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED

Key Stakeholders

- National Assembly of Benin (ANB)
- National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Light Weapons in Benin (CNLCPAL)
- Benin Customs Department (DGD)
- General Directorate of Water, Forests and Hunting of Benin (DGEFC)
- Armed Forces Material Division (DMA)
- General Staff of the Armed Forces (EMG)
- Security and Defence Forces (SDF)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Benin (MAE)
- Ministry for the Environment and Transport, in charge of Sustainable Development, Benin (MCVDD)
- Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Governance of Benin (MDGL)
- Ministry of National Defence (MDN)
- Ministry of the Economy and Finance of Benin (MEF)
- Ministry of the Interior and Public Security of Benin (MISP)
- Ministry of Justice and Legislation of Benin (MJL)
- General Directorate of the Republican Police of Benin (DGPR)
- Presidency of the Republic of Benin (PRB)
- Benin civil society
- Benin's international partners

National context

Benin is a country in West Africa, bordering Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, which has generally experienced relative stability since its independence in 1960, although periods of political instability and coups d'état marked the country's history in the 1960s/1970s.⁸ Today, Benin faces armed attacks by non-state armed groups and groups designated as terrorist groups. The resurgence of designated terrorist groups is leading to a considerable increase in the flow of weapons, ammunition and their components, as well as armed combatants, to several countries in the sub-region, including Benin's neighbouring countries.⁹

The regional security crisis has had a direct impact on Benin, particularly in the northern part of the country, which borders countries facing an increased terrorist threat. In the region, threats posed by the acquisition and use of weapons, ammunition and components, including improvised explosive device (IED) components, by designated terrorist groups, as well as links with criminal activities, have generally increased since 2019. Since then, there has been an increase

in number of attacks, including injuries and casualties, against national security and defence forces (SDF) and civilian populations and communities including men, women, and children. This insidious threat currently endangering Benin, as well as several other coastal countries in the sub-region, has clear links with the diversion and illicit proliferation and circulation of weapons and ammunition, with flows of other illicit goods, and with organised and transnational crime.

Threats linked to weapons acquired and held by designated terrorist groups within Benin's territory seem mainly to emerge from the border areas with Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Togo. This situation highlights the need for Benin and the other countries in the region to strengthen their efforts to prevent violent extremism and combat terrorism, as well as to strengthen their regional and international cooperation on stabilisation, security, peace and sustainable development.

National context as it relates to WAM

Weapons and ammunition management in Benin is complex and raises a number of different issues. First, it concerns State-owned weapons and ammunition, and measures put in place to manage their life-cycle from acquisition and import to their final disposal, including destruction. This includes preventing diversion, illicit trafficking, unplanned explosions and their impacts, particularly on the civilian population, including men, women and children, as well as their acquisition and use by unauthorized actors.

Strengthening the full life-cycle management of weapons and ammunition is especially important for Benin considering that the port of Cotonou serves as an important trade hub for the region, including for international transfers of weapons and ammunition. In addition, Benin is a troop-contributing country to peace operations,¹⁰ and has recently acquired new military equipment for the SDF. The SDF are also responsible for providing security, including the security of the borders and in the provinces, against armed groups and designated terrorist groups.¹¹ All of this makes strengthening WAM even more important.

Another important aspect of WAM in Benin, as in other countries in the region, is civilian ownership and craft production of weapons - including by both civilian entities/organisations/groups and individuals,¹² in Benin but also in other countries in the sub-region. For example, a 2018 study estimated that there were around 34,700 state-owned weapons in Benin, with a similar number (33,000) of firearms in civilian possession.¹³ While precise information in this regard is

scarce, given the security situation in the country and in the region, the regulation and management of these weapons in civilian possession is increasingly important for the authorities and stakeholders in Benin. Against a backdrop of regional instability and insecurity across West Africa, illicit trafficking, particularly cross-border trafficking in weapons and ammunition by various means (sea, land, air) and the associated risks are another important issue for WAM in Benin. The illicit trafficking, proliferation and circulation of weapons and ammunition in the region are facilitated by, for example, porous and permeable land borders, thus facilitating "ant-trafficking" that can grow and have a significantly negative impact on the long-term security situation.

All these issues and problems have a varying impact on stability, peace and sustainable development in Benin. It is therefore essential to address these issues and put in place an appropriate framework and system to prevent conflict and promote the security and well-being of the population, including men, women and children.

At the international level, Benin has long demonstrated its commitment to arms control standards, as a signatory to all relevant regional and international relevant instruments.¹⁴ The assessment carried out in April 2022 is a demonstration of the willingness of national authorities and stakeholders to further strengthen the national framework governing the life-cycle management of weapons and ammunition in order to meet the challenges that Benin faces in terms of stability, security, peace and sustainable development.



► Beninese soldiers on patrol in Pendjari National Park - © Benin Armed Forces

Key functional area 1:

National Coordination Mechanism



A national WAM coordination mechanism ensures the cooperation and coordination of different actors to effectively manage the life cycle of weapons and ammunition and implement associated control measures. To this end, it is generally recommended that a government entity in charge of devising and providing general policy guidelines and ensuring the coordination of national action on WAM be designated or established.¹⁵

In Benin, WAM is currently mainly coordinated by two key national entities. The Directorate for Armed Forces Equipment (*Direction du Matériel des Armées - DMA*), under the responsibility of the Ministry Delegate to the Presidency of the Republic in charge for National Defense (MDN), is responsible for WAM within the Beninese Armed Forces (*Forces armées béninoises - FAB*) and coordinates several WAM-related activities with other components of the Beninese SDF. The National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Benin (*Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères - CNLCPAL*), under the responsibility of the Presidency of the Republic, acts as the main focal point for WAM and is the national entity officially designated by Benin as focal point for the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, MAE*) responsible for ensuring the liaison with regional and international mechanisms, particularly in relation to WAM, in collaboration with the CNLCPAL. The Ministry of Public Security (*Ministère de la Sécurité Publique - MISP*) is responsible for the regulation and measures governing civilian access to weapons and ammunition by civilians. The CNLCPAL has established a five-year action plan for the control and management of small arms and light weapons (SALW). It is worth noting, however, that this plan has faced a number of challenges. These challenges mainly relate to the placement of the CNLCPAL within the government's institutional structure, and to the capacity of national and international stakeholders to adhere to and implement the plan.

During the national baseline assessment in April 2022, the national authorities and

national experts noted the importance of clarifying the roles, responsibilities and missions of the various authorities with regard to WAM, in particular by revising and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework at the national level (see below). These efforts can be supported, by the national authority having the lead for WAM, with the development, adoption and implementation of a national approach and strategy dedicated to WAM. Strengthening the national coordination mechanism (through, for example, an interministerial committee) should go hand in hand with the development of a specific mechanism for exchanging information between national authorities and national stakeholders. Such a mechanism could also consider and include regional and international partners, in order to strengthen regional and international cooperation, including the coordination of assistance and support received in relation to WAM. With regard to the CNLCPAL, the options identified by the national authorities and the national experts who took part in the baseline assessment were to revise and broaden its mandate, to establish stronger links between the CNLCPAL and the other national bodies within the national institutional architecture having a role in WAM, and to allocate it adequate resources to carry out its tasks. Generally, with a view to ensuring the full participation of all stakeholders at the national level, one of the other options identified during the baseline assessment in 2022 was for the CNLCPAL to exchange with, raise awareness among and strengthen the knowledge and capacities of various civil society organisations, including civil those working on gender issues, and media organisations, in order to strengthen WAM in Benin. In the long term, there was interest in decentralising the national coordination mechanism.



► Aerial view of the Presidency of the Republic of Benin in Cotonou - © Presidency of the Republic of Benin

Options for strengthening the coordination mechanism at the national level

SHORT-TERM	Identify the institutions responsible for coordinating the various aspects of WAM in order to define the responsibilities and missions (international transfers, marking, tracing, etc.) of each institution with a role in this coordination (CNLCPAL, Military Staff, DMA, etc.)	CNLCPAL
	Give the CNLCPAL a broader mandate and adequate human, financial and material resources (avoid turnover of members)	PRB MDN / FAB ANB MAE CNLCPAL
	Accelerate the work of the sub-committee responsible for reviewing the mandate of the national commission which places all so-called "conventional" weapons under their remit	PRB MDN / FAB ANB MAE CNLCPAL
	Identify the roles and responsibilities with regard to national obligations established in international and regional instruments for all of these texts (ATT report, ECOWAS exemption request, etc.)	CNLCPAL MDN / FAB MAE
MEDIUM-TERM	Update the CNLCPAL 2020-2024 Action Plan and define a corresponding resource mobilization strategy	CNLCPAL MDN / FAB MAE MEF ANB Civil Society
	Promote support for the CNLCPAL from technical partners and donors	CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
	Set up a framework for regular consultations with civil society to review the activities planned by civil society organisations and ensure the full participation of the CNLCPAL in its activities	CNLCPAL Civil Society Press network
	Provide and ensure training for journalists/civil society organisations on WAM issues	CNLCPAL Civil Society Press network MDN / FAB
	Train judges on the ECOWAS Convention and the law governing weapons and ammunition in Benin	CNLCPAL MJL MDN / FAB
LONG-TERM	Set up a mechanism for exchanging information between the national institutions involved in all the key functional areas of WAM (e.g. Interministerial WAM Committee)	MDN / FAB MISP MJL CNLCPAL Civil Society Press network
	Proceed with a gradual decentralisation of the CNLCPAL	CNLCPAL MDGL



Key functional area 2:



Legal and Regulatory Framework at the National Level

At the national level, the legal and regulatory framework is essential for the establishment of effective control mechanisms aimed at preventing the illicit proliferation of weapons and ammunition, and ensuring the effective management of weapons and ammunition, in accordance with the multilateral and regional obligations and commitments to which the State is a party.¹⁶

In Benin, the legal and regulatory framework at the national level is composed of several national laws and legal texts.¹⁷ However, at the time of the baseline assessment in April 2022, the Beninese authorities and national experts recognised and highlighted a lack of uniformity and harmonisation of the legal and regulatory framework at national level. This concerns both the roles and responsibilities of the national authorities (see above), and harmonisation with international instruments including the obligations and commitments made by Benin as a State Party to the Arms Trade Treaty and the ECOWAS Convention. The draft law of 2020,¹⁸ which aims to incorporate the provisions of the ATT into the legal and regulatory framework at national level, was at the time of the assessment in April 2022 awaiting an implementing decree for it to be enacted. In addition, the national authorities noted that there were a number of gaps in the draft law, particularly with regard to transfer controls, the maintenance of a single national register, the regulation and control of weapons owned by civilians and private security companies, and the profiling and

tracing of weapons and ammunition. In 2022, a more thorough review of the bill was planned to bring it fully in line with the provisions of the ATT and the ECOWAS Convention.

The national authorities and national experts identified several options for strengthening the legal and regulatory framework at the national level. In general, it was noted that the domestication of obligations and commitments under relevant regional and international instruments should be accelerated. The revision and harmonisation of the draft law with the provisions of the relevant international and regional instruments and the adoption of an implementing decree would make it possible to fill the current gaps in several key WAM areas (such as transfers, stockpile management, civilian possession, traceability and profiling, and disposal, including destruction of weapons and ammunition) and would enable more effective implementation of WAM in Benin. More specifically, this would enable the Beninese authorities to ensure better control of international transfers of weapons, ammunition (including explosives) and related materials. Raising awareness among the various stakeholders, including the civilian population, of the legal and regulatory framework at national level, particularly with regard to civilian possession of firearms, hunting weapons and home-made weapons, will further strengthen this WAM functional area and promote the rule of law in Benin.

Options for strengthening the legal and regulatory framework at the national level

<p>Review national laws and regulations on weapons, ammunition and explosives in line with regional and international instruments, standards and guidelines (e.g. by speeding up the drafting and adoption of the 2020 draft law and bringing it into line with the ECOWAS Convention and the ATT)</p>	<p>MDN / FAB CNCLPAL MISP MJL ANB Civil Society</p>
<p>Elaborate, adopt and regularly update a national control list for strategic and sensitive goods</p>	
<p>Adopt legislative measures for the creation of a single organ for conventional arms and ammunition management and control through the revision/adoption of a law (conventional weapons, and cluster munitions)</p>	

Introduce a single set of regulations governing the practices of private security companies
Reinforce the inclusion in legislation of the obligation to request an exemption from ECOWAS for all weapons imports (for civilian and SDF use)
Regulate the management of weapons and ammunition stockpiles, as well as stocks and use of explosives by civilians
Put in place standards for marking, in line with regional agreements on the subject, for all weapons and ammunition present in country
Improve regulations on civilian possession of weapons (hunting weapons and home-made weapons)
Accelerate the domestication of regional and international instruments
Set up standards for maintaining a single national register of weapons and ammunition

MDN / FAB
 CNCLPAL
 MISP
 MJL
 ANB
 Civil Society

Key functional area 3:

Transfer Controls



Transfer controls are crucial to prevent excessive, destabilising and illicit transfers of weapons, ammunition and related materials at international, regional and national levels, which can pose substantial risks and a serious threat to peace and security. Transfer controls are also crucial in preventing human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law.¹⁹

In Benin, the legal and regulatory framework at national level regulates certain aspects of transfers (imports, and in part re-exports, transit, transshipment and brokering) of weapons, ammunition and related materials. However, there are gaps and certain aspects need to be strengthened, in line with the obligations and commitments made under the relevant regional and international instruments (see below).²⁰ In April 2022, the MDN was the competent national authority for authorising imports of military weapons; and the *Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique* (MISP) for authorising imports of civilian weapons and ammunition for personal use and explosives for civilian use. It should be noted that at the time of the national baseline assessment in April 2022 and in the context of the revision of the legal and regulatory framework at national level (mentioned below), the national authorities of

Benin, through various agencies, were in the process of elaborating a national control list defining the categories of weapons, ammunition, and related material subject to international conventional arms transfer controls.

The process for authorising imports (of weapons and ammunition) for the Armed Forces and other defence and security forces sees the Armed Forces Headquarters issue an opinion on the need for an acquisition, and the import is to be approved by the President of the Republic. Benin therefore has a centralized system for the acquisition (and distribution) of weapons and ammunition for the SDF. The process for the application of an exemption from the ECOWAS Convention, including the transmission of the documentation required to obtain an exemption certificate from the ECOWAS Commission, is managed by the MDN, through the MEA. Imports are recorded in a national arms and ammunition import register held by the MDN. According to the national experts present at the assessment in April 2022, anyone wishing to carry out brokering activities on the national territory must register with the national authorities and hold a brokering licence. However, there was no official list of state-approved brokers.

The national authorities in Benin have noted several opportunities to strengthen controls of transfers of arms and ammunition, in particular by implementing the provisions of the ATT and the ECOWAS Convention. At a strategic level, these opportunities are closely linked to the revision and strengthening of the legal and regulatory framework underway in Benin (see above, for example concerning the establishment of a control list for transfers of weapons, ammunition and related materials, or national coordination). Increased and appropriate involvement of the CNLCPAL in weapons and ammunition transfer processes, including the ECOWAS exemption request process and procedure, was noted and identified as one of the key options for strengthening this area. The systematic

submission of exemption requests to ECOWAS for all transfers, including the import of weapons and ammunition to civilians, would further strengthen this WAM key functional area. In this respect, the centralisation of the national registration system, its electronic conversion and the establishment of a central database were also noted by the national authorities and experts (see below). Lastly, the national authorities and experts stressed the importance of strengthening border controls, including through cross-border cooperation at the various types of borders, and strengthening operational capacities (technical, human, dog squad, etc.) in this respect to combat illicit arms trafficking.²¹

Options for strengthening transfer controls

SHORT-TERM	Regulate import, export, re-export, brokerage, transit and transshipment activities by law (define the procedures to be followed, define the documents required, define the respective roles of each national authority, define criminal penalties)	ANB CNLCPAL ECOWAS
	Strengthen cross-border cooperation to control arms transfers and trafficking	CNLCPAL MDN / FAB
MEDIUM-TERM	Strengthen the human (training) and technical (GPS systems, scanners) capacities of customs and the SDF (at ports, airports and land borders, prison agency)	DGD DGPR CNLCPAL
	Strengthen the dog squad's capacity to detect explosives (port + airport) and molecular detection equipment	DGD DGPR CNLCPAL

Key functional area 4:

Stockpile Management of Weapons and Ammunition



Effective stockpile management of weapons and ammunition is an essential element of any security and defence force and its operations. This management is crucial to ensure the operational readiness of the SDF, to protect national strategic assets, to reduce the risks of diversion and illicit proliferation, and to reduce the risks and mitigate the impacts of unplanned explosions resulting from inadequate management of stocks on the population, including men, women and children.²²

In Benin, the management of weapons and ammunition stockpiles is governed by the national legal and regulatory framework, and

more specifically by internal military regulations. In the absence of such regulations, the national authorities draw from regional and international standards and technical guidelines in this area. Stockpile management is supervised by the Ministry of Defence, the EMG, the DMA and the logistics divisions of the SDF, which are the only bodies authorised to manage these stocks. The national management cycle includes storage, distribution, consumption, accounting, control, assessment and risk reduction. According to the participants and national experts, ammunition is stored and classified (labelled) in depots. Stocks are regularly inventoried

and procedures exist to identify surplus, obsolete and/or unstable material for disposal (see below). In this regard, significant efforts were underway at the time of the national assessment (see below regarding final disposal). Measures to develop (professional) career plans for armourers and ammunition technicians are ongoing to sustainably build the capacity of personnel. At the time of the assessment in April 2022, given the evolving security situation in Benin, major efforts were also underway to reform the physical infrastructure for the storage of weapons and ammunition, following a risk assessment and needs assessment undertaken between 2016 and 2017 (see below). Thanks to international and regional cooperation, Benin has benefited from international assistance in this area, in particular from the Mines Advisory Group. One of the main challenges regarding physical infrastructure is the evolving security situation in Benin, and WAM by SDF units at storage sites in remote and high-risk areas.

The national authorities have noted several opportunities for strengthening this important and key area of WAM for Benin. In this regard, it will be necessary to complete the risk assessment, the identification of obsolete, unstable or

degraded materiel (to be disposed of) and the needs in terms of storage as well as strengthening of the physical infrastructure and capacity of all the SDF (including the Republican Police, - which in April 2022 was recently merged with the National Gendarmerie -, the Customs and Water, Forestry and Hunting services, as well as the Prison Administration). In some cases, these efforts include the relocation of ammunition depots "currently located in urban areas. One of the options identified by the national authorities and national experts also concerns the ongoing and gradual integration of the physical infrastructure for the storage of weapons and ammunition, with the national accountability and monitoring system including the national marking and record-keeping system (see below). Generally, it is also essential to continue building the capacity of personnel (by training officers from the various SDFs, and in particular by passing on expertise from the DMA to the other SDFs in Benin) for WAM, in accordance with international standards and technical guidelines. Finally, the introduction and use of information and communication technologies could further strengthen this important and key area of WAM in Benin.

Options for strengthening stockpile management

Strengthen the physical security of weapons and ammunition depots	CNLCPAL SDF International Partners
Strengthen human resources qualified in the management of ammunition and explosives	
Train ammunition depot managers in stockpile management, international standards and their implementation	
Computerise the registers, files and data collected manually by creating a centralised electronic database (server)	
Continue to destroy obsolete weapons and ammunition to reduce the risk of accidents	
Relocate ammunition depots located in urban areas	
Continue to rehabilitate, build and secure weapons and ammunition storage facilities, in accordance with international standards	
Carry out a technical assessment/technical surveillance visit of the needs of the Republican Police, Customs as well as Water and Forestry Services	

SHORT - TERM

MEDIUM - TERM

Develop national standards and standardised operational procedures for the management of weapons and ammunition

Support the clearance of areas to be used as ammunition isolation zones

CNLCPAL
SDF
International Partners

Develop and implement, at the strategic and operational/technical level, follow up and monitoring to ensure the proper management and security of weapons and prevent diversion

Key functional area 5:

Marking of Weapons



Marking is a crucial component of the effective management of weapons and ammunition, rendering them uniquely identifiable, and prevent diversion, while also contributing to security and stockpile management.

In Benin, the marking of weapons was initiated in 2018 by the Ministry of Defence (more specifically the DMA) and implemented in several phases. Benin has benefited from international and regional cooperation and assistance in this area. Benin has adopted its own national marking system for weapons, which is in line with the relevant international standards and draws on regional standards and guidelines. According to the national authorities and experts, at the time of the national baseline assessment in April 2022 there were two weapons marking practices in use: the marking of State weapons already in State stockpiles (or newly imported); or the marking of weapons held in a second country prior to export to Benin.²³ The existence and continuation of the second practice remained unclear in April 2022. At the time of the national baseline assessment, more than 23,000 weapons had already been marked by the DMA. However, there are challenges regarding the marking of all weapons already held in stockpiles, including the number of personnel (both men and women) trained and the time required. It is worth noting that in April 2022, there was not yet a formal

(standardised) procedure for marking weapons, nor a specific programme for marking civilian weapons. The national authorities and national experts noted several opportunities for strengthening Benin's institutional and operational capacities, procedures and practices for marking weapons, while recognising the significant progress that has been made in this area. First, it remains important for the DMA and other national authorities to continue marking the weapons of certain components and units of the SDF, particularly those located in the north of the country. The necessary strengthening of human (personnel, both men and women) and technical (machines and their management) capacities could go hand in hand with the development, adoption and streamlining of a formal (standardized) marking procedure. The national authorities and experts also noted the establishment of an electronic database (which would allow the automatic and simultaneous registration of the serial numbers of marked weapons in the national registration system). The marking of weapons imported and manufactured locally by civilians, by the MISP, would further strengthen this WAM key functional area. Finally, national authorities could also consider marking weapons that are destined for destruction (see below) to reduce the risk of diversion.



▶ Shooting training for Beninese soldiers - © Benin Armed Forces

Options for strengthening the marking of weapons

	Continue the marking of weapons held by the SDF	CNLCPAL MDN / FAB PR / DGEFC / DGD International Partners ECOWAS
SHORT-TERM	Strengthening the technical capacity for marking (additional marking machines / renovation and maintenance of existing machines, etc.)	MDN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
	Disseminate and raise awareness of the standard operating procedures for marking weapons among the various units and security forces	MDN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
MEDIUM-TERM	Regulation, and marking of, hunting weapons and home-made weapons	CNLCPAL MDN / FAB DGPR / DGEFC / DGD International Partners ECOWAS
LONG-TERM	Secondary marking of weapons identified for destruction	MDN / FAB

Key functional area 6:



Recordkeeping

Comprehensive and effective record-keeping is a crucial element for national authorities, enabling a comprehensive inventory of weapons and ammunition on the territory of the State. Such record-keeping includes information on transfers, national stocks, weapons and ammunition in civilian possession, as well as weapons recovered through illegal activities. International and regional standards/best practices recommend that data management be centralised and managed by a competent State authority.²⁴

In Benin, the national system for registering weapons and ammunition held by the State is centralised within the DMA, EMG of the MDN. Currently, the system is mainly based on internal DMA guidelines, and uses various accounting documents to record movements/transactions of weapons and ammunition along the supply chain from the centre to the units (and between units). It is worth noting that in April 2022, the system was paper-based and being implemented

manually, while a process of digitalization from a manual to an electronic national registration system was underway. Thanks to regional cooperation, Benin has received assistance and support from ECOWAS in this regard. By April 2022, electronic conversion was under way in all four components of the FAB. However, the process of digitalization had yet to be fully and effectively operationalised. In April 2022, only some of the SDF (and their staff, both men and women) had received training in record-keeping and data management. As part of the national registration and record-keeping system, specific registers are also kept by the Republican Police for lost or stolen weapons, as well as those recovered from the illicit sphere (see also below); although the existence and use of such registers did not appear to be a practice followed by all the SDF. Another challenge raised during the assessment in April 2022 was the lack of information on weapons and ammunition held by civilians, and their regularisation, including registration for imports.

During the national baseline assessment in April 2022, the national authorities and national experts identified several opportunities for improvement in the national weapons and ammunition registration system. In general, the precise definition of roles and responsibilities in this area was noted by the national authorities and national experts (see also above). With regard to weapons and ammunition held by State entities, working towards the establishment of a central database contributed to the proper and effective centralization of the registration system in Benin. Such a database would also enable the registration of transfers of weapons and ammunition accompanying Beninese contingents in peace operations. The development of a formal (i.e. standardised)

procedure for recording and storing data would make it possible to streamline good practice at national level, and could also be used in personnel capacity building activities. In addition, the national authorities and national experts noted the importance of setting up a control and verification system to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information recorded. At the same time, the importance of putting in place security measures to prevent unauthorised access to the data was also emphasised. With regard to weapons held by civilians, the importance of having more detailed information was noted and emphasised, as well as the creation, in the long term, of a centralised database that gives authorities a better overview of civilian-held weapons and ammunition (see also below).

Options for strengthening recordkeeping

SHORT-TERM	Strengthen standard operating procedures for weapons and ammunition record-keeping in the security forces (Republican Police, Water, Forestry and Hunting, Customs)	MDN MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
	Identify specific responsibilities in terms of keeping and maintaining registers	
MEDIUM-TERM	Set up an integrated electronic programme for all national weapons and ammunition registers / Creation of an electronic database and a weapons register in line with the provisions of the ECOWAS Convention	MDN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
	Set up a harmonised register for national armed and security forces participating in peace operations in line with international standards	
LONG-TERM	Set up an electronic system for registering weapons held by civilians	

Key functional area 7:

Weapons Tracing and Ammunition Profiling



Tracing weapons and ammunition is a crucial issue in the fight against illicit trafficking, because the vast majority of illegal weapons and ammunition originally ammunition originates from legal sources. An effective traceability system makes it possible to trace weapons and ammunition from their manufacture or import to their last legal owner, in order to prevent them from being diverted to the illicit market and to combat weapons and ammunition trafficking.²⁵

In Benin, in April 2022, the legal and regulatory framework at national level did not define in detail the roles and responsibilities of the various national authorities with regard to the tracing and profiling of weapons and ammunition. The DMA is the focal point for tracing, although it remains unclear whether a focal point has been designated and communicated under the relevant international instruments. Benin has already put in place some essential components of a national

tracing and profiling system, such as the initiation of a national database on State weapons and ammunition and a mechanism for tracing weapons recovered from the illicit sphere. However, in April 2022, the use of this mechanism and the number of domestic and international tracing operations carried out per year remained unclear. In April 2022, the process of tracing weapons and ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere was carried out manually (by consulting paper registers), with an electronic database in the process of being developed (see above). However, in April 2022 it seemed that the experienced personnel (both men and women) of the DMA and the Republican Police were already capable of carrying out certain tracing operations.

At the national assessment in April 2022, the participants and national experts identified several options for strengthening this WAM functional area in Benin. The traceability and profiling of weapons and ammunition could be taken into account in the current revision of the national legal and regulatory framework (see above). At the strategic level, a specific coordination mechanism, including

information sharing between the various national authorities, could be strengthened. National authorities and national experts noted the creation of a centralised database at national level and the integration of the national tracing system at regional level with other ECOWAS Member States as a possible national priority. It was also recommended that tracing practices should be harmonised at national level by developing and adopting a standard operating procedure. In addition, one of the other options identified concerned the creation of units for the identification, profiling and tracing of illicit weapons and ammunition, through and in parallel with the strengthening of human resources (both men and women) and technical (equipment, software) capacities. These improvements would not only enhance the effectiveness of the identification, profiling and tracing processes, but would also enable the security forces to track illicit weapons and ammunition, gain a better understanding of the networks involved in the illicit weapons and ammunition trafficking, and thus better protect the population against acts of violence committed with these weapons.

Options for strengthening weapons tracing and profiling of ammunition

SHORT-TERM

Develop standard operating procedures at unit level for identifying, profiling and tracing illicit weapons and ammunition

Establish procedures for monitoring recovered equipment at national level and coordination mechanisms within the State and with other States in the sub-region to share information on cases of diversion

Develop regulations for the creation of weapons and ammunition identification and tracing units

Strengthen information sharing between national institutions on traced weapons and profiled ammunition, with the establishment of a national tracing database

Strengthen cooperation between national authorities and international institutions in the field of tracing

Strengthen technical (equipment/software) and human (training) tracing capacities

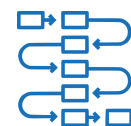
MDN / FAB
MISP
CNLCPAL
ECOWAS
International Partners
(+ INTERPOL)

MEDIUM-TERM



Beninese soldiers in the bush - © Benin Armed Forces

Key functional area 8:



Processing of Illicit Weapons and Ammunition

Dealing with illicit weapons and ammunition is an essential component of any national weapons and ammunition management framework, from criminalising illicit activities to ensuring accountability for items recovered from the illicit sphere. This provides information and evidence on the basis of which illicit traffickers and perpetrators of violence can be convicted, helping to combat impunity.²⁶

In Benin, the processing of weapons and ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere (i.e. seized, captured, surrendered, collected or found) is not harmonised across all national authorities, including the SDF. However, an informal procedure exists whereby several steps are followed by the national authorities and the different entities and units involved. In general, the DMA is responsible for processing weapons recovered from the illicit sphere by the defence forces, and also receives weapons processed by the security forces, once the related legal proceedings have been completed. Since 2018, approximately 642 illicit and illegal as well as numerous items of small-calibre ammunition have been seized by various authorities and handed over to the DMA once the prescribed investigative procedures and formalities had been completed. When weapons and ammunition are handed over to the judicial authorities, experts can be called upon to provide an expert opinion and the Republican Police forensic team may extract any fingerprints. These findings are generally used as evidence when individuals are caught in the act or in direct possession. However, there is no information on the total number of "legal" weapons (with certain weapons and

ammunition that are the subject of current or past legal proceedings not recorded). While justice sector actors are involved in the processing of illicit and illegal weapons (for their judicial processing), one of the challenges that has been raised by national authorities and experts is the lack of physical capacity of justice institutions to store this material.

In Benin, there are several possibilities for improving the handling of weapons and ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere. While the legal framework regulates the handling of these weapons and ammunition, the roles and responsibilities of the various national authorities could and should be clarified to make the processing of this material more systematic. It was also recommended that the existing practice of the national authorities and entities involved should be harmonised through the development and adoption of a standard operating procedure. In addition, strengthening the capacity of the judiciary, particularly in terms of infrastructure for the safe and secure storage of material that is the subject of judicial proceedings, as well as strengthening human resources (staff, both men and women) in general. Finally, the national authorities and national experts in April 2022 noted the importance of setting up a monitoring system, including an accounting/record-keeping system for weapons and ammunition from their initial registration, through the judicial process (as well as a central register of judicial weapons) to their final disposal, including destruction, in line with international standards, in order to prevent their diversion.

Options for better processing of illicit weapons and ammunition

<p>Establish clear standard operating procedures for the processing of illicit weapons and ammunition</p>	<p>MDN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners</p>
<p>Continue to identify illicit weapons and ammunition and proceed with their destruction</p>	
<p>Improve the infrastructure capacity of the judicial authorities to safely and securely store (sealed weapons)</p>	

COURT-TERME

MEDIUM-TERM

Establish a specific register for weapons and ammunition investigated in legal proceedings

MDN / FAB
MISP
CNLCPAL
ECOWAS
International Partners

Key functional area 9:



Collection of Weapons and Civilian Possession

Collecting and regulating civilian possession of weapons and ammunition are key elements in reducing armed violence in communities, by removing illegal and unwanted weapons from civilian hands, and thus potential preventing underlying security problems.²⁷

As mentioned above, the legal and regulatory framework at the national level regulates several aspects of civilian access to weapons and ammunition. In particular, it defines the processes for acquiring and trading these weapons through imports, for which the MISP is the main body responsible for ensuring control (see above). The manufacture and possession of weapons by civilians is prohibited as a matter of principle, and requires an exemption from the ban on holding, using, lending, transferring, exchanging and trading these weapons. The CNLCPAL, the DMA and the Republican Police are responsible for designing and supervising the collection of firearms and small-calibre ammunition from civilians. The last voluntary collection campaign was organised by the CNLCPAL in 2019, following post-election violence in certain regions. The results were modest and limited, with a relatively small number of weapons collected. One of the main challenges is the lack of an accurate estimate of the number of weapons manufactured and held by civilians. It should be noted that the CNLCPAL national action plan foresees further voluntary collection

campaigns in the future. Some related initiatives also include efforts to raise awareness and increase the involvement of civil society actors, training (of defence forces, including men and women) on SALW issues and specifically civilian possession, and generally improving cooperation between the different actors involved in the fight against SALW proliferation.

The participants and national experts identified several options for strengthening this WAM functional area in Benin. Among these options, a survey (or a study providing precise estimates) of all weapons and small-calibre ammunition held by civilians, and the gradual regularisation of these weapons (through marking and registration) by the MISP and the CNLCPAL, were identified as key recommendations. At the same time, the national authorities (including the security and justice authorities) would need to make continuous efforts to raise awareness among citizens, both men and women, of the risks of owning and using weapons. The national authorities and national experts also noted the importance of continuing campaigns for the voluntary surrender and collection of weapons and ammunition from civilians, and of better coordination of efforts in this area by the national authorities and greater involvement of civil society.

Options for strengthening collection and the management of civilian-possessed weapons

Develop a programme for tracking the use of assets placed on the national list of strategic and sensitive goods

MSN / FAB
MISP
CNLCPAL
ECOWAS
International Partners

Continue to implement a programme for the voluntary surrender of civilian weapons and the collection of weapons and ammunition

CNLCPAL
Civil Society
Press

Identify, mark and register all weapons and ammunition held by civilians	MSN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners
Raise public awareness of the risks of civilian possession and use of weapons	CNLCPAL Civil Society Press
Involve civil society stakeholders to a greater extent in the regularisation of weapons and ammunition held by citizens (civilians + off-duty military personnel)	CNLCPAL Local councils Prefectures DGPR Civil Society

Key functional area 10:

Disposal, including Destruction of Weapons and Ammunition



The disposal of weapons and ammunition, including their destruction, is an essential component of any national WAM framework. This reduces security risks and prevents the illicit circulation of weapons and ammunition, while ensuring effective management of surplus or undesired stockpiles.²⁸

In Benin, the Ministry of Defence (through the DMA) seems to be the main entity responsible for deciding on the method of final disposal of weapons and ammunition, although the decision-making process remained unclear at the time of the assessment in April 2022. The CNLCPAL is responsible for strategically overseeing the destruction of weapons and ammunition, while the DMA is responsible for operationalising the destruction of army weapons and ammunition that are declared unusable, obsolete or unstable. Thanks to international cooperation, the DMA has received assistance from the Mines Advisory Group for a technical assessment and implementation of a broad programme for the destruction of surplus, obsolete or non-functional weapons and obsolete and/or unstable ammunition since 2019. In April 2022, the programme was still underway, with almost 12,000 weapons and 400 tonnes of ammunition to be destroyed. A standard operating procedure for the destruction of weapons exists, while an operating procedure for the destruction of ammunition was under development in April 2022. Generally, weapons are destroyed by cutting them up and melting them down so that the steel can be reused in the construction sector, while

small-calibre ammunition is burnt in dedicated open-air furnaces.

The national authorities and national experts have identified several options for further strengthening this key WAM functional area in Benin. Among these options, capacity building for (trained) personnel (both men and women), as well as the sustainability of operational procedures were identified as key recommendations. It was also noted that the implementation of new methods with low ecological impact and environmental nuisance would benefit from being taken into account during these destructions. Raising the awareness among the civilian population living near temporary destruction sites and exposed to the risks, as well as considerations regarding the safety of local communities and the impact on their economic activities, were also noted by the national experts. Another option identified by the national authorities and national experts was to bring permanent destruction sites up to international standards. Marking of weapons for destruction was also noted as a preventive measure against the risks of diversion of these weapons prior to their destruction, as well as tracking transactions (i.e. documenting/recording transactions) and recording all information on weapons and ammunition to be destroyed in the national registration system (a specific register), including for a comprehensive and effective assessment of efforts to destroy surplus, obsolete and/or unstable material.

Options for strengthening disposal including destruction of weapons and ammunition

MEDIUM-TERM

Include methods with a low ecological impact and limiting environmental damage (noise, dispersion of metal shrapnel, air and soil pollution, etc.) in the practice of destroying munitions	MDN / FAB MISP CNLCPAL ECOWAS International Partners MCVDD
Build technical capacity to destroy small arms and light weapons, as well as heavy weapons, through ad-hoc training courses	
Secure sensitive sites (shooting ranges and permanent destruction sites) by fencing and signaling	
Regularly decontaminate permanent destruction sites and bring them up to international standards	
Regularly clean up firing ranges used for heavy weapons and air force training (artillery, aviation bombs, air-to-ground rockets)	
Raise awareness of the risks for civilians living near sensitive military zones	MDN / FAB International Partners Civil Society Press

Outlook

This publication is based on a holistic approach to the management of conventional weapons, including SALW, ammunition and components. It highlights the current status of WAM in Benin, progress made, as well as existing institutional and operational capacities, processes, practices and procedures. Further, it notes challenges currently faced by Benin's national authorities at the strategic and operational levels. It also provided options for strengthening the national framework for the life-cycle management of weapons and ammunition in Benin, including proposing periodic assessments of progress over time.

The Government of Benin has demonstrated a willingness to use and take into account these options, including in order to consolidate, with stakeholders and international partners, a "roadmap" (or strategic approach) for strengthening the national framework for the life-cycle

management of weapons, including SALW, and ammunition in Benin. This is in line with the Regional Action Plan on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition and other related materials, the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention, as well as security and cooperation. The Government of Benin has also used the results of this assessment to strengthen international and regional cooperation and assistance.

UNIDIR encourages the community of States, regional and sub-regional organisations and relevant international partners to consult this Benin WAM Country Insight, its series of Country Insights, and the series of annual updates, as a basis for strengthening WAM policies and practices at various levels, as well as for planning, implementing and evaluating future programmes and projects in WAM and related areas in Benin.



Close-up of a Beninese soldier's weapon - © Benin Armed Forces

Republic of Benin



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The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) - an autonomous institute within the United Nations - conducts research on disarmament and security. UNIDIR is based in Geneva, Switzerland, the centre for bilateral and multilateral negotiations on disarmament and non-proliferation, and the seat of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues relating to a variety of existing and future armaments, as well as global diplomacy and local tensions and conflicts. Working with researchers, diplomats, government officials, NGOs and other institutions since 1980, UNIDIR serves as a bridge between the research community and governments. UNIDIR's activities are funded by contributions from governments and donor foundations.

Note

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Notes / References

- ¹ See « Vers un cadre national de la gestion des armes et des munitions au Bénin : Rapport narratif de l'évaluation et de base », UNIDIR, 2022. The report is available from UNIDIR and the national entity designated by the Government of Benin, the CNLCPAL. It can be consulted or shared with interested parties by the CNLCPAL, upon consultation and request.
- ² See « Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2023 Update », UNIDIR, 2023 : <https://unidir.org/publication/weapons-and-ammunition-management-in-africa-insight-2023-update/>.
- ³ See « Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context: A Handbook for United Nations DDR Practitioners » Department of Peace Operations, Office for Disarmament Affairs: 2021.
- ⁴ See « IDDRS Module 4.11 on transitional weapons and ammunition management », 2020, ONU DPO et UNODA ; and « The Role of Weapon and Ammunition Management in Preventing Conflict and Supporting Security Transition », UNIDIR. 2019.
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- ⁶ See Hana Salama and Emma Bjertén-Günther. *Women Managing Weapons: Perspectives for Increasing Women's Participation in Weapons and Ammunition Management*, UNIDIR 2021.
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- ¹¹ « Vers un cadre national de la gestion des armes et des munitions au Bénin : Rapport narratif de l'évaluation et du suivi », UNIDIR, 2022.
- ¹² See Vecchioni, Matilde and Topal, Sanem. « Unregulated: Examining the Global Proliferation of Craft-Produced Weapons », UNIDIR, 2024.
- ¹³ « Vers un cadre national de la gestion des armes et des munitions au Bénin : Rapport narratif de l'évaluation et du suivi », UNIDIR, 2022.
- ¹⁴ The regional and international arms control instruments to which Benin has acceded are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Bamako Declaration at regional level, as well as the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the International Tracing Instrument and the Arms Trade Treaty at international level.
- ¹⁵ See Article 24 of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials.
- ¹⁶ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Decree No. 61-39 PR/MI of 7 February 1961, which lays down the rules governing arms and ammunition in Benin, and Decree No. 2007-620 of 31 December 2007, which governs craft-produced firearms.
- ¹⁸ Namely, Law No. 2019-07 of 14 January 2020, which is supposed to lay down the regime for weapons, their ammunition and other related materials on national territory.
- ¹⁹ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.
- ²⁰ See the functional area on the legal and regulatory framework at national level, as well as the Benin Customs Code.
- ²¹ See the functional area on national coordination mechanisms.
- ²² Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.
- ²³ The marking is carried out on three parts of the weapon and includes information on the ECOWAS logo and the country code, as required by the standards of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but also contains the category of weapon, the defence and security forces component and a unique numerical code.

²⁴ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.

²⁵ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.

²⁶ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.

²⁷ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.

²⁸ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani. Ibid.