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# Efficacy of Small Arms Control Measures and National Reporting: Learning from Africa

Effective control of small arms is largely dependent upon states' capacity and willingness to design and implement appropriate legislation, regulatory procedures, and policies. Various international and regional frameworks—some of which are legally binding—set agendas, call for or require concrete actions, and encourage best practices in this area. In many of these contexts, states have committed themselves to issuing reports on progress made in implementation. Such reports also help to guide the matching of needs with resources.

This *Research Note* underscores the importance of reporting while raising concerns about its limits. Although it focuses on the experiences of countries in Africa, its findings are relevant for the international community as a whole. It draws on a study undertaken in 2013 to review African states' activities with respect to six broad arms control measures. While the study shows that national reports typically capture general implementation activity, it also reveals that states rarely provide details on specific challenges to implementation, thereby highlighting the limitations of self-reporting.<sup>1</sup>

## The study

Since 2010, the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA) has been facilitating the implementation of a multi-year African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) project entitled 'The Fight against the Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of Firearms in Africa' and funded by the EU. The project's objective is to support national and regional efforts to counter the proliferation of small arms.

To support programming initiatives under the project, the Small Arms Survey and the Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP) conducted a study of the implementation of small arms instruments in Africa. The study included a desk review of implementation by all African states: 54 AU members and Morocco.<sup>2</sup> This research entailed an examination of national reports submitted

by 50 African states under the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the desk research, in-depth assessments of countries' capacity to implement small arms control measures were carried out in 11 states, which were selected based on membership in four regional organizations: the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), RECSA, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (see Map 1). The field visits included interviews with national small arms institutions, security providers, weapons brokers, civil society organizations, and other relevant actors.

## Implementation of international and regional instruments

African states represent a quarter of UN membership and all are committed to implementing the PoA and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI). In addition, 31 African states are party to the UN Firearms Protocol supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.<sup>4</sup>

Sub-Saharan countries were among the first to take substantial action in developing regional small arms control instruments. Forty-seven states are either signatories or parties to one or more regional instruments, including the ECCAS Convention, the ECOWAS Convention, the Nairobi Protocol, and the SADC Protocol.<sup>5</sup> For each instrument, the relevant regional organization assists its member states in meeting small arms commitments.

Under small arms control instruments, states report on issues such as the six key measures listed below. Implementation rates are derived from national reports and are intended to provide a general understanding rather than a specific status report.

**National institutions:** National focal points (NFPs) and national commissions (NatComs)



Table 2 Implementation challenges identified during country visits

Type of challenge	Examples
Political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weak or non-operational NFPs, NatComs, or NAPs;</li> <li>• poor execution of NAPs;</li> <li>• outdated or non-existent legislation to implement small arms commitments;</li> <li>• insufficient efforts to sensitize populations on small arms legislation and small arms- and security-related programmes;</li> <li>• stalled or non-existent small arms marking initiatives;</li> <li>• poor inter-agency communication;</li> <li>• a lack of established minimum security standards for armouries; and</li> <li>• limited national reporting on progress of small arms control.</li> </ul>
Capacity building and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a lack of proper training in use of software and hardware for small arms marking and record-keeping;</li> <li>• a limited range and scope of civil society and government programming on small arms;</li> <li>• poor management of small arms records;</li> <li>• a lack of training to implement small arms trafficking and control measures; and</li> <li>• a lack of capacity to implement physical security and stockpile management.</li> </ul>
Funding and equipment provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a lack of funds for a national assessment on small arms and security;</li> <li>• insufficient funding for local and national NFP programming activities, including NAP implementation and public awareness campaigns;</li> <li>• absent or non-operational marking, recording, and tracing equipment;</li> <li>• a lack of equipment for centralized databases for civilian- and state-held small arms;</li> <li>• poor storage facilities for stockpiles; and</li> <li>• a lack of border control equipment (such as scanners).</li> </ul>

ture, sale, transfer, possession, and destruction of small arms (UNGA, 2001). While a majority of African countries maintain records of state- and civilian-owned weapons, the 11 field visits revealed that reliance on manual recording methods is still common, even if electronic resources are available.<sup>6</sup>

**Tracing:** Roughly half of all African states have tracing procedures in place. However, interviews conducted with national institutions indicated that levels of tracing activity vary widely across countries due to a number of factors, including a lack of knowledge among law enforcement actors on the benefits of tracing, poor inter-state cooperation between tracing agencies, and inadequate marking and record-keeping procedures.

**Stockpile management and surplus identification:** Study findings indicate that 34 states have policies and procedures to manage stockpiles.<sup>7</sup> Concerning the management of surplus small arms and disposal, findings show that slightly fewer than half of all African states have policies and practices in place.<sup>8</sup>

**International transfers and brokering controls:** Of the 55 countries under review, 33 have adopted legislation to regulate exports while 43 have done so for imports. Fewer than half (24) of all African countries have legislative controls regulating the international transit and transshipment of small arms, while only eight countries regulate brokering activities.

### Implementation challenges among the 11 visited states

During the field visits to the 11 selected states, Small Arms Survey and GRIP researchers investigated instrument implementation and capacity building initiatives. Foremost among the findings was the importance of meeting directly with national institutions and civil society organizations to assess the extent to which states implement small arms control commitments. While national reports often contain general indications of challenges in instrument implementation, they rarely provide the types of specifics that tend to be mentioned in interviews. In many cases, the challenges are not identified at all within national reports.

Table 2 lists common challenges identified by small arms control actors in the 11 visited countries, highlighting obstacles that are rarely included in national reports.<sup>9</sup>

### Observations

Generally speaking, African states' national reports point to ongoing activities aimed at the implementation of commitments under international instruments. In view of the overall dearth of comprehensive reporting, however, an accurate assessment of the efficacy of control initiatives under regional instruments and the PoA remains elusive (Berman and Parker, 2012). This hampers efforts to evaluate progress in implementation and in the PoA process more broadly. Indeed, the work of Biennial Meetings of States and Review Conferences, designed to appraise progress in implementation and identify gaps and challenges in states' efforts, is limited by the absence of comprehensive—or, stated differently, *meaningful*—information.

Given that national, regional, and international programming must be informed by robust evidence-based assessments to provide states with effective assistance in the implementation of small arms control instruments, bridging this information gap is critical. The question thus becomes: how can states' implementation be better assessed?

In this context, the study findings are particularly instructive. Specifically, this research would have been incomplete without on-site interviews with members of national institutions, civil society organizations, and regional bodies. The insight gained through these interviews was crucial in determining whether sufficient national capacity exists to implement small arms control commitments. The study process itself thus underscored the importance of developing—and using—an information gathering system to complement national reporting.

Such a system could be established to cover all states engaged in the implementation of small arms

control instruments. Donors and participating states could apply this model on a rotating regional basis, working with participating governments to conduct in-depth assessments that complement national reports and that help to prepare or update NAPs. States and regional organizations could request such assessments, or be designated or sponsored during Biennial Meetings of States. Ideally, assessments would be conducted in the interim years between PoA-related conferences and meetings. The result would be a significantly enhanced understanding of a state's capacity and of the efficacy of its implementation efforts. Such a foundation would serve to underpin a more meaningful roadmap for future small arms control. ■

## Notes

- 1 In addition, the study finds that some states that have not submitted national reports have been engaged in implementation activities nonetheless.
- 2 The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) joined the AU in 1984. Morocco subsequently withdrew. Morocco is a member of the UN; SADR is not a member.
- 3 SADR is not permitted to submit PoA reports. Nor has it signed or adopted any African-region small arms instruments.
- 4 See UNODC (2012) on national challenges and recommendations concerning implementation of the Firearms Protocol.
- 5 See ECCAS (2010), ECOWAS (2006), RECSA (2004), and SADC (2001). There is no regional small arms instrument specific to North Africa, nor is any North African country party to any other African instrument. Among sub-Saharan African countries, only Comoros is not a signatory or party to any small arms instrument.
- 6 Only the ECOWAS Convention and the SADC Protocol require countries to record small arms electronically (ECOWAS, 2006, art. 9(1); SADC, 2001, art. 7).
- 7 Data is not available for eight countries concerning policies and procedures on stockpile management.
- 8 Data is not available for ten countries concerning policies and procedures on small arms surplus and disposal.
- 9 A discussion of best practices is beyond the scope of this *Research Note*, but three important general practices are worth mentioning. First, inter-state cooperation between NFPs and NatComs has led to increased cross-border collaboration on small arms control (as in Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe). Second, national assessments on security and small

arms have identified priorities for NAPs and other small arms control programming. Third, civil society engagement with national institutions assists in implementing small arms control programmes at the local level.

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**For additional information on regional small arms control measures, please visit: <[www.smallarmssurvey.org/regulations-and-controls/levels-of-action/regional.html](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/regulations-and-controls/levels-of-action/regional.html)>**

## About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey serves as the principal international source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence, and as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists. The Small Arms Survey, a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, hosts the Geneva Declaration Secretariat. For more information, please visit: [www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org)

## About GRIP

GRIP (Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité) is an independent research centre based in Brussels specialised on arms transfer control and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and on issues related to security and governance in sub-Saharan Africa

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