

WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA INSIGHT: 2024 UPDATE



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SUMMARY

Effective weapons and ammunition management (WAM) can reduce the number of illicit conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, and ammunition in circulation, prevent their diversion to unauthorized users, and mitigate the risk of unplanned explosions of munitions. WAM can thereby contribute to preventing armed conflicts and violence, including gender-based violence, as well as the maintenance of peace and the achievement of socioeconomic and development goals. By early 2024, 15 states – including 12 African states – have assessed and made efforts to strengthen their national frameworks governing the management of conventional weapons and ammunition throughout their life cycle using UNIDIR's Reference Methodology for National WAM Baseline Assessments. UNIDIR has identified 10 key functional areas for WAM, including a national coordination mechanism and a legal and regulatory framework, as well as measures to be taken to control transfers, manage stockpiles, ensure accountability through marking and record-keeping, dealing with illicit arms and ammunition, and final disposal.

This is the third annual update by UNIDIR to recognize the progress made to strengthen WAM policies and practices by those 12 African states. This update provides an initial comparative analysis of progress made across the regional baseline of WAM policy and practice. It sheds light on persistent as well as context-specific challenges encountered by States in strengthening their national WAM frameworks. The

update presents national examples of activities and progress made in oftentimes challenging environments from 2023 to early 2024 in the 10 key WAM functional areas.

Examples of national progress include strengthened legal and regulatory frameworks at the national level, leveraged national lead entities, expanded coordination mechanisms, operational solutions and innovative community-based approaches adopted. Managing stockpiles and ensuring accountability, dealing with illicit materiel, and ammunition disposal present persistent challenges. Craft production, border controls, and criminal justice approaches merit further attention.

Several stakeholders participating in this research emphasized current or emerging risks posed by illicit arms and ammunition, including instability and the spread of violent extremism, non-state armed groups, porous borders, as well as dynamic and changing security environments.

Enhancing national ownership through the sensitization of high-level political actors on the importance of WAM are essential to making further progress and strengthen WAM in Africa. This is a long-term endeavour – with continued efforts, national authorities can work to address current and anticipated future risks through holistic, integrated, and comprehensive approaches to WAM.



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NOTES

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ABOUT UNIDIR

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 disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations, and home of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues pertaining 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 acts as a bridge between the research community and governments. UNIDIR activities are funded by contributions from governments and donor foundations.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
CAR	Central African Republic
CNCA	National Commission for Arms Control (<i>Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Armes, Burkina Faso</i>)
CNC-ALPC	National Commission for Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Reduction of Armed Violence (<i>Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Armes Légères et de Petit Calibre et de Réduction de la Violence Armée, DRC</i>)
CNLCPAL	National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Light Weapons (<i>Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères, Bénin</i>)
CMD	Central Monitoring Department (Somalia)
Comnat-ALPC	National Commission for the Fight Against the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (<i>Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères et de Petit Calibre, CAR and Côte d'Ivoire</i>)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FACA	Firearms and Ammunition Control Act (Liberia)
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
GNACSA	Ghana National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons
LiNCA	Liberia National Commission on Arms
NAP	National Action Plan
NCCSALW	National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Nigeria)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ONS	Office of the National Security, Somalia
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDF	Security and defence forces
SSF	Somali Security Forces
SLeCAA	Sierra Leone Commission on Arms and Ammunitions
SLeNCA	Sierra Leone National Commission on Arms
SOP	Standardized operating procedure
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
WAM	Weapons and ammunition management

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1. INTRODUCTION



Soldiers cleaning their small arms
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As part of his *New Agenda for Peace*, the United Nations Secretary-General highlights the significant challenges posed by the diversion, proliferation and misuse of weapons, including small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition.¹ In late 2023, States adopted a new multilateral instrument to national and regional efforts to strengthen WAM and enhance international cooperation and assistance – the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management.² States “expressed grave concern over the risks posed by diversion of conventional ammunition to unauthorized recipients” and “their trafficking into illicit markets”, which contributes to armed conflicts and violence, including gender-based violence, and threatens peace, security, stability and sustainable development around the world.³ The global framework fills a gap, complements and reinforces the existing international normative framework for the control and management of conventional arms including SALW. It contains 15 political commitments to ensure safe, secure and sustainable management of all types of conventional ammunition from their manufacture to use or final disposal. This underscores a need for a strengthened international approach for weapons and ammuni-

tion management (WAM) that recognizes the interconnectedness of peace, security and development, addresses the evolving nature of conflict and reducing the human cost of weapons.⁴

WAM is the exercise of oversight, accountability and governance of conventional arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, from production through to their use or the disposal of materiel designated as surplus, obsolete or unsafe.⁵ It covers conventional weapons, including SALW, and ammunition. Effective WAM can reduce the number of illicit weapons and the amount of illicit ammunition in circulation, prevent the diversion of state-owned materiel to unauthorized users, and mitigate the risks of unplanned explosions. It thereby contributes to the maintenance of peace as well as the achievement of socioeconomic and development goals. WAM is also a fundamental component of conflict prevention and of action to tackle armed violence, ensuring that states can exercise governance, oversight, management and control over the full life cycle of weapons and ammunition within their national territory. Box 1 provides an overview of key WAM functional areas.

1 General Assembly, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace”, A/77/CRP.1/Add.8, 3 July 2023.

2 General Assembly, resolution adopted on 4 December 2024, A/RES/78/47, Through-life conventional ammunition management.

3 Ibid. above. General Assembly, resolution adopted on 4 December 2024, A/RES/78/47.

4 Ibid. above. General Assembly, resolution adopted on 4 December 2024, A/RES/78/47, pp. 9 and 11; see also, General Assembly, Eighth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, Report, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1, 12 July 2022.

5 Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2021), p. 13.

BOX 1.

Key functional areas of weapons and ammunition management

- 1 A **national coordination mechanism** on WAM ensures that all relevant parts of the Government work together with national, regional and international partners to conceive, direct, monitor and evaluate safe, secure and accountable WAM policies and practices.
- 2 The **legal and regulatory framework at the national level** consists of the laws, decrees, regulations and administrative documents that form the basis of the national WAM governance structure and guide their implementation.
- 3 Effective **transfer controls** provide for the regulation of the export, import, retransfer, transit or trans-shipment, and brokering of conventional arms, ammunition and related materiel to prevent excessive, destabilizing or illicit transfers that pose a serious threat to peace and security.
- 4 Effective **stockpile management** of conventional arms and ammunition ensures the operational readiness of defence and security forces, protects national strategic assets, and limits the risk of diversion. It also reduces the risk of, and mitigates the effect from, unplanned explosions of inadequately managed conventional ammunition stockpiles.
- 5 The **marking** of conventional arms, especially small arms and light weapons, with unique identifying marks supports accurate record-keeping. It thus aids national accounting for weapons and the trackability and tracing of weapons and ammunition.
- 6 An effective national **record-keeping** system comprehensively records all phases of the life cycle of arms and ammunition under the jurisdiction of the state (i.e. production, international transfer, national stockpile, recovery from the illicit sphere, and use or disposal). It aids national accounting, trackability and tracing of weapons and ammunition.
- 7 **Profiling and tracing of weapons and ammunition** consists of the systematic examination of information related to illicit weapons and ammunition from their point of manufacture or most recent import, through the lines of supply, to the last legal titleholder in order to determine the place and time at which the item became illicit.
- 8 The **processing of illicit weapons and treatment of illicit ammunition** can support the domestic judicial process by providing information and evidence which can be used to convict traffickers and violence perpetrators, thereby helping to address impunity.
- 9 **Weapon collection**, whether as part of an integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process or as a separate activity, encourages individuals, groups and communities to relinquish illegal, illicit and/or unwanted weapons and ammunition.
- 10 The **disposal** of illicit, surplus, unwanted or obsolete conventional arms and ammunition can be conducted by destruction, transfer to another authority or entity, or sale or donation, either domestically or internationally. It can be undertaken to remove unsafe ammunition from the national stockpile, prevent diversion and illicit weapon and ammunition circulation, and reduce costs associated with maintaining unserviceable materiel.

To support national and regional efforts to review and update policies and practices to control and manage conventional arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, as well as to address the illicit trade and misuse of such materiel, UNIDIR has developed – and promotes the use of – a Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments (UNIDIR’s WAM Reference Methodology).⁶ Since 2015, 15 states – including 12 African states – have conducted a national WAM baseline assessment using this methodology to strengthen their national WAM frameworks, policies and practices (see Figure 1). Three of these African states have also conducted a WAM follow up assessment. This includes Côte d’Ivoire, which

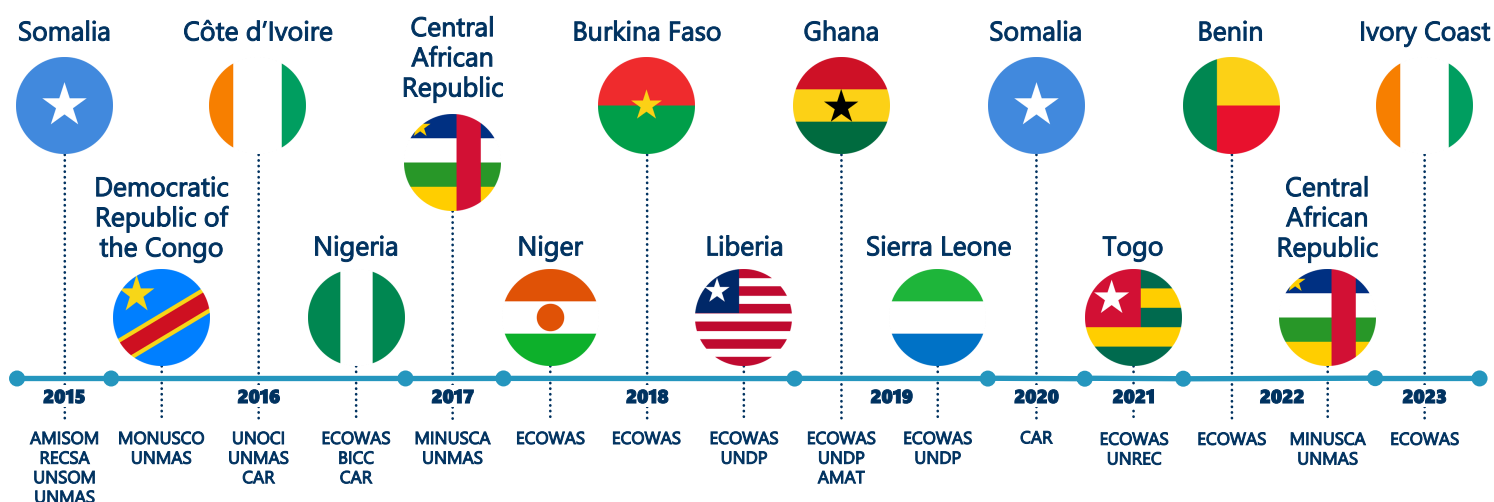
in 2023 through its National Commission for the Fight Against the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (ComNat ALPC) undertook a follow-up assessment in cooperation with ECOWAS and UNIDIR. This third annual update on progress made by these African states seeks to highlight some of the measures that can be taken to prevent diversion and misuse of weapons and ammunition as well as to mitigate risks of unplanned explosions of munitions. As shown in Box 2, UNIDIR’s Reference Methodology has also been used to inform United Nations Security Council partial arms embargo regime benchmarking, implementation, reporting and monitoring of State progress towards established WAM benchmarks.

6 Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology.

Each assessment is organized under the ownership and lead of the host Government. It consists of a national consultative process that facilitates dialogue and decision-making on WAM and related issues among all relevant national stakeholders. These national processes have been guided by UNIDIR’s approach to WAM, its Reference Methodology and supported by relevant subregional and regional organizations (in particular the African Union, and the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa), UN entities, and

specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The key findings, recommendations and WAM enhancement options identified during these baseline or follow-up assessments inform the development or review of a strategic approach and national ‘road map’, which is a strategic document that provides a starting point for a continuum for action to strengthen the national WAM framework in a comprehensive manner, including where needed through international cooperation and assistance.

Figure 1. WAM in Africa: Baseline and Follow-up Assessments conducted during 2015–2023



Note on supporting organizations:

AMAT: Ammunition Management Advisory Team

AMISOM: African Union Mission in Somalia

BICC: Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies

CAR: Conflict Armament Research

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNOCI, UNSOM: UN peace operations

RECSA: Regional Centre on Small Arms

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme



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BOX 2.**Assessing progress made against UN arms embargo WAM benchmarks in Africa**

In recent years, the United Nations Security Council increasingly used the practice of establishing WAM benchmarks in its considerations to modify, suspend, adjust, or incrementally lift partial and targeted UN arms embargos. This includes contexts where the government, under certain conditions, is allowed to import arms, ammunition, and related material to strengthen its security apparatus against a threat or threats to peace, security, and stability. The United Nations Security Council usually and simultaneously obliges the State to incrementally strengthen national WAM institutional and operational capacities and procedures, in order to prevent arms diversion, proliferation to embargoed actors' part of those threats or constituting the threat, and misuse.

In 2023, the Office of National Security (ONS) of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) autonomously applied UNIDIR's WAM Reference Methodology, with technical assistance and remote support from UNIDIR. The FGS ONS used the findings from the assessment to update its WAM reference baseline and inform its reporting on progress made towards benchmarks established by the United Nations Security Council. In the context of United Nations Security Council mandated and requested UN assessments of progress achieved by the Central African Republic (CAR), Somalia and South Sudan towards established arms embargo WAM benchmarks, UNIDIR also provided information in 2023 when requested and consulted. Also in 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) consulted UNIDIR in the context of its reporting on its WAM as well as efforts to fight arms trafficking and prevent and counter diversion, following the lifting in 2022 of United Nations Security Council arms embargo measures on the Government of the DRC.

UNIDIR's Annual WAM in Africa Insight update highlights progress made by African states in strengthening their national WAM frameworks, policies and practices after conducting a WAM baseline assessment (as well as any WAM follow-up assessment). Each edition seeks to raise awareness on challenges and efforts made in overcoming them as well as effective national measures, building upon previous annual updates⁷ and in country-specific WAM Insights.⁸ It thereby supports efforts by those involved in international assistance and cooperation to strengthen WAM

frameworks, policies and practices across Africa. In 2023, UNIDIR facilitated international dialogues on enhancing international cooperation and assistance to strengthen (WAM), drawing on findings and lessons from previous regional dialogues as well as lessons learned from the use of its baseline assessment methodology and meeting increasing global interest in WAM (see Box 3).

BOX 3.**International dialogues in 2023 for strengthening WAM approaches**

In 2023, the United Nations took steps to consider options for promoting a United Nations whole-of-system approach to coordinating support to Member States. It did this through an informal strategic dialogue on through-life WAM organized by UNIDIR in September 2023, in cooperation with the Office for Disarmament Affairs and other interested United Nations entities. In November 2023, UNIDIR also organized the first global WAM symposium, held in Geneva. This provided a platform for informal dialogue among more than 200 participants from states, the United Nations, regional organizations, NGOs and civil society on WAM frameworks, policies and practices. These platforms gathered lessons learned for enhancing international cooperation and assistance to strengthen national frameworks, policies and practices. A symposium report will be made publicly available.

⁷ Anna Mensah-Sackey, Hardy Giezendanner and Paul Holtom, "2023 Update", Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight, UNIDIR, November 2023, Anna Mensah-Sackey, Hardy Giezendanner and Paul Holtom, "2022 Update", Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight, UNIDIR, June 2022.

⁸ Country Insights draw from the national baseline assessment reports delivered and transmitted to the governments of states that have undertaken a WAM baseline assessment with support from UNIDIR and its partners. They summarize the main findings and options identified for the enhancement of the national WAM framework, institutional and operational capacities, policies and practices in those countries. Country Insights are available from here.

The research and data collection for this annual update involved contacting national authorities in the 12 African states that have undertaken a WAM baseline assessment using UNIDIR's WAM Reference Methodology. It focused on monitoring progress made in implementing the options and recommendations identified during the initial baseline assessments by national authorities. The data for this publication was collected via questionnaires and interviews conducted with national WAM focal points and lead authorities, complemented and validated via interviews with a select number of regional and international partners as well as open sources throughout 2023 and the first quarter of 2024. Interviewees were asked to provide examples of activities undertaken between January 2023 and mid-2024 to enhance strategic WAM decision-making, policies and practices, as well as provide reflections and perspectives on previous activities and their current impact. In addition, national authorities were asked to provide updates on the approximate number of options and recommendations that have been implemented or are currently being implemented, or have otherwise been considered, across the key functional areas outlined in the Reference Methodology.

Section 2 of this report provides an initial comparative analysis of progress made by states that have undertaken a national WAM baseline assessment and established a national road map on developing and strengthening comprehensive national WAM frameworks. It also provides information on challenges faced in this regard and lessons from national experiences. In addition, national examples of progress made in 2023 in the 10 key WAM functional areas are presented. It places some emphasis on cross-enabling functional areas, such as national coordination mechanisms and strategy as well as the legal and regulatory framework at the national level. Linkages between other functional areas, such as for example marking and recordkeeping (accounting) systems, and the processing of arms and ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere including their tracing, are also indicated. Section 2 is structured around the 10 areas (see Box 2). In addition, this update highlights examples of gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive WAM in cases that have been highlighted by African states. Finally, Section 3 provides a short conclusion.



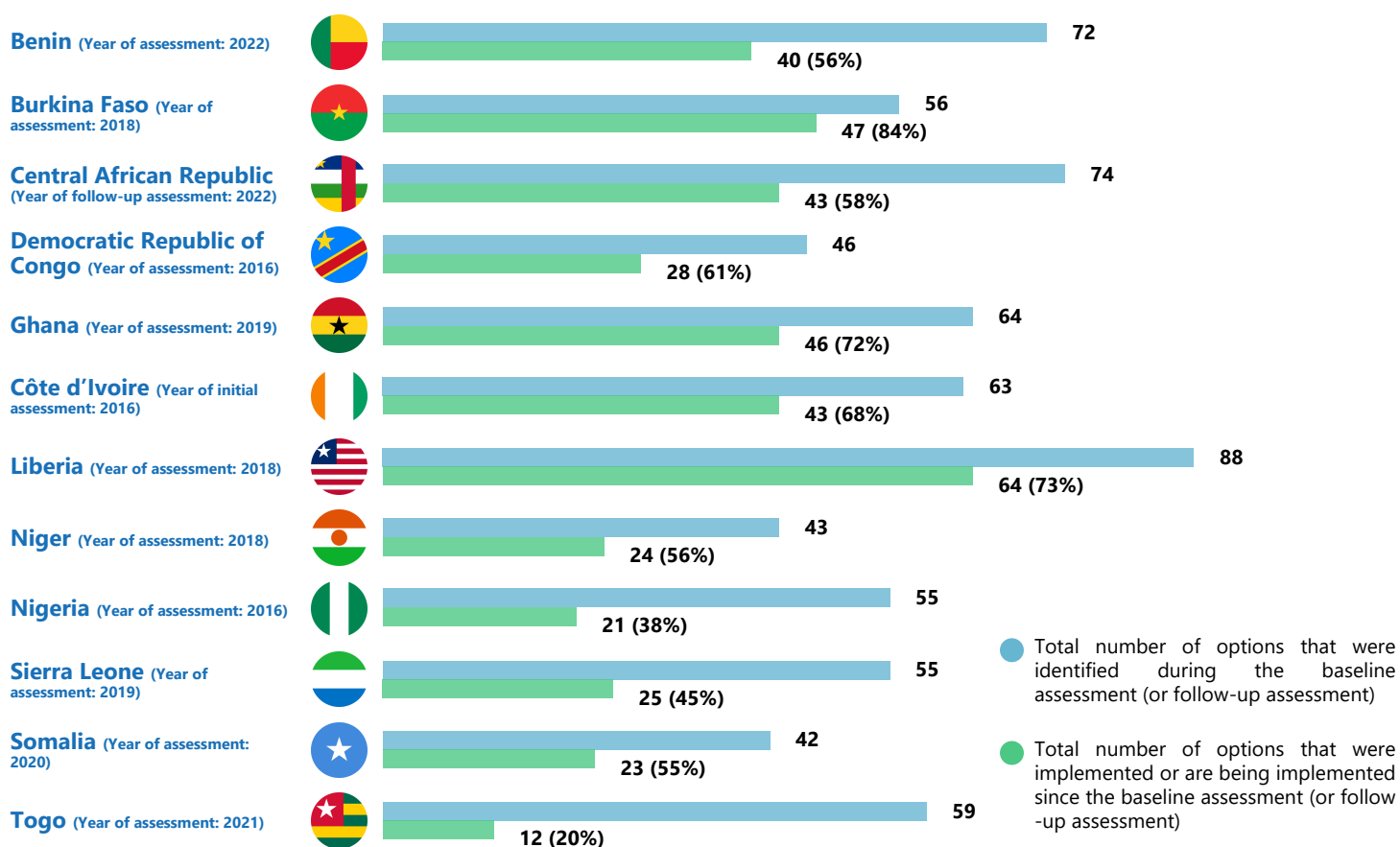
Different types of small arms and light weapons on a storage rack
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2. PROGRESS MADE IN STRENGTHENING WAM IN AFRICA IN 2023

This section provides a preliminary comparative analysis of progress made by – and variations between – states in developing and strengthening comprehensive national WAM frameworks (see Figure 2 below). The section then presents a sample of activities implemented between 2023 and early 2024 to enhance key functional areas of WAM in the 12 African states that have undertaken a national WAM baseline assessment or follow up assessment using UNIDIR’s WAM Reference Methodology. Each subsection provides examples to highlight progress made to enhance WAM and specific functional areas, providing context, the original challenges, options identified by national authorities to address them, and impacts their implementation has had, or is expected to have. The experiences detailed demonstrate what can be achieved by targeted efforts, creativity and cooperation – even in oftentimes very challenging environments. Sharing these insights may also help other states to enhance their WAM national frameworks, policies and practices. They however also highlight the continuing need for coordinated international cooperation and assistance.

The responses from national authorities were analysed and are presented here (see Figure 2) to provide an initial overview of progress made in implementing enhancement options as part of roadmaps towards strengthened national WAM frameworks. However, it is important to note that direct comparisons between states should be made if at all with caution for various reasons. First, the timing of baseline assessments varies between states and therefore the time-frame within which enhancement options have since been implemented as well. Second, not only the number but also types of options identified during the assessment based on challenges, priorities and needs at the time of the assessment by national authorities and stakeholders vary. For example, some may require fewer resources than others (and/or require international cooperation and assistance). Third, there are broader factors, such as the political and security situation and enabling or hindering factors understandably impacting progress in the implementation of these WAM enhancement options. Nevertheless, Figure 2 below provides an initial overview of progress made by 12 States.

Figure 2. Progress made in follow through implementation of WAM enhancement options



9 Consensus-driven options or recommendations to support the strengthening of the national WAM framework form a critical part of any WAM reference baseline assessment. These options are identified during the in-county WAM baseline assessment multi-stakeholder process. They are generated based on the baseline of institutional and operational capacities and practices and related challenges and needs, and identified by national authorities, experts and stakeholders. They usually aim to be specific, measurable, oriented towards future results, and realistic and achievable by the relevant national authorities and stakeholders. See Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology, p. 8. The questionnaire asked respondents to provide an estimation of the total number of options identified that by early 2024 had been implemented per functional area, as well as additional information on options per functional area that were deemed no longer relevant by national authorities or that have been considered and adapted given the context and in light of developments.

During the collection of information for this update, representatives of the 12 African states that have conducted a national WAM baseline or follow-up assessment were asked to indicate the WAM functional areas in which they faced “persistent challenges” in strengthening institutional or operational capacities or policy and practice between 2023 and early 2024. Seven (7) of these states highlighted persistent challenges in stockpile management (of both weapons, and ammunition), five (5) for marking, and four (4) for

the legal and regulatory framework and coordination at the national level. Only a few of these states highlighted persistent challenges in other WAM functional areas (such as the control of international transfers, the processing of materiel recovered from the illicit sphere, or final disposal including destruction). Importantly, a significant number of States from the West African region highlighted persistent challenges in the regulation and control of craft produced or manufactured weapons, ammunition, and related items.

Figure 3. Persistent challenges in WAM functional areas

National coordination mechanism							
Legal and regulatory framework							
Transfer controls							
Stockpile management							
Marking							
Record-keeping							
Tracing of weapons and profiling of ammunition							
Processing of illicit arms and treatment of illicit ammunition							
Weapons collection							
Disposal							



Landscape view from the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo
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In comparison with data presented in last years' annual WAM update, there have been some notable changes in the number of states reporting persistent challenges in WAM functional areas. In the 2023 annual WAM update we reported that 7 states faced challenges regarding national coordination of WAM and six with the legal and regulatory framework.¹⁰ As shown in Figure 3, the number of states reporting persistent challenges in these areas is now down to 4 states for each. The number of states reporting persistent challenges for disposal and collection has also dropped. Conversely, the number of states reporting persistent challenges with marking has increased from 2 in last year's annual WAM update to 5 for this year. While a number of States participating in this research highlighted the positive role and impact the introduction of technology has had in strengthening certain key functional areas, such as the national recordkeeping system. Generally, as shown in the subsections below, despite continuing challenges, progress is being made.

UNIDIR's WAM Reference Methodology recognizes and promotes gender mainstreaming in WAM as one of the guiding principles for baseline assessments and as an integral part of the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of WAM initiatives and activities. Several of the states that contributed to this annual WAM update, as well as other stakeholders engaged, shared information on activities conducted in 2023 and early 2024 to enhance women's meaningful representation in and contributions to WAM. They also highlighted the importance of ensuring that gender sensitivities are adequately considered in the programming,

planning, implementation and evaluation of WAM activities. Information was shared for example by **Burkina Faso**, the **Central African Republic**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Ghana**, and **Côte d'Ivoire**. In Burkina Faso, the National Commission for Arms Control (CNCA) cooperated with civil society organizations and women's associations on small arms, light weapons, and ammunition management and control in July 2023. In the Central African Republic and in Côte d'Ivoire, the respective national commissions cooperated with civil society organizations earlier in 2023 and built capacity of female journalists on issues related to the control and management of small arms, light weapons, and their ammunition. In all three cases, these activities raised awareness or built capacity among women and men, while strengthening outreach to populations, communities and individuals including women, men, and children, in order to sensitize them on risks posed by the presence of weapons and ammunition in their communities, and the applicable legal and regulatory frameworks. Further information is and other examples are provided below, others will be considered in future updates.



Small arms magazines with ammunition
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2.1 National coordination mechanism

A national coordination mechanism for WAM ensures that all relevant parts of the government work together with national, regional, and international partners to conceive, direct, monitor and evaluate the safe, secure, and accountable practice of WAM. Establishing and implementing effective life cycle WAM and related control measures requires cooperation and coordination among a wide range of actors at different levels. Relevant international and regional instruments recommend that there is a designated or established government entity to take the lead in providing overall policy direction and coordination for national WAM-related efforts. This can include the development, adoption, and implementation of a national WAM strategy and/or specific national action plans. National coordination is needed for, and applicable to, all WAM functional areas. While the national coordination mechanism and national WAM lead entity play a key role in

initiating and coordinating the establishment, review or update of national laws, regulations and procedures, the mandate for the national WAM lead entity and coordination mechanism is usually established in the national legal and regulatory framework – these two are therefore considered cross-cutting WAM creating an environment conducive to progress in WAM in other and more operational WAM functional areas.

In **Somalia**, the Central Monitoring Department (CMD) was created within the Office of National Security (ONS) of the Federal Government of Somalia in late 2023 through a presidential decree. It now serves as the lead authority and focal point for all matters related to WAM in Somalia, including the implementation of the national WAM strategy, which it coordinates with federal member states and with international stakeholders and partners. The CMD is also the national focal point entity for WAM, and related-matters, specified in

¹⁰ Mensah-Sackey, Giezendanner and Holtom, "2023 Update".

¹¹ Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology, p. 8.

UN Security Council resolution 2713 (2023). It is assisted by an advisory board and once fully operationalized, is expected to establish coordination units for relationships with federal member states and the security forces as well as regarding information management. Within the CMD, specialized units are being operationalized for example for human security and for countering improvised explosive devices. The establishment of the CMD represent important progress in leveraging and institutionalizing a national WAM lead entity and coordination mechanism as well as its continuous expansion of the WAM system beyond Mogadishu, following the lifting of arms embargo measures on the FGS. In addition to overseeing the implementation of international obligations and commitments, Somalia's CMD is now also equipped to develop further plans of action, coordinate assistance and monitor progress in other parts of the country – marking a significant step towards strengthened governance over weapons and ammunition in Somalia.

Starting in February 2023, the Government of the **Central African Republic**, via its ComNat-ALPC, reviewed its national strategic approach and adopted a new national strategy and corresponding action plan (NAP) covering the period 2024–2028.¹² Among the key challenges faced in the implementation of the previous strategy and NAP (for 2019–2023) were limited resources allocated to and available at the ComNat-ALPC, which hampered its full operationalization and its ability to coordinate WAM and related activities nationally. CAR, and its ComNat-ALPC, have used the results of the follow-up assessment conducted in April 2022, as well as a workshop held in early 2023 to inform its new strategic approach and strategy.¹³ In addition, three workshops were organized in 2023, including a pre-validation workshop, in cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS, Mine Action Service of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR, MINUSCA) and a working group was established prior to validation and adoption of the revised strategic approach and the new NAP. Specific WAM benchmarks and the cooperative framework established by United Nations Security Council resolution 2454 (2019) also informed the revised strategic approach and the adoption of the new NAP by CAR. Generally, after seven years of existence, the ComNat-ALPC has gained visibility and been operationalized, now playing its role within the national security architecture of the Government of CAR.¹⁴ Furthermore, the adoption by the Government of CAR of a new NAP demonstrate political will and commitment as they provide direction and policy guidance on the implementation of WAM and

related activities.

Similarly, the Government of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, via its National Commission for Control of SALW and Reduction of Armed Violence (CNC-ALPC), reviewed its strategic approach in 2022 and in November 2023 adopted a new strategy and corresponding NAP for 2024–2028.¹⁵ Among the key initial challenges faced in the implementation of the previous NAP was the lack of a sufficiently strong mechanism and capacity to monitor and evaluate progress made over time. This was coupled with a lack of awareness of, adherence by, or support from international stakeholders, in addition to resource constraints. To address these challenges, the CNC-ALPC organized three workshops in 2021–2022 to monitor and evaluate progress made in the implementation of the (previous) NAP, in cooperation with UNMAS (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, Mine Action Service) and other partners. The process for the development of a new strategy and NAP then included several workshops, as well as the work of a designated technical working group (in 2022–2023), prior to validation and eventual adoption. The new strategy and NAP differ from previous ones by adopting a structured approach organized around six pillars and by including measurability to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of implementation. The six pillars are:

- Strengthening the legal and regulatory framework at the national level
- Institutional development (including strengthening the CNC-ALPC)
- Management of weapons, including SALW, and ammunition
- Civilian voluntary disarmament
- Gender dimensions in the fight against SALW proliferation
- Research on illicit SALW, including flows and proliferation trends



12 Central African Republic, Presidency of the Republic, National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, “National Action Plan to combat the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons 2024 – 2028”, 2024.

13 Anna Mensah and Hardy Giezendanner, “Central African Republic”, Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2023, p. 24.

14 Presentation by CAR representative, at the 2370 Technical Guidelines Regional Workshop for the Sahel: countering terrorist use of improvised explosive devices and small arms and light weapons, organized by United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 28 February 2024.

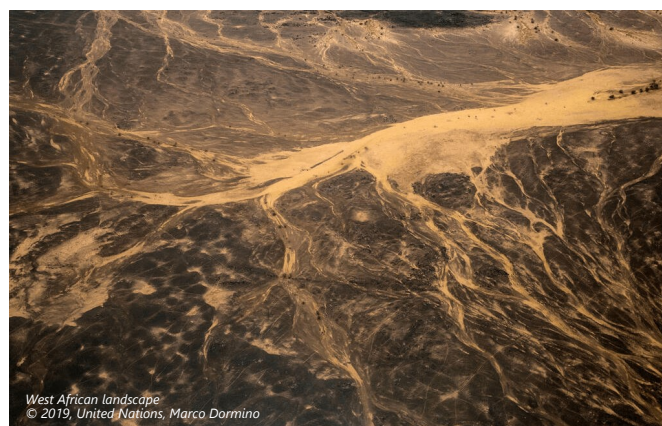
15 Democratic Republic of Congo, Ministry of the Interior, Security and Customary Affairs, National Commission for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Reduction of Armed Violence, “National Action Plan 2024 – 2028 for the Control and Management of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Democratic Republic Of The Congo”, 2023.

Notably, the pillar on gender dimensions in the fight against SALW proliferation aims at achieving gender equity and equality by increasing the participation of women in functions linked to WAM and in the design of policies and measures to combat the proliferation of SALW in the DRC. This new strategy and NAP are expected to facilitate more effective monitoring and evaluation of progress and to help address challenges faced in implementation of SALW control efforts in the DRC.¹⁶

In **Nigeria**, efforts by the national WAM lead authority to expand the geographical scope and coverage of the coordination mechanism to the six governmental zones continued in 2023. Key challenges faced by the national lead authority and stakeholders in expanding the geographical scope and coverage of the national coordination mechanism were limited resources, the lack of awareness at the zonal and local levels, and differing priorities across governmental entities in the federal zones. Such challenges were already highlighted during the 2016 assessment, which therefore included options to increase the involvement of governmental entities at the federal zone and local levels in WAM-related processes, while maintaining the central authority's role in providing policy direction and guidance.¹⁷ Since the establishment of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in 2021 with its 10 directorates,¹⁸ the organizational structure has also provided for the institution of six zonal offices. Notably, 2023 saw the operationalization of the first zonal offices, following the appointment of zonal coordinators in 2022. In 2023 and early 2024, zonal offices contributed, for example, to:

- raising awareness and strengthening relationships with the federal government
- local partnerships in certain federal states
- setting up zonal focal groups on specific WAM issues
- outreach to and inclusion of younger generations and youth
- awareness-raising activities concerning craft or artisanally produced small arms.

This progress and positive development demonstrate how in a relatively short period of time the national coordination mechanism has been adapted to addressing context-specific challenges and expand specific WAM activities in a more tailored and targeted manner, taking into account the geographic, security and political dynamics within different parts of the country. A similar example has already been highlighted in the 2022 update, and similar processes are ongoing in other States.



2.2 Legal and regulatory framework at the national level

The national legal and regulatory framework consists of national laws, decrees, regulations and administrative procedures for controlling and regulating the life cycle of conventional arms and ammunition. These form the basis of a national WAM governance structure.¹⁹ To enable the competent national authorities and relevant stakeholders to effectively implement relevant international and regional instruments at the national level, states domesticate the obligations and commitments contained in those instruments into their national frameworks governing weapons and ammunition. Ensuring that this is done in a sufficiently uniform, harmonized and logical manner is fundamental in enabling the operationalization of all WAM by the relevant national authorities.

In January 2024 the Council of Ministers of **Togo** adopted a draft law on the arms control regime.

This aims to strengthen the country's legal framework for WAM by updating the outdated 1959 law on arms and its 1995 implementing decree. At the time of the baseline assessment in 2021, national authorities had assessed the national legal and regulatory framework as outdated and obsolete, posing significant challenges for national authorities to effectively implement life cycle WAM activities. Finalizing the review of the preliminary draft law, raising awareness about it and adopting it were among the main options identified during the baseline assessment to strengthen the national legal and regulatory framework.²⁰ By 2021 a draft law had been elaborated to fill regulatory gaps, covering the life cycle of weapons and ammunition from their manufacture, import, possession and transfer to their destruction. The revised law covers both state-held weapons and weapons held by civilians.

16 Presentation by DRC representative, at the Virtual conference for the publication of the new National Action Plan for the Control and Management of Small Arms and Light Weapons 2024-2028 (NAP 2024-2028), organized by UNMAS MONUSCO/DRC and CNC-ALPC, 19 March 2024.

17 Mike Lewis and Himayu Shiotani, "Nigeria", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2020, p. 4.

18 Mensah-Sackey, Giezendanner and Holtom, "2022 Update".

19 Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology, pp. 51-53.

20 Théô Bajor and Mohamed Coulibaly, "Togolese Republic", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2023, p. 7.

However, the legal review process and the adoption of the national law experienced significant delays. Since 2021, the National Commission to Counter the Proliferation, Circulation and Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (CNLPAL) has made significant efforts. Through several activities, it raised awareness among high-level national authorities on the importance of WAM for peace, security and stability in Togo. While securing parliamentary approval may still take time and continuous efforts are needed, the adoption of the law by the Council of Ministers is an important step that sends a strong message about the importance of WAM in Togo.

Amongst the other representatives of states that participated in this research, several also highlighted the sustained efforts by the designated national WAM lead authority to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework and enable the competent national authorities and relevant stakeholders to effectively implement relevant international and regional obligations and commitments at the national level. This included, for example, **Benin**,²¹ the **Central African Republic**,²² **Nigeria**,²³ **Sierra Leone**,²⁴ as well as **Liberia**. In some of these States, the legal and regulatory framework at the national level has recently been reviewed and new national laws or legislation have been adopted and entered into force. In many cases, efforts are ongoing to further codify these laws or legislation into administrative procedures or standard operating procedures. This is expected to overcome challenges faced in certain WAM functional areas, by allowing, mandating and enabling relevant and competent national authorities to implement life-cycle WAM activities or operations.

In Liberia, the baseline assessment conducted in 2019 noted the existence of illicit manufacturing of arms (and ammunition) by unidentified manufacturers and illicit possession of arms by civilians and civilian entities. At the time, there was no licencing system or mechanism in place as part of a broader regulation and control of civilian access to SALW and ammunition (and explosives). The 2022 Firearms and Ammunition Control Act (FACA) now gives clear provisions for such a licensing system and mechanisms. In operationalizing the FACA in 2023, draft administrative regulations harmonized with the penal code (e.g. prohibitions, fees and penalties) were endorsed – these now enable the Liberia National Commission on Arms (LiNCA) and other competent national authorities to properly conduct licencing, including authorization and registration. This includes exemptions for certain types of civilian users and uses (such as hunters and hunting) and also covers civilian entities with special needs (e.g., companies, diplomatic representations, etc.). The licence application process and review cover several criteria (e.g., background checks, medical examination, level of training and certification). In 2023, LiNCA and competent national authorities started implementing the licencing system and mechanism, which coincided with the launch of registration of civilian arms. The mechanism also includes periodic training of civilian entities and civilians authorized to hold firearms. Physical storage facilities are also inspected regularly. While the implementation of the system and mechanism has only recently started, it is expected to curb illicit trade, transfers, possession, manufacture and use of firearms and ammunition by civilian entities and civilians.



Soldiers and record-keeping
© 2019, United Nations, Gemma Cortes

21 Theò Bajan and Mohamed Coulibaly, "Republic of Benin", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2024, p. 8.

22 Mensah and Giezendanner, "Central African Republic", p. 9.

23 Lewis and Shiotani, "Nigeria", p. 4.

24 Savannah de Tessières and Himayu Shiotani, "Sierra Leone", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2020, p. 4.

BOX 4.

Craft and artisanally produced weapons, ammunition and components

Illegal craft production of small arms and light weapons continues to be a global challenge – and one that has been highlighted repeatedly by several West African states including as part of national WAM baseline assessments. As highlighted in previous annual updates, craft-produced weapons are increasingly used in episodes of armed violence, terrorism, and criminality in the region – their regulation and control constitutes a major, continuous challenge for many of the 12 States that participated in this research. As noted last year, these States present and pursue different national approaches to dealing with the craft production that takes place in their country, depending also on their legal and regulatory framework at the national level. Practical recommendations noted in 2023 based on responses from states remain valid, with additional recommendations made this year:

- Conduct national surveys and research on the issue of craft production to better understand the scope of the issue and inform high-level governmental officials, and actions;
- Sensitize and raise awareness amongst those involved in craft production and the applicable legal and regulatory frameworks at the national level, and beyond;
- Facilitate the establishment of an association of individuals or organizations involved in craft production and related trade activities to encourage their registration and regulation;
- Consider, if feasible and appropriate, including an association of those involved in craft production and related trade activities in a national coordination mechanism;
- Provide appropriate training activities on the legal and regulatory framework at the national level to those involved in craft production;
- Consider the development and implementation of positive and negative incentive structures including alternative livelihood programs for those involved in craft production rather than their criminalization.

As indicated by several of the progress updates featuring in this annual WAM update, at the national level, key in addressing the issue is an inclusive, gradual, and conflict-sensitive approach to the issue of craft-production of SALW, ammunition and components. There is merit in further research, examination of options and dialogue to address this issue at national, regional, and global levels.

2.3 Transfer controls

Illicit transfers of conventional arms and ammunition can fuel or prolong conflicts, violent crime and instability, and can facilitate or be used to cause abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law.²⁵ It is therefore important for states seeking to develop a comprehensive and effective WAM framework to have a national system for regulating international transfers of conventional arms and ammunition, including imports, retransfers, transit, transshipment and brokering. During the period considered for this annual WAM update, several states made progress in strengthening their international transfer controls.

In **Sierra Leone**, the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms (SLeNCSA) was officially replaced by the Sierra Leone Commission on Arms and Ammunitions (SLeCAA) in 2023.²⁶ This follows an option identified during the baseline assessment in Sierra Leone in 2019 to strengthen the national WAM framework by the expansion of the mandate of the national lead authority and coordination mechanism including for the control of transfers.²⁷ In line also with a

recommendation made by ECOWAS to its member states, and following sustained awareness-raising by SLeNCSA among relevant high-level national authorities, the 2023 SLeCAA Act, amongst other important changes, expanded the mandate and its scope beyond SALW to cover conventional arms, ammunition, parts, components, and related material. This now allows an empowered SLeCAA to serve as the competent national authority and coordination mechanism for all issues related to international transfers of conventional arms, including SALW, and ammunition, but also



25 Giezendanner and Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology*, p. 55.

26 "Sierra Leone Commission on Arms and Ammunitions Act, 2023", Act 24 of 2023, *Sierra Leone Gazette*, 19 June 2023.

27 de Tessières and Shiotani, "Sierra Leone", p. 5.

28 Mensah-Sackey, Giezendanner and Holtom, "2023 Update", pp. 12-13.

ensuring compliance with provisions and measures of the relevant regional and international instruments, such as the ATT. It is worth noting that the 2023 annual WAM update highlighted a similar process in Liberia, which had resulted in a boost of resources available to the national WAM lead authority, an increase in its leverage via the expanded legal mandate, and its further institutional strengthening to facilitate its work coordinating WAM activities on the national, regional and international levels.²⁸

In **Burkina Faso**, the 2018 assessment noted that its regulation of arms transfers including its import control system has often been described as a model in the region, with a dedicated, competent national authority, a sufficiently developed national legal and regulatory framework, and its own end use/r documentation allowing the implementation of relevant provisions of international instruments, on which Burkina Faso has regularly reported on. Among the key challenges at the time were cooperation through appropriate channels with competent authorities in exporting States, including to more effectively operationalize end use/r control measures, as well as undetected cross-border arms trafficking.²⁹ To address this issue, stricter national control measures were recommended, as well as cooperation with neighbouring countries to monitor points of entry. In response to the questionnaire used as part of this research, the CNCA noted that during the period covered by this annual WAM update, meetings were held with neighbouring countries to strengthen border controls (including through joint patrols and exercises), and to prevent and detect illicit arms transfers and trafficking at specific border points. There are also indications that the CNCA, through a consultative process involving other national authorities and other national stakeholders, is in

the process of reviewing its import control and end use/r control system as it relates to transfers of items for use by certified and authorized civilian entities and individuals. Generally, this is expected to reduce illicit cross-border trafficking, while contributing to security in Burkina Faso and stability.

While usually considered an important area of its own, several states consulted for this research in the context of transfer controls referred to challenges in addressing illicit trade and cross-border arms trafficking, and noted efforts for life cycle management of arms, including SALW, and ammunition in the context of border management, customs and law enforcement cooperation. A number of WAM baseline assessments in West Africa have considered this as an additional WAM functional area and among the options identified to strengthen the national WAM framework were options to better monitor and interdict illicit transfers and cross-border arms trafficking. For example, **Benin's** 2022 baseline assessment highlighted the need to strengthen technical capacity at ports, airports and land borders.³⁰ In 2023, Benin received scanning systems that have been installed at various border crossings (e.g., ports, airports and land crossings) to improve monitoring of traffic and the detection of illicit arms trafficking. Cooperation and collaboration between the customs authorities with the Secretariat of the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Light Weapons (CNLCPAL) was key in this regard. When consulted, the representative of Benin participating in this research noted that information generated through use of these systems has already yielded some results and allowed targeting of limited resources to key illicit trafficking points.



Patrol
© 2022, United Nations, Haradane Dicko

28 Mensah-Sackey, Giezendanner and Holtom, "2023 Update", pp. 12-13.

29 Hardy Giezendanner, Franziska Seethaler and Himayu Shiotani, "Burkina Faso", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2020, p. 5.

30 Bajon and Coulibaly, "Republic of Benin", p. 10.



The driver of a transportation truck
© 2022, United Nations, Harandane Dicko

2.4 Stockpile management

Effective stockpile management ensures the operational readiness of national security forces, prevents the theft or the diversion of state-owned weapons and ammunition, and enables the timely identification and disposal of obsolete and surplus materiel.³¹ In order to effectively manage weapons and ammunition and prevent their diversion, there is a need for adequate infrastructure, training of personnel, and regular maintenance and inventory checks, all according to established international standards. Measures are also required to ensure the safety of conventional ammunition, which may deteriorate or become damaged if not correctly stored, handled and transported. That may result in unplanned and accidental explosions at munition sites with the risk of significant loss of life, damage to infrastructure and costs for clear-up operations.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, remarkable achievements and considerable progress had been made during 2011–2016 across all levels, across national authorities and the SDF, and across all regions of the country in strengthening WAM including stockpile management, with support from international partners. The 2016 assessment found the technical capacity and level of expertise of the personnel in charge among the SDF to be sufficient, given the national context and situation at the time. A key challenge was furthering the implementation of existing SOPs, which had been developed in line with international standards and guidelines, at lower levels of management and at unit (individual) levels of the SDF and building their capacity. A related key question was therefore how to sustain and expand the national technical capacity over time. Among the enhancement options identified were:

- Sensitizing and increasing the level of awareness of high-level political authorities and leadership on the importance of stockpile management for public safety and security
- Allocating adequate funds to guarantee personnel capacity-building (e.g., regular training)
- Creating career paths and certification of specialized personnel (to encourage new recruits and to retain existing specialized personnel)
- Introducing modules/components in the training programmes of the SDF

During the follow-up assessment in 2023, national experts from all SDF reiterated in particular the necessity of the last of the above points. Later in the year, a workshop bringing together the Ivorian ComNat-ALPC and the leadership of Military Training Schools was organized, which validated in principle the integration of WAM (including stockpile management modules) into the training curriculums and programmes of Military Training Schools. While a small example, it is illustrative of sustainability, including a longer term, institutional impact of previously provided assistance.

In **Somalia**, efforts and activities aimed at further expanding the WAM system from the FGS to the federal member states, including capacities to store weapons securely and accountably, remain necessarily transitional and incremental. The incremental expansion of the established national WAM system beyond Mogadishu required overcoming several challenges and certain prerequisites need to be in place to strengthen stockpile management, including physical infrastructure:

- There needs to be clarity on the structure, composition and needs of Somali Security Forces (SSF).
- Storage infrastructure locations need to be controlled, secured and policed.
- Adequate infrastructure needs to allow the SSF to maintain operational readiness.
- At the same time, diversion risk mitigation is needed to prevent loss, theft or capture by negative elements.
- Where military operations are ongoing, storage facilities or solutions may need to be temporary or mobile to allow for rapid deployment and movements in operations (and by frontline units).



A SSF soldier
© 2024, Scott Peterson

31 Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology, p. 59.

In addressing and overcoming these challenges in Somalia, the CMD (with and through relevant ministries and the SSF) has strategically and operationally planned in advance, with relevant focal points at federal member state level as well as international partners. A nationwide audit of existing physical infrastructure and capabilities for the storage of weapons (and ammunition) and needs assessment had been undertaken by mid-April 2023, which informed planning, prioritization, procurement and resource allocation. Security (and safety) risks as well as accountability measures were also assessed, and specific actions taken to address them. For example, as an additional security measure the Somali National Army and other parts of the SSF have also categorized items' storage according to their attractiveness to groups designated as terrorist groups. Since mid-2023, focus has shifted to implementation of the physical infrastructure plans, and notable progress has been made. By April 2024, the physical infrastructure (including facilities) audited and assessed included a total of 228 facilities, of which 70 were operational, 18 were non-operational and 13 had been destroyed or had to be abandoned (the status of a further 127 facilities currently unknown).³² Such progress updates are expected to help overcome the challenges outlined above and to further strengthen stockpile security and accountability in a transitional context, extending the reach of the established national WAM system from Mogadishu towards the federal member states.

In **Benin**, preventative efforts to strengthen the physical infrastructure for the storage of weapons and ammunition were underway at the time of the assessment in April 2022, in the context of the evolving security situation at the national level, including in border areas in the north of the country, and security dynamics in the region. One

of the main challenges in this regard has been ensuring that units of the Benin SDF, including those operating in remote and high-risk areas, can be supplied with material in an accountable manner, while enabling them to safely and securely manage and store ammunition and weapons during operations in such areas. Among the key enhancement options identified during the assessment has therefore been the completion of an ongoing, specific and technical assessment of risks, the identification of obsolete or unstable materiel (expected to be disposed of through destruction), as well as the physical infrastructure storage needs and capacity of all SDF units. By April 2022, a risk and needs assessment with the Army had already been (almost) completed, undertaken by the CNLCPAL together with the Armed Forces Materiel Division in cooperation with international partners. Since 2023, the CNLCPAL has since made notable progress in assessments of state-held ammunition and weapons of the remaining parts of the SDF, including the Republican Police, Customs, and the Water, Forestry and Hunting Services, supporting assessments and technical monitoring visits to several storage sites operated by various components of the security forces in order to develop a prioritization plan for upgrading several key infrastructures. In 2023, additional armouries have been built and renovated, and twenty (20) temporary solutions for the separated storage of ammunition and weapons have been put in place. While these efforts are ongoing, it is an example of progress contributing to broader efforts to secure national stockpiles in a varying security situation at the national level, and of the safe and accountable management of ammunition not only in Cotonou and the capital, but also by units operating in remote and high-risk including border areas.



A weapons storage facility with weapons racks
© 2024, Alexander Koerner

32 Security Council, "Situation in Somalia", Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/109, 16 February 2023, para. 33.

2.5 Marking

The marking of conventional arms, especially small arms and light weapons, with unique identifying marks supports accurate record-keeping. It thus aids national accounting for weapons and the trackability and tracing of weapons and ammunition. National marking systems are therefore closely linked to national recordkeeping systems, which also enable the identification of potential points of diversion from stockpiles or other sources of illicit material in a given context.³³

The 2023 Annual WAM in Africa Insight included an example of the development of a national marking system by the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, including the challenges faced, steps taken to overcome them and progress achieved in advancing over time its national weapons-marking programme, in cooperation with international partners.³⁴ In June 2023, the Government of the DRC and its CNC-ALPC officially closed the first phase of its national marking programme, which started in 2016, with over 300,000 primarily state-held as well as civilian-held weapons successfully marked in Kinshasa and in the eastern, conflict-affected provinces in a challenging security environment. Whereas much of the first phase of the national marking programme focused on eastern provinces, the national strategy and the newly adopted NAP for 2024–2028 now also envisage the marking of state weapons in the other provinces, as well as the incremental marking (and registration) of civilian-held SALW.³⁵ Overall, the marking and registration efforts under the national programme over the past eight years have helped enhance accountability and the ability of authorities in the DRC to trace weapons, thereby supporting ongoing efforts to curb armed violence and fight impunity.

Generally, research conducted for this update found that an increasing number of States that have undertaken a national WAM baseline assessment face challenges in effectively marking State-held (and civilian) weapons under their jurisdiction. For example, the previous annual WAM update highlighted progress made to mark (register) and account for weapons in Niger by Niger's National Commission for the Collection and Control of Illicit Weapons (CCNAI), in cooperation with national authorities, since 2019. When consulted as part of this research, the representative from CCNAI noted that weapons marking has been pursued in 2023 within certain national defence and security forces, and there is a willingness to maintain previous gains made by expanding this to other defence and security forces that requested the marking of their state-held weapons. In addition to Niger, Burkina Faso in 2022 also already indicated persistent challenges in maintaining or increasing their national marking capacity – while overall, this number in 2023 increased to a total of five (5), including three states (Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, and Nigeria) that previously did not face challenges in this regard.



Marking machines
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2.6 Recordkeeping

An effective national recordkeeping system comprehensively records weapons and ammunition within the jurisdiction of a state. This includes records of international transfers, the national stockpile, arms and ammunition in civilian hands, weapons and ammunition recovered from the illegal or illicit sphere, as well as records of materiel that has been disposed of (e.g. destructions, international sales, donations). Relevant international and regional instruments and standards recommend a centralization of the recordkeeping system, managed by a competent authority.

One of the key discussion points throughout all of

the national WAM baseline assessments is the degree of digitalization of the national recordkeeping and accounting system more broadly. Generally, while manual record-keeping systems, if structured and used appropriately, can be effective, many of the 12 states and their national authorities seek to increase efficiency through computer-based and networked communication systems. Responses and findings from this research are also indicative that this is one of the several domains where technology more generally may have an impact in strengthening WAM practices including to prevent or counter arms diversion.

33 Giezendanner and Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology*, p. 66.

34 Mensah, Giezendanner and Holtom, "2023 Update", p. 15.

35 See the subsection 2.1.

In **Burkina Faso**, the 2018 assessment found that computer-based, specific records were already in use by national authorities and specific components of the SDF. However, this was not common practice across all national authorities and SDF, especially at lower management levels and in remote locations.³⁶ In 2023, the CNCA initiated a process to review recordkeeping practices and procedures in consultation with competent national authorities. Ultimately, this ongoing process aims at centralizing the national recordkeeping system and working towards a fully computer-based, networked systems, in order to increase efficiency as well as accountability and oversight.

Similarly, in **Côte d'Ivoire**, assessments highlighted the need for a more centralized recordkeeping system across all national authorities and for all parts of the SDF. In 2023 under the leadership of the National Security Council, relevant national authority in cooperation with the ComNat-ALPC began piloting a computer-based, specific recordkeeping system for the police. If successfully piloted, the intention is to then gradually expand the system to the gendarmerie and then the Army. It should be noted, however, that national authorities have highlighted significant challenges posed by the geographical and territorial coverage of system, especially in remote and low capacity areas. Ultimately, this process aims to centralize the national accounting system, with the National Security Council managing, supervising and providing oversight over the accounting system.

In **Nigeria** as well, the 2016 baseline assessment identified a need to review existing recordkeeping practices and work towards their harmonization across national authorities, security forces and agencies through their codification and the development, adoption and subsequent use of a unique set of national guidelines at all levels and echelons.³⁷ In 2023, the NCCSALW in cooperation with the Nigerian Armed Forces and other relevant security forces and agencies initiated a process to

review and standardize registration templates and to initiate the development of a more centralized national (electronic) accounting system. In the long term, this process is expected to support improved national information management for all weapons and ammunition held by the SDF.

In **Somalia**, the ONS since 2020 in consultation with relevant ministries, and with the support from a non-governmental expert organization, has been developing a comprehensive national WAM database, in order to strengthen overall accountability over weapons and ammunition (including through a strengthened recordkeeping system linked to international transfers controls). The national WAM database centralizes the national accounting system and importantly, can ensure accountability over weapons and ammunition through-out the transfer chain from the pre-transfer to the post-transfer and import phases to central registration, stockpiling and distribution to unit and individual levels. It is combined with and works alongside an electronic application ("Fulcrum") allowing the remote registration or verification and monitoring. By late 2022, the comprehensive national WAM database was piloted and "fitted-for-purpose" in cooperation with international partner support. In 2023, further technical capacity and infrastructure was built within relevant ministries and the SSF, supporting its further roll-out, use and institutionalization at different levels.



2.7 Tracing of arms and profiling of ammunition

The identification, profiling and tracing of illicit arms and ammunition can support early-warning mechanisms by identifying demand for and sources of weapons and ammunition in specific areas or among particular groups.³⁸ Ideally, this process begins by examining information contained within national borders to determine the point of diversion. Then, if the source of the conventional arms and its point of diversion appear to be outside the national territory, the process would turn to the international level. This information can contribute to efforts to prevent

armed violence and de-escalate conflict. In addition, states should process illicit arms and treat illicit ammunition as part of investigations and domestic judicial processes relating to the possession, use, trafficking or diversion of the illicit materiel.³⁹ It is therefore important for states to have appropriate laws and procedures for the marking, recording, storing and responsible disposal of illicit weapons and ammunition to ensure that they are not diverted again into the illicit market.

36 Giezendanner, Seethaler and Shiotani, "Burkina Faso", p. 8.

37 Lewis and Shiotani, "Nigeria", p. 7.

38 Giezendanner and Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology*, p. 74.

39 Giezendanner and Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology*, p. 78.

In **Benin**, the baseline assessment conducted in 2022 highlighted similar challenges and identified the different roles and responsibilities of entities responsible for the processing of illicit arms and the treatment of illicit ammunition, from their point of recovery and initial registration through to domestic tracing. However, the clear identification of the institutional roles of the entities responsible for these processes was mentioned as a priority by national authorities. Between 2023 and early 2024, the Armed Forces Materiel Division in the Ministry of Defence and the Republican Police under the Ministry of Interior, in coordination with the CNLCPAL, held several consultative meetings. This included the review, codification as well as harmonization of the existing national practices into specific SOPs, including templates for the proper, systematic documentation of recovered illicit weapons, allowing their traceability. With these SOPs being put in place in Benin, they are now expected to facilitate the building of personal capacity in a sustainable manner, as well as allowing the streamlining of good national practice across all responsible entities. This, in turn, is expected to further cement gains made and ensure accountability over illicit arms from recovery to tracing to disposal – in the process, better protecting Beninese communities from armed

violence.

It is notable that, of the States consulted for this update, only Burkina Faso highlighted traceability of arms and ammunition as a WAM functional area in which there is a persistent challenge while at the same time also highlighting its importance in efforts against diversion and illicit arms flows. Very few of the African States that have conducted a WAM baseline assessment highlighted progress in this regard, despite all having options for enhancement in this critical WAM functional area.



Observations of the marks on a cartridge before profiling
© 2019, United Nations, Harandane Dicko

2.8 Processing of illicit arms and treatment of illicit ammunition

Some states made some progress in 2023 in strengthening their national system and practices for the processing and treatment of illicit weapons and ammunition, several states noted persistent challenges in their efforts to strengthen their national systems for processing and treatment of illicit weapons and ammunition from the point of their recovery (e.g. seized, captured, surrendered, collected or found weapons and/or ammunition) to their disposal. Common challenges include, for example, the absence of clearly established national procedures across all national authorities involved in this process; determining the specific role and involvement of criminal justice actors in the judicial processing and use of evidence; as well as defining the lead authority or authorities for the decision-making process on the final method of disposal of this material. Between 2023 and early 2024, some progress has been made in addressing some of these specific challenges.

In **Nigeria**, a lack of specific coordination and differing practices between the different national authorities has hindered the full and complete processing of illicit arms and ammunition from the moment of their recovery through to their disposal. Specifically, the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Nigerian Police Force, which are among the key forces recovering weapons from the illicit sphere, had different procedures and cooperation between these two forces was limited (with one

force not always transferring recovered materiel with the other), which influenced the steps considered and limited the full, complete processing. The establishment of the NCCSALW in 2021 not only strengthened the national coordination mechanism in general but also the specific coordination mechanism among relevant national authorities and forces involved in the processing of illicit arms and the treatment of ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere. In 2023, for example, the Nigerian Police Force handed over more than 4,000 seized weapons (most of which were craft-produced) and 2,000 rounds of ammunition directly to the NCCSALW once the legal and judiciary processing had been completed, in order to proceed with the disposal through destruction.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the 2023 follow-up assessment noted that the justice actors and authorities are generally responsible for the management of the judicial processing of illicit arms and ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere by the Armed Forces or the Gendarmerie. In 2023, one of the key challenges included a general lack of capacity to safely and securely store weapons and ammunition at courts. As a consequence, judicial authorities would often ask for this materiel to be stored at Gendarmerie premises, which in turn had a negative impact on the Gendarmerie's management of its own stockpile of weapons and

ammunition. Since 2020, major efforts have been made to raise awareness among justice authorities on physical and post-judicial management of weapons and ammunition, including their disposal through destruction. Since then, a small number of storage solutions have also been installed at courts. Generally, these efforts started to bear some fruit in 2023, when prosecutors started asking for the disposal through destruction of weapons that have gone through judicial processing. Later in 2023, approximately 900

weapons were destroyed with support from the Ivorian ComNat-ALPC, which played an important role in coordinating different authorities involved in these efforts. More remains to be done to raise awareness and capacity of judiciary authorities in Côte d'Ivoire. A robust criminal justice approach to illicit arms – that addresses not just the tools but individuals, entities and networks behind illicit arms trafficking – can be critical to preventing diversion and curbing the illicit trafficking and proliferation of arms in the long term.



2.9 Weapons collection

Weapon-collection programmes help to reduce the quantities of unwanted, illegal and illicit weapons that might otherwise be used in armed conflict or armed violence.⁴⁰ When implemented as part of broader efforts to address the root causes of violence and conflict, rather than as stand-alone or ad hoc activities, weapon-collection programmes can contribute to sustainable peace, security and development efforts. Any such effort often requires positive and/or negative incentive structures and mechanisms, and a strong involvement of communities and individuals with a view to minimize risks and reduce incidents of violent crime by limiting the availability of, and reducing trafficking in, illicit and illegal small arms, light weapons and their corresponding ammunition among civilians.

A major challenge in **Ghana** continues to be the regularization and control of access by civilians to SALW and ammunition, as well as artisanal or craft-manufactured weapons, and their presence among the civilian population and communities. This challenge is shared with many other West African countries. In Ghana, there are varying levels of societal trust (including in relation to state institutions), attitudes, as well as access of the Ghana National Commission on SALW (GNACSA) to communities and populations in remote areas. In 2023, GNACSA continued to take a gradual approach that combines awareness-raising with the promotion of dialogue by GNACSA with, as well as between, the civilian population and communities, including women, men and young generations. This has included the organization of several campaigns, some in close cooperation with

civil society organizations (including in particular women's associations), as well as with schools, taking into account the differentiated, gender- and age-related impacts of armed violence in Ghana. These campaigns are expected to promote responsible ownership of small arms among adult civilians. These campaigns are also expected to contribute to gradually changing attitudes towards responsible civilian ownership of small arms and to increasing trust in state institutions, thereby supporting further progress in Ghana's efforts to curb the proliferation and misuse of weapons. Ultimately, GNACSA also hopes that they encourage, through appropriate measures and in line with the relevant provisions of the legal and regulatory framework, the voluntary surrender of weapons held by civilians to the national authorities and GNACSA. This would reduce risks posed by weapons-related violence, including risks posed by gender-based and sexual-violence. Such a progressive approach provides an example of creating trust through creative awareness campaigns. Continued, sustained efforts will be needed to achieve long-term impact and transformation of attitudes.



40 Giezendanner and Shiotani, A Reference Methodology, p. 80.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the problem of violent extremism gaining ground in neighbouring countries poses the challenge of strengthening community cooperation in the fight against the proliferation of illicit weapons. In June 2023, the Ivorian ComNat-ALPC conducted an awareness-raising campaign that targeted road hauliers and community leaders with the aim of raising awareness of the issues surrounding violent extremism and eventually encouraging the voluntary surrender respectively collection by the Ivorian ComNat-ALPC and other competent national authorities of weapons and ammunition at local levels. The aim of this

approach is to strengthen the bonds of trust between communities, the population and state authorities, in order to better prevent criminality and strengthen early detection mechanisms. Through such community-based approaches, the Ivorian authorities hope to strengthen public security while the ComNat-ALPC contributes to preventing violent extremism from gaining traction among communities. The example demonstrates a holistic, inclusive approach and the important role and contributions that national WAM lead entities and coordination mechanisms, where mandated, can make to help raise awareness about PVE.⁴¹

2.10 Disposal

United Nations guidance recommends destruction as the preferred method for the disposal of surplus, unwanted or obsolete conventional arms and ammunition.⁴² States use various methods for disposal, which should be outlined in their national WAM legal and regulatory frameworks. The exact method used for disposal will also vary depending on capacities and resources.

Ghana's baseline assessment, which took place in 2019, focused on management of conventional ammunition and noted several key challenges regarding its disposal. These included, for example, a tendency by security agencies to keep obsolete, unsafe or surplus materiel in stock due to limited resources and national capacity for their disposal. This resulted in security and safety risks both for personnel and for the civilian population living in proximity to storage locations. There was also a limited level of motivation by high-level national authorities for the disposal of such materiel due to its perceived financial value and a lack of awareness of the benefits of effective management of conventional ammunition. Coupled with the absence at the time of legal provisions and procedures, this led to ad hoc disposal, including destruction of material, with sometimes severely negative environmental impacts. Key enhancement options at the time included:

- the development of a disposal plan;

- the formalization of cooperative agreements between security agencies;
- strengthened national capacities (in line with the specific plan);
- the conduct of subsequent operations to dispose of ammunition assessed and identified as obsolete, unsafe or in surplus.⁴³

The results of the 2019 baseline assessment informed the development and adoption of a dedicated national policy. When consulted as part of the research, Ghana highlighted significant progress and achievements. At a purpose-built ammunition-destruction facility that was built after the assessment, Ghanaian national authorities have destroyed over 60 tons of ammunition since 2019; after a drop in operations during the 2020–2021 period (impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic), most of the ammunition was destroyed during 2022–2023. Generally, Ghanaian authorities implemented approximately three-quarters of the options identified in the 2019 national assessment (see Figure 2 above), including the construction of the destruction facility and the destruction of ammunition. Overall, Ghana's progress in conventional ammunition management has led to reductions in security and safety risks for both security personnel and surrounding civilian populations, while it demonstrates commitment to effective stockpile management and disposal.



Final disposal of weapons at a public ceremony © 2022, United Nations, Leonel Grothe Tossela

41 UNIDIR, UNREC, FDFA, *Summary Report: Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa*, 2023.

42 Office of Disarmament Affairs, "Destruction: Weapons", Modular Small-Arms-Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) Module 05.50, 27 August 2012, p.3; Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, "Disarmament", Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) Framework 04.10, p 30.

43 Savannah de Tessières and Himayu Shiotani, "Ghana", Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight, UNIDIR, 2020, p. 10.

3. CONCLUSION



This Annual WAM in Africa Insight update promotes a holistic, integrated and comprehensive approach to WAM with a special focus on progress made by 12 African states in strengthening their WAM frameworks and practices after undertaking a WAM baseline assessment using UNIDIR's WAM Reference Methodology. Such an approach contributes to achieving broader peace, security and development goals including, but not limited to, the prevention of armed conflict and armed violence, security sector governance, the protection of civilians and reducing the human cost of weapons.

National authorities participating in this research also emphasized several current or emerging risks posed by illicit arms and conventional ammunition, including:

- the spread of violent extremism,
- dynamic and changing security contexts and environments,
- the presence of non-state armed groups (and increasing demand)
- porous borders.

These risks contribute to the proliferation of illicit arms and threaten regional stability, including through cross-border trafficking. To address these challenges, national WAM frameworks must be strengthened. Measures that can be taken in this regard include risk assessments, community-inclusive solutions, and regional coordination to effectively monitor, regulate, and safely dispose of conventional arms and ammunition, especially in the context of cross-border flows.

The examples provided above of progress made by different African states in various WAM functional

areas shows not only the types of measure that can be taken to strengthen WAM policies, practices and capacities at the national level, but also the linkages between different WAM functional areas – for example, the relationship between marking, record-keeping, profiling, tracing and processing of illicit arms and the treatment of illicit ammunition.

This update also highlights the importance of ensuring that efforts to monitor progress in WAM take into account cross-cutting issues. These include gender-mainstreaming and gender-sensitive WAM practices. The update also highlights a need to consider challenges – such as craft production, border controls, WAM in remote areas, and criminal justice approaches in response to illicit arms trafficking and proliferation – that are relevant for WAM but which are not currently explicitly addressed in the UNIDIR WAM Reference Methodology.

A key lesson highlighted in the previous two updates on WAM in Africa remains central to the progress updates or success stories above: enhancing national ownership among all relevant national stakeholders and sensitization of high-level political actors and government officials on the importance of WAM are essential to making further progress to strengthen WAM in Africa.

National WAM systems must be strengthened and continuously enhanced to effectively regulate, control and manage conventional arms, including SALW, and ammunition in complex, evolving security environments. With continued efforts, national authorities can work to address current and anticipated future risks through holistic, integrated and comprehensive approaches to WAM.

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LOOKING AHEAD

The exchange of good practices and lessons learned in strengthening WAM policy and practice in Africa seeks to enhance the knowledge of States, regional organisations and international partners on ways to establish and implement comprehensive national and regional frameworks governing the full lifecycle of arms and ammunition.

UNIDIR encourages the Community of States, regional organisations and relevant international partners to consult its WAM Country Insight and Annual Update series as a useful reference to support the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation for future WAM projects.

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