



Mitigating Threats to Human Security: An Examination of Small Arms Stockpile Management in West Africa

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SUMMARY

Security threats emanating from poorly managed stockpiles in the ECOWAS region call for a critical examination of existing initiatives addressing stockpiles. Thus a holistic look at the laws, human resources and context of stockpile control is essential for mitigating their humanitarian and socio-economic consequences.

Introduction

In June 2014, member states of the United Nations gathered under the 5th Biennial meeting of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) to review progress in implementation. The outcome document highlighted the importance of proper stockpile management in settings of armed violence, transnational crime, and conflict and post-conflict situations. It further emphasized the urgency of appropriate stockpile management practices as essential for preventing accidents and reducing the risk of diversion to the illicit trade, illegal armed groups, terrorists, and other unauthorized recipients¹. Similarly, at the sub-regional level, the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on SALW encourages member states to observe proper stockpile

management practices by taking all necessary measures to ensure the safe and effective management, storage and security of their national stocks of small arms and light weapons.² Nonetheless, the gap between policy formulation and implementation is wide and increasingly, the humanitarian and socio-economic costs associated with poorly managed stockpiles are on the rise. This paper examines current initiatives on stockpile control within a human security perspective. While acknowledging existing efforts on the ground, the paper nevertheless calls for a prioritization and re-focus of states on strengthening and or institutionalizing standard operating procedures for an effective stockpile control regime in order to mitigate the humanitarian costs.

¹ UN Outcome document on fifth Biennial Meeting of States, available at www.poa-iss.org.

² See the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on SALW, their Ammunition and other related Materials.

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Contextualizing Stockpile Control and Human Security in West Africa

Stockpile control in this context means putting in place standards, procedures and security strategies to safeguard weapons and ammunition, especially in government stockpiles. Human security is also used here to mean protecting people from the threats of fear. Thus poorly controlled stockpiles have a negative effect on the human security of the people. In the sub-region, despite the gains made in minimizing threats emanating from poorly controlled stockpiles, millions of weapons have been diverted from national stockpiles which are often poorly supervised by corrupt officials. National stockpiles are sometimes raided by criminal elements with the direct collusion of some personnel of state agencies³. Such weapons are used in armed robberies, kidnapping and terrorist activities. Surplus weapons owned by national governments instead of being destroyed, find their way into illicit uses, and increases criminality and violence in societies. Clearly, the frequency and increase of these illicit activities means that the state is severely constrained in responding effectively to mitigate the effects of these threats to its citizens. Several examples encapsulate the above point. The Nigerian Defence Headquarters admitted in September 2014 that the local terrorist group Boko Haram had been looting its armories nationwide⁴. Other examples from Albania, Uganda, Iraq and Libya all indicate the fatal consequences of looted and diverted stockpiles.

³ For more information visit:

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/stockpiles/state-stockpiles.html>

⁴The Defence Headquarters disclosed that it was aware that Boko Haram insurgents were in the habit of looting its armories, and was making efforts to secure its armories across the country. It also stressed on interagency collaboration and warned that saboteurs of their counter-insurgency would be decisively dealt with. Available at: <http://www.punchng.com/i-punch/boko-haram-looting-our-armoury-dhq/>

Legal and Policy Frameworks in Managing Stockpiles

Since the early 2000s, legal and policy frameworks on SALW control have especially discouraged SALW transfers which breach human rights and international humanitarian laws. The UNPoA emphasizes the human suffering caused by the excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread of SALW, which is a threat to peace and security. Thus under Part II (17), states are encouraged to ensure that the armed forces, police or any other body authorized to hold small arms and light weapons establish adequate and detailed standards and procedures relating to the management and security of their stocks. The standards recommended above include appropriate location for stockpiles; physical security measures; control of access to stocks; inventory management and accounting control; staff training; security; accounting and control of small arms and light weapons held or transported by operational units or authorized personnel; procedures and sanctions in the event of thefts or loss and; the regular review of stockpiles and identification of surplus stocks for its safe destruction. All ECOWAS member states are parties to the UNPoA, and all, except Cape Verde, have reported at least once. However, reporting by states is not done regularly and peaks every two years during the biennial meetings.⁵

Two other instruments complement the provisions of the UNPOA internationally. On the one hand, the International Tracing Instrument provides for marking and record keeping of all weapons in armed and security forces, to prevent illicit diversion. On the other hand, the newly adopted 2013 Arms Trade Treaty does not explicitly address stockpile management but has general guidelines for the transfer, brokering, trans-shipment and export of arms. Additionally, at the ECOWAS level, the Convention on SALW under Articles 16 and 17 outlines similar provisions that reinforce those

⁵ Between 2003 and 2012, the most national reports were in 2012 (8), 2010 (12) and 2005 (10). Togo has been the most consistent, reporting a record 7 times followed by Senegal (5) and Benin and Burkina Faso (4).

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outlined in the UNPoA on effective standards and procedures and review and destruction of surplus and obsolete stocks.

Moreover, the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG)⁶ developed by the UN SaferGuard Programme for the stockpile management of conventional ammunition contains comprehensive guidelines developed to check the increasing occurrence of ammunition explosions⁷ as well as diversion from poorly controlled stockpiles.

An Examination of Stockpile Management Practices in West Africa

It is useful to note that ECOWAS member states are at various stages of harmonizing their laws to meet the requirements of international and sub-regional policies such as the UNPoA and the ECOWAS Convention. Nonetheless there still remains significant work to be done in ensuring that laws respond to humanitarian needs in the field as highlighted in data from national reports on the UNPoA and field experiences in the countries involved. In much of the sub-region (with the exception of Benin and Guinea Bissau), the security agencies have in place adequate standards and procedures governing stockpile management. Nevertheless, an authoritative standard derived at the sub-regional level such as the European Union's (EU) 'Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction'⁸ (RASR), would be useful for member states.

In the area of security of stockpiles, the degree of compliance varies among the different security agencies legally mandated to bear arms. The military, for instance, have a more securitized approach as compared with their fellow agencies. Observing physical security measures, control to

access of stocks and security are on average rigorously enforced in most of the military forces across the sub-region. Among the police, prisons and other agencies, there are implementation gaps in proper management of weapons stockpiles consistent with international standards. Additionally, Côte d'Ivoire has since 2012 received support from donor agencies to rehabilitate its national armouries. To date, 87 armouries have been rehabilitated.⁹

The appropriate location of stockpiles away from built areas, however, remains a huge challenge. In Ghana and Nigeria, for instance, some armouries are located in or have been encroached by expanding civilian settlements. This explains the devastating humanitarian cost when the Ikeja armoury in Lagos exploded in 2005 killing 1500 people.¹⁰ Procedures and sanctions in the event of thefts or loss are also being improved. For example, in 2007, some personnel of the Nigerian Army were handed various jail sentences for selling 7,000 SALW to a militant group in the Niger Delta.¹¹ In Guinea Bissau, similar investigations into the theft of arms to the Movement of Democratic Forces in Casamance (Senegal) led to the arrest of a dozen military personnel and the dismissal of the then army chief of staff.¹² Benin also recorded some thefts of weapons from its gendarmerie¹³. These issues, though challenging, are a good sign that some level of accountability and punishment is

⁹ Interview with Côte d'Ivoire NatCom, November, 2014.

¹⁰ See Anders, H., 2009. Ammunition Stockpile Management in Africa, Challenges and Scope for Action. GRIP Note d'Analyse. Available at:

http://archive.grip.org/en/siteweb/dev_c702b371.asp.html.

¹¹ Hazen, J.M. and Horner, J. 2007. Small Arms and Armed Violence and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Perspective. Occasional Paper No. 20. Geneva: Small Arms Survey

¹² Small Arms increases in Guinea Bissau, Afro News, 11 March 2013. Available at: <http://www.afrol.com/articles/15871> [Accessed July 2014].

¹³ In May 2014 bandits broke into an armoury in the gendarmerie, tied up two police officers and made off with a number of weapons and ammunition into neighbouring Togo, but they were captured and the arms retrieved (Authors' interview with police official from Benin).

⁶ Available at:

<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Ammunition/IATG/>
Accessed on 6 July, 2014.

⁷ These have caused 1,561 deaths in the past two decades in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

⁸ For more information, visit <http://www.rasrinitiative.org/>

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imposed on culprits while simultaneously restricting the potential risk to human security and public safety.

There exists a huge gap in staff training in the sub-region. Training opportunities for practitioners are relatively few and most personnel have to rely on their own resourcefulness and experience to respond to the challenges encountered on the job. Since 2008, a sub-regional capacity development initiative based at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) has sought to enhance the competencies of West-African personnel on issues relating to SALW control, including the specialized area of stockpile management. It remains the only sub-regional training facility on SALW and its specialized areas. Thus, gradually, the awareness of pertinent issues relating to stockpile management, skills and techniques are being created.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Improving stockpile safety and security for enhanced human security essentially requires the following:

- Incorporation of best practices into national standards and procedures guided by the local context. Provisions from the IATG, for instance, could be adopted to reinforce existing initiatives. This initiative would also ensure that the policy and legal frameworks in the various member states of ECOWAS are comprehensive enough for the end users;
- Improved capacity of stockpile managers for good stockpile management. Admittedly, the time needed to train, for example, an ammunition technician, varies between 6 to 10 years and most of this training is done outside the African continent. Thus such training could be initiated in the sub-region for security personnel; and

- Enhanced community awareness of the dangers posed by stockpiles within communities, including living close to stockpiles. States also have a responsibility to make sure that communities do not encroach on areas designated to hold weapon stockpiles.

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