

INTRODUCTION

Boosting capacity to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in West Africa: priority for local expertise

The fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a key priority on West Africa's peace and security agenda. Stopping the illegal circulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons is such an important objective that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security devotes an article (article 51) specifically to "Preventive Measures against the Illegal Circulation of Small Arms". This says that "ECOWAS shall take all the necessary measures to combat illicit trafficking and circulation of small arms".

Given that effective arms-control requires competent and responsible security forces, the Mechanism recommends such measures include "training for military, security and police forces" (article 51). "Training programmes for military, security and police forces" are stressed just as highly as a key element of the Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED).

In keeping with this widely held view and the operational task that it implies, PCASED has, since its establishment, run a number of "train the trainer" courses for West African armies and security forces. This handbook is the outcome of the rewarding interactive process of building and consolidating local capacity to restore, maintain and consolidate peace.

A training handbook generally takes the form of a "cocktail" of "recipes" for action, "prepared" by "experts" for general use. It was not thought necessary to follow this classical formula in producing the present volume. Instead, PCASED has opted to spotlight the expertise of those regarded as the subregion's top experts, individuals for whom the peace and security of West Africa's peoples are a daily concern. There are two advantages to this approach. First, it is an efficient means of consolidating

local capacity. Second, the end result faithfully reflects the conditions that people in West Africa confront daily.

Wherever possible we have tried to remain faithful to the original words of the authors concerned. Very slight amendments have been made here and there, chiefly for reasons of clarity. The various chapters of the Handbook, most of them produced by armed or security force officials or by civilians working with defence and security establishments, are, as one might expect, direct and forthright in tone, making the Handbook a pragmatic volume accessible to its entire target audience. Our experience of training sessions with armed and security forces shows that the message, when thus presented, is invariably better understood and assimilated by those it is addressed to.

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Anatole Ayissi, UNIDIR
Ibrahima Sall, PCASED