

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON SMALL ARMS Blog post



Published on 15 December 2016

Building PSSM Capacity in the Greater Sahel

By the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)

The physical security of weapons and ammunition stockpiles is essential to prevent the diversion of state weapons stocks from legal to illicit markets, particularly in areas where non-state armed groups are active. Effective stockpile management is also necessary to reduce the risk of unplanned explosions triggered by improper storage, and the associated risks to human life and nearby infrastructure. In the Greater Sahel region, where non-state armed groups often cross borders with impunity, and where a recent influx of small arms from Libya has contributed to a growing market for arms, the need for sound Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM) is particularly stark.

To address this challenge, in early 2015 the German Federal Foreign Office, the African Union Defense and Security Division (AU-DSD), and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) began a project to improve PSSM practices across the Greater Sahel. This AU-Germany project is based on the premise that even seemingly small PSSM measures, including regulations for locks, the use of ID badges to restrict access, and proper accounting procedures can help to reduce the risk of diversion from government stocks. In this respect, the project is in line with Sustainable Development Goal Target 16.4, which aims to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030. With Target 16.4 in mind, in October 2015 the project partners established a PSSM [Coordination Platform](#), which annually brings together regional organizations, AU member states, relevant implementing agencies and donors. The Coordination Platform is designed to:

- Promote the sustainability of PSSM support provided by donors and implementing agencies.
- Contribute to the effective transfer of PSSM expertise between Coordination Platform members.
- Facilitate operational and technical cooperation on PSSM among AU member states.

The [first meeting of the Coordination Platform](#) was held on 11 June 2016, and addressed the possible creation of an AU roster of PSSM experts. This proposal was further discussed at an AU-Germany [PSSM Technical Working Group \(PSSM-TWG\) meeting](#) on 12-13 October 2016. During this PSSM-TWG meeting, the international agencies in attendance acknowledged that current PSSM interventions do not always allow for the sustainable transfer of PSSM skills to national counterparts. This admission was attributed to the fact that donor investment in PSSM training is often one-time only, rather than longer-term. In response, the AU-DSD and BICC agreed to map existing PSSM capacity across the Greater Sahel, and to provide repeated PSSM training to a small number of pre-selected individuals. The overall idea behind this

endeavour is to ensure that the African Union has a group of highly trained PSSM experts at its disposal, from Greater Sahel nations, who can be deployed when the AU receives requests for technical assistance. These rostered individuals will also be used to train others across the region in PSSM.

The Coordination Platform and PSSM-TWG meetings also exposed the need for increased guidance on how to secure and manage arms and ammunition in contexts of resource scarcity. To address this need, the AU-DSD and BICC will produce two Operational Guidance Notes (OGNs) and associated training modules throughout 2017. The first of these Guidance Notes will provide information on the incremental steps that can be taken towards improved PSSM in instances where resources are limited and the IATGs and ISACS are difficult to implement in full. The second OGN will address ways to improve the sustainability of PSSM projects by outlining the necessary preconditions for successful PSSM and measures to secure improved national ownership. As currently planned, both documents will be used to train individuals selected for the aforementioned AU PSSM roster. Links to both the roster and the two OGNs will also be made available on a new AU website, dedicated to PSSM, which is scheduled to be online early next year.

The overall progress of the AU-Germany project will be measured in terms of the number of individuals identified and trained for the AU PSSM roster, and the number of deployments undertaken by rostered personnel. While these deployments will initially be limited to the Greater Sahel region, the roster may later be scaled-up to the continental level. First results from the project will be presented at the second annual meeting of the Coordination Platform, scheduled for mid-2017.

This blog post was published as part of the Global Partnership on Small Arms project, which was managed by the Small Arms Survey and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The Global Partnership on Small Arms was a platform where stakeholders engaged in reducing or preventing illicit arms trafficking were able to interact; exchange information, experience, and knowledge; and give feedback to further their shared goals.

The Global Partnership was intended to build on the mutually reinforcing implementation of existing international instruments dealing with countering illicit arms trafficking (for example, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons), promoting the regulation of the legal trade through the Arms Trade Treaty, and advancing gender equality through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

*The **Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)** is a Germany-based think tank dealing with global topics in the field of peace and conflict research, including the (de)mobilization of violent actors, global migration, and the use of natural resources. BICC's research both lays the foundation for policy advice and contributes to the public debate.*