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## Safer Stockpiles: Developing Regional PSSM Instructor Cadres

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This paper outlines the approaches of regional organizations and bodies in Africa, in particular the Regional Centre of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, Horn of Africa (RECSA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and their partners in developing regional physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) expert and instructor rosters based on a train-the-trainer program developed by the Multinational Small Arms and Ammunition Group (MSAG). This training has been designed to provide a baseline of best practices across participating states based on international standards, as well as a cadre of instructors able to design and deliver training across the African continent in an attempt to reduce the reliance on outside expertise. The information in this paper highlights the process of developing these programs and calls on national governments, as well as regional bodies, both in Africa and globally, to commit to supporting the continued development and deployment of the regional PSSM program and instructor rosters.



*Figure 4. Stacks of small arms ammunition in a model storage facility in West Africa after a successful PSSM training intervention. All images courtesy of BICC.*

RECSA is an intergovernmental organization established in June 2005. The Secretariat is mandated to build the capacity of Member States, and coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol within the RECSA region. The Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons is a legally binding instrument requiring state parties to introduce certain national legislative measures, strengthen their operational capacities, and install measures to control state-owned small arms and light weapons (SALW).

In order to discharge its mandate to address the proliferation of illicit SALW and provide a conducive environment for sustainable development, RECSA undertakes a range of activities with its partners across its fifteen Member States and engages at the international level in various disarmament fora. One pillar of RECSA's approach is to build the national capacities of states in the field of PSSM. In this vein, RECSA negotiated a multi-year regional PSSM training-of-trainers project with the government of Germany that began in 2013 with technical support from MSAG and the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC). This project aims to do two things: The first is to develop national PSSM expertise in member states by establishing a best practice "baseline" of expertise for PSSM instructors. The second is to develop a cadre of instructors and senior instructors who are able to run their own training courses, as well as certify new instructors, thus contributing to the sustainability of the program and further capacity building following MSAG's exit. The course run by RECSA was developed in conjunction with MSAG, who officially handed over the course to RECSA in 2019. It is now entirely administered by RECSA.



Figure 5. A regional PSSM course participant taking part in an MSAG exercise on ammunition, UN hazard classification, and compatibility groups.

In 2018, the insights gained from the design and the implementation of the regional PSSM training process in East Africa were used to negotiate and establish a similar regional training-of-trainers process in West Africa under the auspices of the ECOWAS Commission with funding from the government of Germany, technical expertise from MSAG Member States, and support from BICC. All fifteen ECOWAS Member States contributed to the conceptualization of the West African version of the PSSM training project during a statutory meeting of all National Commissions on Small Arms in the ECOWAS region. These bi-annual meetings are organized by the ECOWAS Commission and serve as a vital coordination platform for the Commission, Member States, and implementing organizations and donors to discuss developments and project activities in the field of small arms control. By including each Member State, this established the regional, as well as national, ownership of the project required to maintain a strong and sustainable interest throughout the training.

The ECOWAS Commission and its Small Arms Division are tasked with coordinating regional small arms control and are the custodians of the *Convention on Small Arms, Light Weapons and Other Related Materials* (ECOWAS Convention), a legally binding instrument requiring all Member States to enshrine in national law many provisions related to state stockpile security (Article 16) and the import and export of SALW, among others. Article 25 (1b) states the obligation for the ECOWAS Commission to provide Member States with financial and technical support for the realization of activities to implement the ECOWAS Convention.<sup>1</sup> The Commission has also elaborated a PSSM roadmap document with envisaged action points to improve PSSM measures across the West African region in which the implementation of the regional training-of-trainers and the creation of an ECOWAS pool of PSSM experts are major components.

### [Why Do Regional Organizations and Their Member States Continue to See PSSM as a Priority within Broader Weapons and Ammunition Management Processes?](#)

Enhancing PSSM capabilities is one important aspect of building broader Weapons and Ammunition Management (WAM) capacities of different security agencies within individual states across the entire arms and ammunition lifecycle. For instance, RECSA has developed a comprehensive PSSM model focusing on a range of actions that complete a holistic lifecycle management approach. This model includes the following technical components:

- arms marking
- safe storage
- digital record keeping
- destruction of obsolete arms, ammunition, and unexploded ordnance (UXO)

Although RECSA is undertaking PSSM training in individual Member States, it also recognized the need for a broader regional approach to strengthen capacities across States rather than viewing PSSM activities solely in isolation. Although a focus on PSSM alone is not a panacea for all issues relating to the illicit trafficking of SALW or unplanned explosions at munitions sites, enhancing PSSM practices does reduce the potential for diversion of SALW from state stockpiles, a key source of illicit trafficking, as well as enhance the safety of communities and personnel who live and work in the vicinity of stockpile storage facilities. The regional trainings and expert rosters are also increasingly used as important platforms for cross-border exchange and skill-sharing as many security agencies face similar challenges and can share success stories to inspire others. Regional training courses, as in the case of the ECOWAS region, additionally support the streamlining and harmonization of different standards across the region and create equal opportunities for all Member States.

### Structure of the Course

Both regional training-of-trainer programs are two-week courses running twice a year, around March and October. Each course is split into two components: The first week involves training new instructors or senior instructors and the second week is dedicated to teaching new students. Candidates are nominated by their respective agencies or governments according to a pre-determined profile as negotiated with MSAG to ensure the right caliber of personnel attends, e.g., individuals with sufficient experience in PSSM, a suitable rank, and who are likely to remain in active duty for a number of years so as to retain expertise and bolster capacity building by sharing the newly acquired knowledge more widely once back in their organizations.



*Figure 6. A group of regional PSSM course participants assessing the outside security parameters of an ammunition storage facility during a practical exercise.*

Although mostly attended by participants from military and policing agencies, these trainings are inclusive and generally open to all arms-bearing (and storing) security agencies in a given country. Regional organizations are increasingly attempting to prioritize the nomination of female candidates. This continues to be challenging in a traditionally male-dominated sector, though PSSM provides a level playing field for female and male instructor candidates to share their experiences. Female PSSM instructors and senior instructors play a powerful dual role in sharing their military expertise with fellow practitioners and in connecting with female community members—often the most affected by the consequences of inadequate PSSM practices, such as armed violence and unintended explosions. The majority of course participants are represented by their countries' armed or police forces, but the trainings are also open to immigration services, gendarmerie, wildlife services, and others.

The training curriculum is based on a series of PSSM modules that have been developed by MSAG to accurately align with principles related to effective weapons and ammunition management practices and standard operating procedures outlined in the United Nations Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC),<sup>2</sup> the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG),<sup>3</sup> and the UN SaferGuard



Programme.<sup>4</sup> This core structure is complemented by the operational and context-specific experience of the candidates and instructors, making for a varied and dynamic teaching environment. In addition to the classroom-based theoretical modules that include group work sessions and extensive use of visual teaching aids, practical exercises in live ammunition storage facilities are also included. A selection of modules taught during the courses, such as in the current ECOWAS regional training, includes:

- ammunition basics
- net explosive quantity distance calculations
- United Nations hazard classification
- inventory management
- physical security
- SALW
- fire safety

After participation in the basic PSSM Competence Building Seminar, the most successful candidates are selected to participate in the next training session, the Instructor Candidate course, followed by a Senior Instructor Candidate course. After successful graduation as a Senior Instructor, participants implement the training-of-trainers approach.

### Opportunities and Risks

The programs are thus far a success. In East Africa, more than 280 PSSM practitioners from eighteen countries have been trained, with certification of six senior instructors. Increasing numbers of RECSA Member States are asking for support in the field of PSSM, evidenced by the requests to RECSA from their Member States, as well as the priorities listed in the regional chapter of the Silencing the Guns program, which list PSSM as one of the areas where support is required. The Silencing the Guns program is an initiative by the African Union aspiring to end all wars, conflict, and gender-based violence, as well as prevent genocide. Similarly, in West Africa, the regional training-of-trainers initiative has so far seen 120 participants from fifteen countries trained in the basic course and sixteen certified as instructors out of which ten have been certified as senior instructors. The ECOWAS regional training will include two sessions in 2023, with the total numbers trained likely increasing to 160 basic course participants and twenty-eight instructors. It should also be noted that national PSSM trainings undertaken in individual Member States, such as those in South Sudan and Liberia in 2021, have been trainings solely conducted by PSSM instructors trained at the respective regional training programs. In the case of South Sudan, PSSM components form part of the benchmarking process (Benchmark 2 Article 215) required to be in

place before the arms embargo is lifted. National trainings are also often accompanied by a policy level workshop aimed to sensitize key political and security sector decision makers on the need to continue to adequately support robust national PSSM standards. The regional trainings are consistently highlighted as inspirational to the establishment of new national-level training programs, some even based on the certified instructors' own initiative. These trainings on the continent of Africa can serve as inspiration for the development of similar initiatives in other parts of the world.



*Figure 7. A regional instructor candidate conducting a module during a regional PSSM training-of-trainers in East Africa.*

There is a clear risk in relation to funding PSSM activities. To date, a relatively narrow donor base has funded both the regional courses and the individual national-level trainings. Their generosity has allowed the programs to be a success, however, there is a need for a more diversified donor base to ensure the projects sustain themselves into the future. While there are many states in Africa not yet able to resource PSSM training or capacity building effectively, those countries that are able to do so should evaluate whether they would be willing to donate more resources to building capacities in this area. Shared by all, the benefits of good PSSM practices produce safer communities by limiting illicit SALW and ammunition trafficking both nationally and in a cross-border context. States should also make use of the funding options available through mechanisms such as the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR) or the Saving lives Entity (SALIENT), which can provide support in this area and ensure that hard-won gains are secured for the future.



David Häfner joined Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) [www.bicc.de](http://www.bicc.de), in November 2018 as an Advisor for small arms control. An emphasis of this advisory work lies in regional approaches to weapons and ammunition management and physical security and stockpile management. He has worked on a range of small arms management approaches and processes with regional and multilateral bodies in both East and West Africa. David holds a Master of Arts in Violence, Terrorism and Security from the Queen's University of Belfast, Ireland.



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#### Endnotes:

1. ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition, and Other Related Materials, <https://bit.ly/3EQbMs3>.
2. Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSIAC), <https://bit.ly/3lzNWsX>.
3. International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, <http://bit.ly/3xlbaFB>.
4. UN SaferGuard, <https://unsafeguard.org/>.
5. Benchmarks to assess the arms embargo on South Sudan: report of the Secretary-General 2021, <https://bit.ly/3HYLUtK>.