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Elvan Isikozlu
BICC

Matthias Krötz
BICC

Claire Trancart
BICC

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CROSSING THE FENCE: CHALLENGES OF OPERATIONALIZING PSSM

by Elvan Isikozlu, Matthias Krötz, and Claire Trancart [BICC]

Physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) can be broadly defined as a series of activities that make national stockpiles of weapons and ammunition safe and secure. Over the last decade, PSSM has become a highly requested form of intervention to curb the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) and conventional ammunition (CA), as well as to keep communities safe from unintended explosions. Donors have provided substantial funding for PSSM activities to countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where we have learned that the impact of PSSM assistance depends a great deal on how actively improvements are maintained.1

Maintaining PSSM improvements has to do with influencing human behavior. Organizations supporting national institutions with PSSM are well aware of this but are often overwhelmed by immediate, tangible needs on the ground such as demands for new depots, fencing, or training. While these activities are critical, they will easily go to waste if PSSM is not practiced on a daily basis. This article will discuss three challenges that we have observed and present some critical questions for organizations to consider when providing PSSM assistance.

Challenge #1: Leadership of PSSM

Traditionally, PSSM falls within the purview of defense and security institutions. However, since the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) was adopted in 2001, as well as the entry into force of, among others, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006), States Parties are mandated to establish national SA/LW commissions to advise their governments, security, and defense forces in developing a small arms policy.2,3 PSSM is part of this policy and is therefore in the purview of national SA/LW commissions. However, these commissions are often not recognized or treated as the legitimate leaders of PSSM, nor are they given adequate authority by the top echelons of government. This lack of clarity challenges the ability of implementing organizations to roll out their assistance, as they may have to coordinate with more than one national body in order to access storage facilities, interview personnel, and/or assist in setting priorities.

Apart from which entity is the physical leader of the PSSM portfolio, there is also the question of whether this entity provides conceptual leadership of PSSM. This has also been referred to as national ownership of the PSSM portfolio. In some cases, strong national leadership is overlooked by donors due to conflicting interests. However, when national leadership of this kind is missing, it is often provided by outside organizations or donors who may implement their own priorities for PSSM. There are a number of reasons why national and local leadership of PSSM may be missing. For example, these leaders may prioritize other security-related issues over PSSM, and some may even benefit from the status quo. There are also practical reasons why national and local leadership of PSSM may be missing—namely a lack of motivation and capacity to practice PSSM—to which we turn to next.

Challenge #2: Motivation to Practice PSSM

Requesting assistance for PSSM does not necessarily mean that motivation to practice PSSM exists. Even if motivation for PSSM is high at the top level of government, it does not automatically trickle down. Motivation needs to exist at lower levels of government by those doing the job. It is not enough to train security service personnel and armorers on what they should do for PSSM, they should also be taught why. In most cases, this means understanding some of their grievances and finding ways to relay them to national leaders of PSSM. For example, some individuals working in armories expressed frustration over the lack of career opportunities for PSSM personnel, especially given the potential health hazards and physical danger of working around decaying weapons.4

It is also important to consider whether there are motivations to not practice PSSM. Some individuals may benefit financially from having unregulated access to SA/LW by renting them out, selling them on the black market, supporting poaching activities, or committing robberies.5 Addressing motivations against PSSM is a significant challenge for implementers and, more importantly, for national governments. They can be mitigated through greater job recognition, career advancement opportunities, access to regular training, and salary increases. These qualitative and quantitative benefits can also serve as incentives to recruit and retain PSSM personnel.
Challenge #3: Capacity to Practice PSSM

The lack of institutional capacity to practice PSSM—and the consequent outsourcing of capacity to perform certain tasks—is another challenge to maintaining PSSM improvements over the long term. Conflict-affected countries particularly struggle to take on the many responsibilities of PSSM. Tasks such as drafting standard operating procedures (SOP), organizing trainings, and coordinating armory inspections need to be assigned to a particular institution with the ability to absorb these tasks as part of their ongoing operations. In the absence of these institutions or skilled personnel, external or seconded staff is often invited to take over some of these tasks. The benefit of outsourcing is clear: improvements to PSSM are made in a relatively short period of time. The disadvantage is that little of the expertise and skills necessary to operationalize PSSM are left behind.

Dealing with this challenge means considering how any type of PSSM improvement will be operationalized before the work begins. It means assessing what kind of managerial capacities exist within responsible institutions and building these capacities in lieu of or in addition to material assistance. For example, PSSM requires skills in project management, budgeting, human resource management, etc., none of which are specific to PSSM per se but are critical to its practice over the long term. It also means adjusting the expectations of donors and implementers to match the realities of the local context and not the other way around. Many institutional capacities required to meet regional and international PSSM guidelines are limited. Rather than overburden these governments, it may be more realistic and effective to search for localized, low-cost options for stockpile safety and security that can be maintained and improved upon in the future.

Looking Ahead

To date, PSSM assistance has understandably focused on urgent needs and threats by providing material assistance, technical guidance, and equipment to sub-Saharan countries in particular. Our concern is that these needs and threats will reappear if assistance does not address the less tangible, more human-oriented and longer-term needs for PSSM. The impact of PSSM comes from how actively any and all improvements are maintained. This means that PSSM needs to be practiced on a daily basis and integrated into the ongoing operations of designated institutions. It is time to reflect on the extent to which donors and implementing organizations are supporting these needs and hence the operationalization of PSSM.

PSSM does not occur in a vacuum. The challenges that we have outlined in this article are also shared with the wider SA/LW and CA management agenda. It is difficult for any donor or external implementing agency to influence lasting change on this issue if a country does not have a national weapons control framework in which to legitimate and prioritize activities. There is only so much work that can be supported and sustained from the bottom up in the absence of top down directives and leadership. The best way forward for donors and implementing organizations is to support a combination of both, and to continue to reflect on the impact of their contributions.

See endnotes page 66
Improvised Explosive Devices and the International Mine Action Standards by Rhodes, Ph.D. [from page 4]

1. An IED is defined as ‘a device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating explosive material, destructive, lethal, noxious, incendiary, pyrotechnic materials or chemicals designed to destroy, disfigure, distract or harass. They may incorporate military stores, but are normally devised from non-military components’ (IMAS 04.10.3.134: 2013 & IATG 01.40.2011). Those victim–operated devices laid as landmines are referred to in this paper as locally manufactured landmines or improvised landmines.

2. The phrase ‘Humanitarian Mine Action’ is redundant as Mine Action by definition is humanitarian. In this paper Mine Action is used where others may use the phrase Humanitarian Mine Action.

3. Excluding EO of a nuclear, biological, or chemical nature; see endnote 13.


5. Email correspondence with MAG. Statistics current to August 2017.


7. IMAS 01.10 Section 6.2.

8. Mine action operators must therefore conduct risk assessments that include proper assessments of the conflict in question and of the actors involved. Such assessments will examine whether areas being targeted for clearance are permissive environments, where explosive devices are no longer in use for the parties to the conflict, or whether devices are ‘active’ in a given area and therefore not appropriate for mine action operations.


10. For instance IMAS 09.31 concerns Battle Area Clearance ‘including UXO, AXO, hooby traps and failed, or abandoned, IEDs left behind after hostilities have ceased.’

11. IMAS 04.10 and IATG definition: EO - all munitions containing explosives, nuclear fission or fusion materials and biological and chemical agents. This includes bombs and warheads; guided and ballistic missiles; artillery, mortar and rocket and small arms ammunition; all mines, torpedoes and depth charges; pyrotechnics; clusters and dispensers; cartridge and propellant actuated devices; electro-explosive devices; clandestine and improvised explosive devices (IEDs); and all similar or related items excluding EO of a nuclear, biological, or chemical nature; see endnote 10.


13. Excluding EO of a nuclear, biological, or chemical nature; see endnote 10.

Quality Management and Standards for Humanitarian Improvised Explosive Device (HIED) Response Activities by Keeley [from page 9]

1. See the UNMAS mine action portal at http://www.mineaction.org/issues.

2. Assuming victim assistance is mainstreamed into health and disability sectors and supported by specialist organizations that may not be involved in the ‘field’ elements of mine action.


Crossing the Fence: Challenges of Operationalizing PSPM by Isikozlu, Krotz, and Trancart [from page 14]


2. Other agreements that are in force in the United Nations, such as the Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa, and Bordering States (2004) and most recently, the Kinshasa Convention (2017).


Promoting Secure Stockpiles and Countering Diversion by Berman and King [from page 18]


2. MSAG is an apolitical, informal, and multinational platform of a dozen or so like-minded governments that, to the extent possible, since 2005 have worked together to support each other’s efforts to improve stockpile management practices across the globe. See www.msag.es.


4. The PSSM Best Practice Cards are available in Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS—in the Latin alphabet), French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swahili.

5. For example, over the past three years, the Survey has added eight incidents and deleted five during the period 1979–2013.


7. The UEMS Database records 19 events as having occurred in the United States, which have resulted in four dead and two injured. By way of comparison, while casualty data for many incidents is incomplete (including for those in the United States), the average number of casualties recorded for the other 548 UEMS in the 100 other countries in the database comes to less than 50.

8. The RASR Initiative Steering Committee comprises the International Trust Fund (ITF) Enhancing Human Security, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA), the RACVIAC Centre for Security Cooperation, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearing House for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), and the Small Arms Survey. The nine participating states since 2009, when the Initiative was launched, include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.


References


Strengthening Security in Mali With Weapons and Ammunition Management by Dupouy [from page 23]


Clearing Landmines and Building Peace in Colombia by Finson and Diffident [from page 25]


Humanitarian Mine Action and IEDs by McNally and Risser [from page 30]

