

# Partnership & Progress

*Lessons in effective arms  
control from Sierra Leone*





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# Introduction

Over the next decade, more than a million lives globally could be saved through decisive action on armed violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

In Africa, despite significant progress towards mitigating and resolving violent conflict, the prevalence of lethal weapons continues to perpetuate armed violence, with far-reaching and often devastating consequences.

This violence deprives citizens of their most fundamental human rights, and of the dividends of peace which so many of us take for granted: employment, education, healthcare, personal safety.

The proliferation of weapons is an enabler of crimes such as human trafficking, drives human rights violations, fuels political fragility and undermines attempts to strengthen governance and democracy in affected states.

But progress is being made.

This report demonstrates how one country, Sierra Leone, is tackling arms control through national commitment and a wide range of partnerships, and highlights the need for a community-centred approach.

It is published at this moment in time – on

the eve of the 7th Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty – to serve as both encouragement and warning to the global community.

Sierra Leone's path to peace has not been an easy one but its concerted approach, working in partnership with communities, non-governmental organisations and the international community, can and should be an exemplar to others. That note of optimism must be tempered with consideration of the increasing impact across the wider West Africa region of issues such as climate change, extremist violence and increasingly complex, contagious and escalating conflicts.

Accelerated action on arms proliferation is needed now, with the international community prioritising conflict prevention and armed violence reduction, if we are to limit the terrible suffering which ordinary people will otherwise face.

Put simply, endemic armed violence in Africa is an enduring and too often neglected humanitarian catastrophe.

Sierra Leone's experience, however, along with the far-sighted support it has received from key members of the international community, show that it is a catastrophe that can be curtailed.

## Opening Remarks

By *Darren Cormack*, Chief Executive of Mines Advisory Group (MAG)

Every day, MAG witnesses the human impact of conflict and armed violence. In a complex and ever-changing global context, our goal is to mitigate these devastating effects – supporting efforts to combat the illicit flow of weapons, and working to understand what we can do better to help keep people safe.

In 2019/20, working across Africa, South and Central America, the Middle East and Asia, MAG staff undertook 206 armoury assessments, built or refurbished 142 armouries and munitions stores and marked more than 15,000 weapons. We also destroyed hundreds of

thousands of rounds of small arms ammunition, preventing it from falling into the hands of criminals or other non-state actors.

MAG has also played a key advisory role to many governments, providing both technical and policy expertise, acting as a convener of important conversations and advocating alongside and on behalf of civil society organisations, as well as building relationships with international donors.

We have particular experience and knowledge of the challenges in Africa, through our extensive and long-standing presence in the region, and our

understanding of the consequences of instability and impacts of conflict in their many guises. That knowledge is both broad and deep because of our interventions at every point of the conflict continuum: from pre-conflict prevention and mitigation through to post-conflict recovery and regeneration.

So we are pleased to be able to present this report – prepared in partnership with the Sierra Leone authorities and the German Federal Foreign Office – and to reiterate its key message: that successfully addressing arms control requires a partnership approach and a true collaboration between state institutions, civil society and the international community.



A police officer marking a civilian-held pistol and a shotgun

# We must collaborate to remove illicit arms

Foreword by Ambassador Dr Lansana Gberie, Sierra Leone's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and President of the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

The thematic focus of the 7th Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty (CSP7) was chosen in acknowledgement of the singular human impact of small arms and light weapons as instruments of armed violence and conflict.

Combating their illicit transfer and diversion paves the way for sustainable peace, reduces human suffering and ultimately saves lives. Sierra Leone's own experience of armed conflict and lessons learned from weak or non-existent national

and border controls have driven a national focus on strengthening arms control, including stockpile security and management, as well as the championing of similar initiatives and programmes at the international and regional level.

This year's ATT conference is an opportunity to take stock of global progress and consolidate and share learning. In that spirit, this timely report provides an overview of Sierra Leone's implementation of its arms control strategy in recent years.

I hope that this is a useful case study of how good practice can be

implemented through political will, international support, collaboration between civil society and state actors and a well-established National Commission to coordinate these efforts. This collaborative approach is strengthened in West Africa by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention, which fosters enhanced cooperation not only between the Member States but also with donors and technical experts. This is reflected in the partnership between the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms (SLeNCSA) and the Mines Advisory Group, supported by funding from Germany.

I look forward to building on our progress nationally, regionally and through fruitful discussions at CSP7.



# Executive Summary

**T**he Sierra Leone conflict of 1991 – 2002 was one of the deadliest in Africa, leaving over 50,000 dead and half a million people displaced. Throughout the civil war, as different armed groups gained and lost territory and soldiers, the underpinning factor that sustained the conflict was the continuous supply of weapons. The weapons were not just used to kill; they were used as a threat under which numerous other atrocities and human rights abuses were committed.

The disarmament processes between 1998 and 2002 resulted in the collection of 25,000 small arms, 1,000 light weapons and almost a million rounds of ammunition. Yet, despite huge efforts by multiple actors, there are still many weapons circulating which continue to cause instability.

In recent years, however, Sierra Leone has achieved strong progress on arms control, including rehabilitating weapons and ammunition storage facilities, weapons marking, training in armoury and ammunition storekeeping and management, weapons and ammunition destruction and munitions safety programming.

This report showcases lessons learned from Sierra Leone. It highlights the success of SLeNCSA, which was established in 2010, and its collaboration with civil society, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP).

It also addresses the importance of ammunition management, ensuring licensing and collection of civilian-held weapons, and the importance of regional and sub-regional co-operation in Sierra



Leone's progress.

The report also looks forward, to examine remaining challenges and future plans in Sierra Leone and the region. It notes the importance of engagement with regional and international instruments and partners to ensure a cohesive approach across West Africa to this regional problem, such as the roll-out of the ArmsTracker database for state-held and, where legislation requires it, civilian weapons.

A key future challenge will be to build on existing work to ensure that gender is mainstreamed throughout all activities and efforts on SALW control, ensuring women's participation, a fuller understanding of the gendered impact of proliferation and ensuring that the management of SALW is gender responsive. SLeNCSA's planned establishment of regional offices to tackle unregistered civilian firearms will enable progress in this crucial area.

The problem of illicit flows of SALW in West Africa has always been a regional one. Ongoing and increased collaboration

**Officers at an old ammunition store containing mortars and rocket-propelled grenades**

between states will ensure strong communication and coherence of approach, enabling countries to face the threat of arms proliferation together.

Enormous progress has been made in Sierra Leone but the country continues to wrestle with the drivers and impact of SALW proliferation. These efforts must be diversified and mainstreamed and, above all, they must be sustainable to ensure continued peace and prosperity.

The example of Sierra Leone shows us that there is no quick fix and is also a stark reminder of the lasting impact of weapons proliferation before, during and after conflict.

Strengthened arms control is a critical tool in prevention. Small Arms Survey estimates that between 2019-31, 1.43 million lives could be saved globally through decisive action on lethal violence.<sup>1</sup> The international community must rise to this challenge and prioritise conflict prevention and armed violence reduction at the policy and programming level.

**4,579**  
Weapons destroyed



# Conflict in Sierra Leone and the role of Small Arms and Light Weapons

**T**he Sierra Leone conflict of 1991-2002 was one of the deadliest in Africa, leaving over 50,000 dead and half a million people displaced<sup>2</sup> and inflicting huge hardship and pain on the people of that country.

The dynamics of the war were particularly complex, with involvement from multiple armed groups and states, but its perpetuation over more than a decade was fuelled in large part by a key underpinning factor: a continuous supply of weapons.

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, received active support from Liberian armed groups led by Charles Taylor, alongside Libya and Burkina Faso. As the brutality of the civil war shocked the world, the Government of Sierra Leone received support from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Guinea and the United States of America, alongside UN peacekeeping forces.

After Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, deep ethnic and regional divisions and resulting ideological differences contributed to polarised public opinion, repeated coup attempts and an unstable political environment.<sup>3</sup> The ruling All People's Congress took an authoritarian approach to democracy, using powers such as the introduction of a one-party constitution in 1978 to suppress dissent. The ensuing period witnessed endemic corruption and nepotism at all levels of government.

The reintroduction of a multi-party constitution by President J. S. Momoh in 1991 did little to quell



the frustration of impoverished, marginalised groups who became increasingly willing to take up arms.

By 1993, the RUF had adopted guerrilla warfare tactics, targeting vast areas under government control and committing major atrocities against the civilian population. Frequently operating in the guise of Sierra Leone Army (SLA) uniforms and formations, the RUF succeeded in breaking ordinary people's trust in the army, further destabilising the country. In response, the government began to strengthen community defence groups, in effect creating armed militia and adding further complexity and ethnic divisions to the conflict.<sup>4</sup> By 1998, armed groups engaged in the conflict included the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), allied with the RUF, the Civil Defence Forces and Kamajors, and ECOMOG.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the Lomé Peace Agreement of 1999, the conflict continued; the terms of the agreement were quickly breached, most notably with the abduction of several hundred peacekeepers

**An officer checks in a weapon at a containerised facility designed and installed by MAG at Police East Division HQ, Bo**

from the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone.<sup>6</sup> Following anti-RUF demonstrations in Freetown, the RUF failed to take control of the city, and were pushed to Lunsar in the North West of the country. Meanwhile, RUF missions across the border into Guinea were met with artillery and air strikes, resulting in the widespread destruction of the RUF's infrastructure and organisation. This reduced capability, along with a change of RUF leadership, paved the way for the Abuja peace process.

On 2 May 2001, the peace process was agreed, including a commitment to a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. Over the next eight months, more than 25,000 small arms, 1,000 light weapons and almost a million rounds of ammunition were collected as part of the programme and when, in January 2002, the war was officially declared over, thousands of weapons were symbolically burned at Lungi International

**10**  
Personnel trained in weapons/ammunition destruction since 2016



Continued on Page 6

*The Path to Peace*

**1961** Independence from Britain

**1991 – 2002** Civil War

1. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-GVD-scenarios.pdf>
2. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/sierra-leone-civil-war-1991-2002>
3. [http://www.sierra-leone.org/Text\\_book\\_Sierra\\_Leone.pdf](http://www.sierra-leone.org/Text_book_Sierra_Leone.pdf)
4. <https://www.aov.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/>

- Sierra-Leone-Armed-Violence-Baseline-Survey-Report.pdf
5. <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/from-research-to-road-map-learning-from-the-arms-for-development-initiative-in-sierra-leone-291.pdf>
6. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/43fb33f04.pdf>



Continued from Page 5

Airport. Throughout the civil war, as different armed groups gained and lost territory and soldiers, the underpinning factor sustaining the conflict was the continuous supply of weapons. The illegal sale of mined diamonds allowed other countries to manufacture, ship and trade weapons to Sierra Leone.<sup>7</sup>

The weapons were used not just as a means of killing opposing armed forces but to inflict widespread atrocities and grave human rights violations on the civilian population. According to a 2012 Action on Armed Violence report, “some 27,000 people were killed as a direct result of violence and a total of approximately 460,000 people died as a result of the conflict (Geneva Declaration, 2011). An additional 4,000 people had their limbs deliberately amputated (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Sierra Leone, 2004a), and 215,000–257,000 women may have been victims of sexual violence (Physicians for Human Rights, 2002).”<sup>8</sup>

Porous borders enabled the proliferation of small arms and light weapons with a UN panel of experts<sup>9</sup> concluding that there was “conclusive evidence of [arms] supply lines to the RUF [that run] through Burkina Faso, Niger, and Liberia.”<sup>10</sup>

Weapons were also transported by air; forged end-user certificates allowed arms traffickers to profit from illegally obtained diamonds while fuelling the conflict through the shipment of significant quantities of weapons. Weapons held by government troops, ECOMOG and UN peacekeepers were seized and sometimes sold after troops were taken hostage or because of damage to armouries leaving stockpiles vulnerable.<sup>11</sup> In addition, blacksmiths became proficient at making single-barrelled guns from scrap metal, often used by civilians as a means of self-defence.

## Establishment of SLANSA and SLeNCSCA and post-conflict context

**M**ore than two decades after the end of the conflict, the proliferation of weapons continues to pose a threat to peace and stability.<sup>12</sup> Civilians continue to carry weapons for a multitude of reasons, including self-protection and defence of property, agriculture and livestock. Many also have weapons for livelihoods such as hunting, and for use in traditional burial ceremonies.

Fear continues to be endemic in communities almost 20 years after the end of the war, not just of a return to conflict, but of ongoing armed crime. Unemployment is high, resulting in youths turning to criminal activity as a means to survive. For those enlisted into warring factions at a young age, the negative psychological impact endures.

The rapid escalation of tense situations such as elections has sometimes resulted in a willingness to fire weapons.<sup>13</sup> Domestic violence, possibly increased by the psychological effects of war, impacts women and children in their homes.

Porous borders remain a problem for Sierra Leone and other countries in West Africa, demanding a regional approach to combatting the proliferation of SALW. Whilst the will to silence guns in Sierra Leone exists, limited funding, competing political priorities and access to weapons pose challenges.

In response to this ongoing situation, in October 2001, after the signature of the peace deal in Abuja, the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA) was established in Freetown, with representatives and networks

9,419

Weapons  
marked

from 15 religious institutions and civil society organisations. The SLANSA coalition advocates for SALW control, under the frameworks of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials, and the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All Its Aspects (UNPoA).<sup>14</sup>

SLANSA recognises many challenges in post-conflict Sierra Leone, including the proliferation of small arms, which contributes to high crime rates, armed banditry and has the potential to trigger conflict.

SLANSA, under the framework of Article 6 of the ECOWAS Convention, lobbied for the creation of SLeNCSCA, which was established by an act of parliament in 2010 to control the illicit proliferation of SALW. The mandate of this new organisation included the management of stockpiles to prevent leakages through the destruction of obsolete weapons and the rehabilitation or construction of facilities to safely store weapons.



**2001** First weapons collected under Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration destroyed

7. <https://www.worldpress.org/cover4.htm>  
8. <https://www.aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Sierra-Leone-Armed-Violence-Baseline-Survey-Report.pdf>  
9. idem  
10. idem  
11. <https://www.refworld.org/>

pdfid/43fb33f04.pdf  
12. <https://www.aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Sierra-Leone-Armed-Violence-Baseline-Survey-Report.pdf> & information provided by SLeNCSCA  
13. Information provided by SLeNCSCA  
14. <http://slansa.org/activities/>

## The importance of the ATT and other international instruments

**O**ne of the key priorities of Sierra Leone's presidency of the CSP7 is highlighting how effective stockpile management strengthens efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW).

Preventing diversion is a key objective of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Although Article 11 on diversion does not focus specifically on the diversion risk that poor stockpile management practices pose, stockpile management is referenced in Article 16 of the ATT on international assistance as one form of assistance that should be considered.

The CSP7 is the first time that discussions are focused on stockpile management in the framework of the ATT. There are, however, other international arms control frameworks that address stockpile management in more detail and which should be seen as complementary to the ATT. Indeed, seeking synergies between the ATT and these instruments would enable more effective implementation of all.

The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA), adopted in 2001, is a politically binding global commitment to further develop and implement practical measures to curb the illicit trade in small arms at all levels.

The PoA sets a commitment for states to engage in effective stockpile management, including ensuring physical security of stocks and accounting control, as well as destruction of surpluses.

The International Tracing Instrument (ITI), adopted in 2005, is also politically binding and it is considered jointly with the PoA. The ITI provides a framework for cooperation on tracing SALW and emphasises the importance of marking and record-keeping to enable effective tracing.

The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials is a regional legally-binding instrument which includes important commitments for states in the ECOWAS region, including on management and security of stockpiles, collection and destruction of SALW, marking and tracing.

The implementation of these arms control frameworks will contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, and in particular of target 16.4: ‘By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime.’

Effective stockpile management, safe disposal and destruction of illicit and surplus SALW, and effective marking and tracing are all essential for reaching this goal. As recognised by the UN Secretary General, “the diversion of small arms and light weapons is a threat to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Efforts towards the attainment of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals in particular are essential to reducing illicit arms flows and ensuring the establishment of stable environments conducive to development.”<sup>15</sup>



### ATT Voluntary Trust Fund

Article 16(3) of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) provides for the establishment of a Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) to support national implementation of the Treaty and encourages all States Parties to contribute resources to the Fund.

Sierra Leone has successfully accessed funding through the VTF in three out of the last four funding cycles. The projects funded through this mechanism have enabled Sierra

Leone to:

- ▶ Conduct a full review of ATT compliance in-country, and identify gaps and needs
- ▶ Carry out ongoing advocacy campaigns on requirements for ATT compliance at parliamentary level and with other stakeholders
- ▶ Start working on capacity building workshops for effective ATT implementation at regional level, with the first workshops held in July and August 2021

These projects have been implemented either with partners such as Saferworld or directly by SLeNCSCA and SLANSA.

**2001** Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA) established

15. A/75/78 - The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them, Report of the Secretary-General, 14 April 2020





Staff at the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms

## The Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms (SLeNCSA)

**S**LeNCSA was established by an Act of Parliament in 2010. Prior to this, in 2003, Sierra Leone set up a National Focal Committee (NFC) within the Ministry of Defence to work towards the establishment of the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms.

The NFC was then incorporated into the Office of National Security (ONS) and in 2008 was elevated to become a directorate within the ONS.

Two years later in 2010, SLeNCSA was established in compliance with the UNPoA, the ITI, and the ECOWAS Convention.

The mandate of SLeNCSA is to control the proliferation and illicit circulation of SALW throughout Sierra Leone. SLeNCSA's mission is to ensure that Sierra Leone joins the global challenge of fighting against the proliferation of small arms and

light weapons and in this regard regulate the use of small arms and light weapons within its territory.

It is worth noting that before, during and immediately after the decade-long national civil unrest in the country, poor inventory management and inadequate physical security at storage facilities increased the likelihood of the diversion of weapons and ammunition from national stockpiles to criminal gangs and other armed groups. This was a very serious security challenge in the country as there was rampant armed robbery, armed violence, especially among the youth, and breakdown of law and order.

Since its establishment, SLeNCSA has done much to position itself within the security architecture in Sierra Leone, significantly contributing towards the maintenance of peace and security in the country. SLeNCSA has

# 39

Total facilities upgraded

achieved much through its robust interventions aimed at reducing the incidence of arms-related crimes. Working with others, SLeNCSA succeeded in putting in place control measures to combat SALW diversion and reduce their impact on communities. It also facilitated the repeal and replacement of the obsolete Arms and Ammunition Act of 1955 with the Arms and Ammunition Act of 2012 and the passing into law of the Arms and Ammunition Regulations of 2014, which are the main legal working instruments of the Commission.

Since then, SLeNCSA has worked relentlessly to combat the illicit proliferation and circulation of SALW by ensuring:

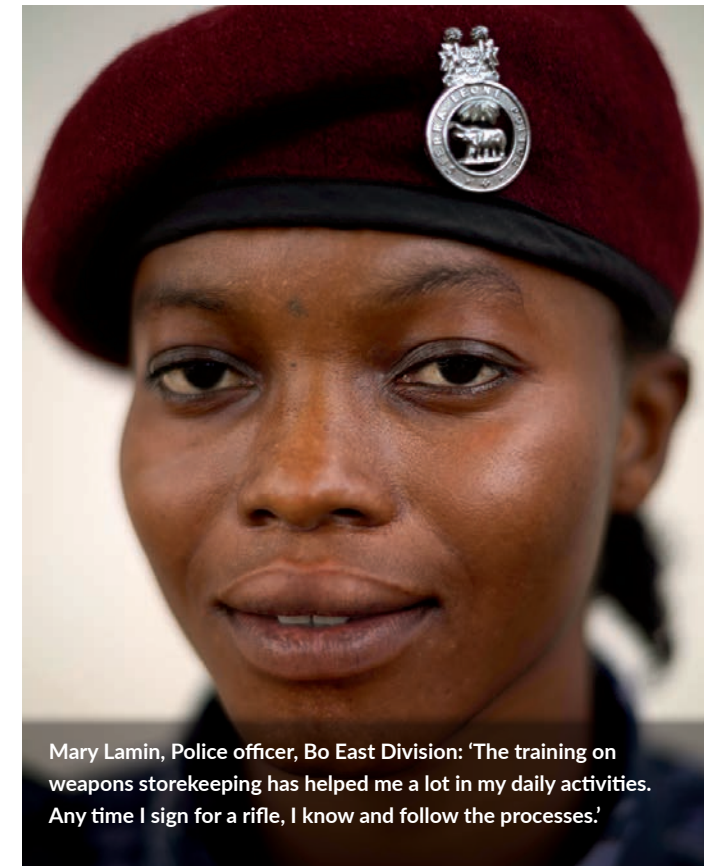
- Marking of approximately 96% of all state-owned arms;
- Destruction of unserviceable weapons from national stockpiles;
- Construction and rehabilitation of storage facilities for the RSLAF and the SLP;
- The co-ordination of training for personnel working in storage facilities.

These and many more achievements have greatly helped to reduce opportunities for the diversion of SALW and reduced the negative effects on communities.

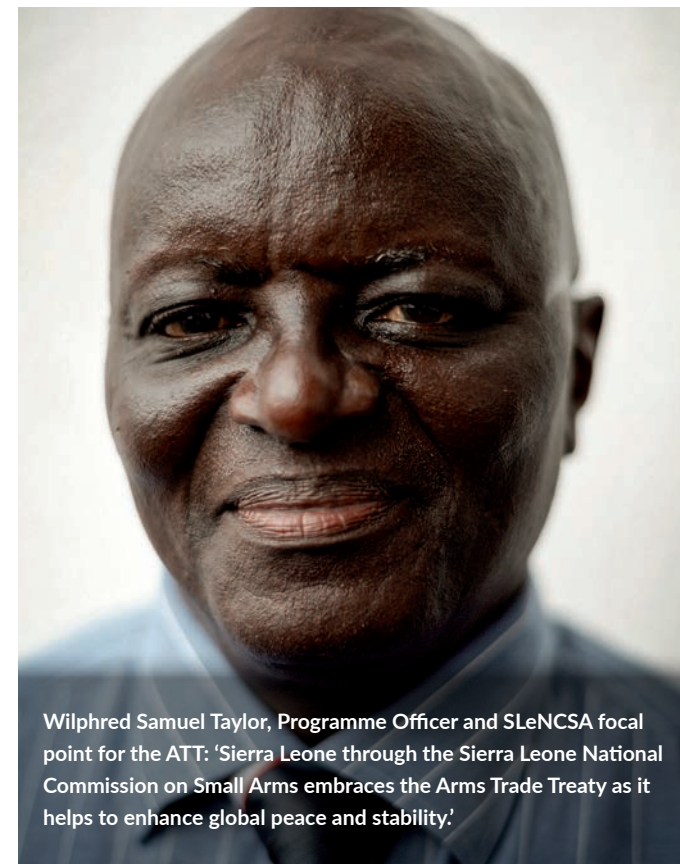
# Voices of Peace



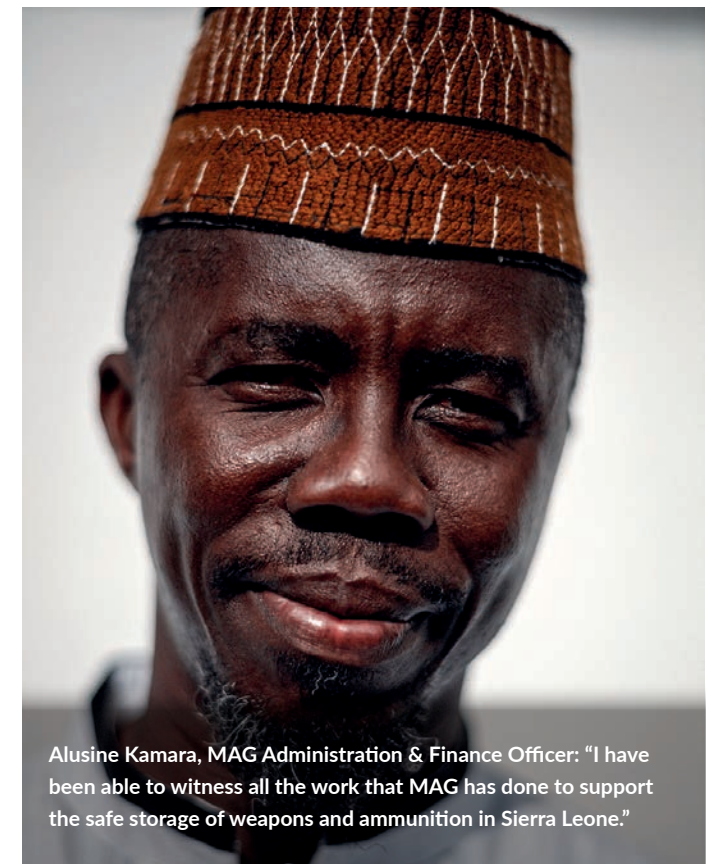
Colonel Bangura, SLeNCSA, PSSM focal point: 'Thanks to our work, we will leave a better Sierra Leone for our children.'



Mary Lamin, Police officer, Bo East Division: 'The training on weapons storekeeping has helped me a lot in my daily activities. Any time I sign for a rifle, I know and follow the processes.'



Wilphred Samuel Taylor, Programme Officer and SLeNCSA focal point for the ATT: 'Sierra Leone through the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms embraces the Arms Trade Treaty as it helps to enhance global peace and stability.'



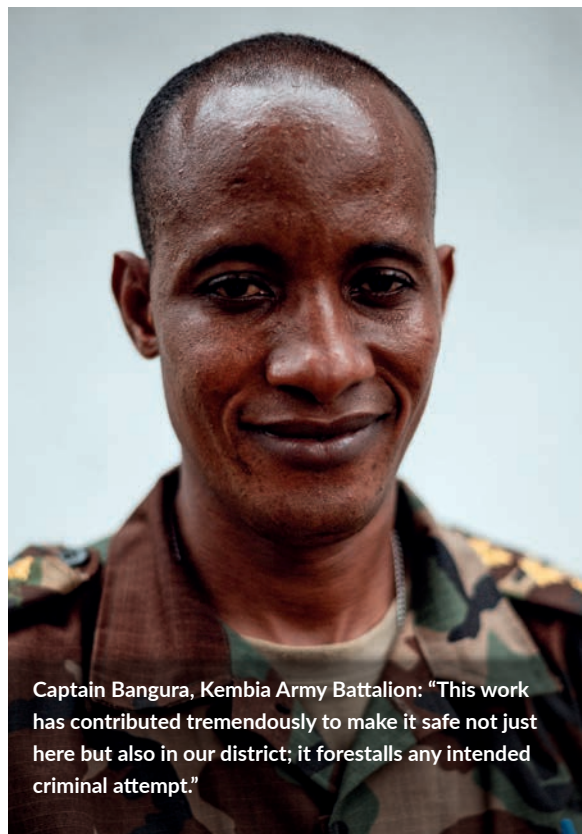
Alusine Kamara, MAG Administration & Finance Officer: "I have been able to witness all the work that MAG has done to support the safe storage of weapons and ammunition in Sierra Leone."

**2005** Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report published





# Voices of Peace



Captain Bangura, Kambia Army Battalion: "This work has contributed tremendously to make it safe not just here but also in our district; it forestalls any intended criminal attempt."



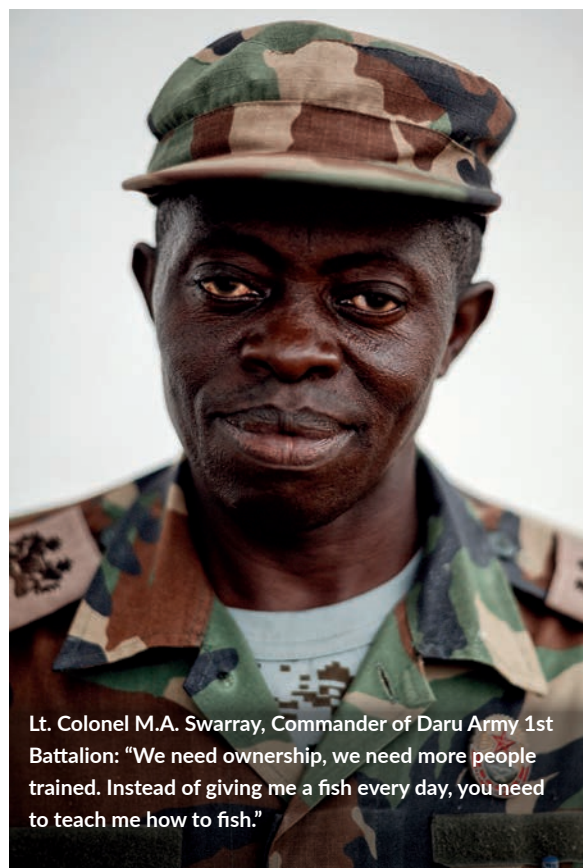
Olivia Davies, UNDP Project Coordinator: "The guns are silent, but negative peace prevails, and dominates the health sector, the economy and the development sector."

Adenike Cole, SLANSA:

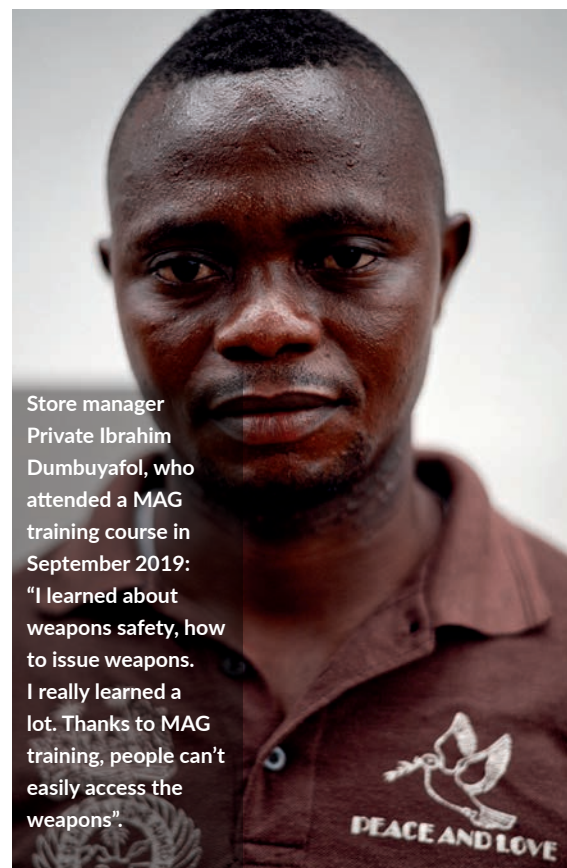
'Advocacy work of civil society is instrumental in the setting up and the work of SLeNCSA. SLANSA work has focused on research and publication to understand the impact of small arms and light weapons...'



Sallamatu Mansaray, Police officer, Bo East Division: "MAG trained me at our training school. We have since rehearsed the training at the office in a form of a competition to keep us abreast with it."



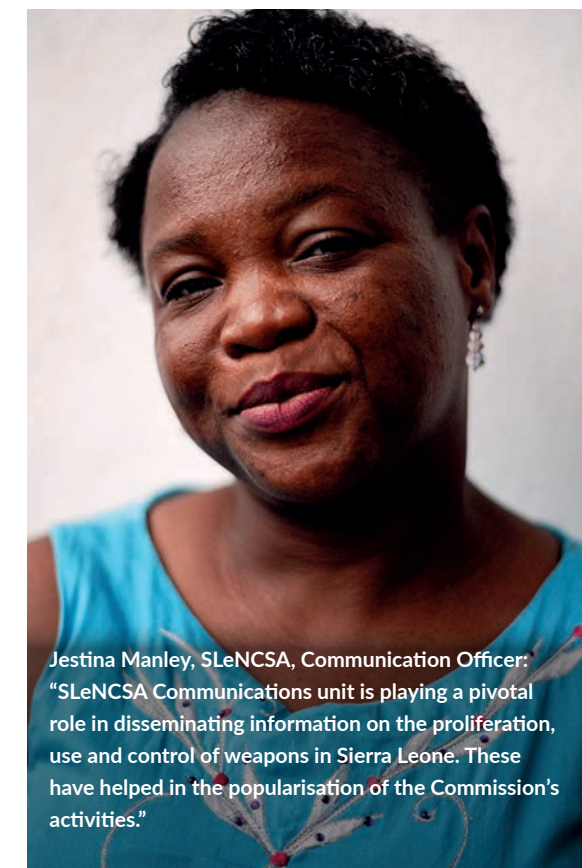
Lt. Colonel M.A. Swarray, Commander of Daru Army 1st Battalion: "We need ownership, we need more people trained. Instead of giving me a fish every day, you need to teach me how to fish."



Store manager Private Ibrahim Dumbuyafol, who attended a MAG training course in September 2019: "I learned about weapons safety, how to issue weapons. I really learned a lot. Thanks to MAG training, people can't easily access the weapons."



John Yambasu, SLeNCSA, IT specialist: "Responsible for weapons marking and record keeping, the information technology unit has been working on securing and utilising the right technology for our arms register to enhance weapon management and tracing."



Jestina Manley, SLeNCSA, Communication Officer: "SLeNCSA Communications unit is playing a pivotal role in disseminating information on the proliferation, use and control of weapons in Sierra Leone. These have helped in the popularisation of the Commission's activities."





An armoury, near the border with Guinea, built by MAG in 2019

‘Thanks to our work, we will leave a better Sierra Leone for our children’



# The achievements of Sierra Leone

**U**nder SLeNCSA's leadership, in collaboration with the RSLAF and SLP, Sierra Leone has made significant and sustained progress on SALW control.

In order to provide a framework for future activities to secure state-held stockpiles and manage ownership of civilian weapons, the Weapons and Ammunition Management Capacity-Building Action Plan for Sierra Leone was developed by SLeNCSA with the support of MAG and Small Arms Survey in 2019, with funding from the Government of Japan, and printed and distributed with funding from Germany.

The plan will inform future activities on SALW control in the country and be used to demonstrate needs and priorities to potential donors. It provides a framework for weapons management activities and lays out five key priority areas to target for progress in the period to 2023:

- 1** reduce the risks of unplanned explosions at munitions sites by ensuring that all ammunition is stored at safe distances from civilian populations;
- 2** increase the capacity of Sierra Leonean personnel responsible for managing weapons and ammunition;
- 3** improve Weapons and Ammunition Management and Physical Security and Stockpile Management practices throughout the country;
- 4** improve the safety and security of ammunition and explosives during transportation and storage;
- 5** ensure that relevant legislation adequately covers craft-produced firearms and larger conventional weapons systems.



A weapons store facility belonging to the RSLAF

Sierra Leone has already made strides towards these goals, with improvements to weapons and ammunition storage practices, physical upgrades to facilities and dedicated training undertaken by security and defence force staff.

SLeNCSA also tailored and agreed standard operating procedures (SOPs) on all topics related to SALW management, from weapons marking standards to record-keeping of seized arms and ammunition. These SOPs have been shared with security and defence forces as a reference guide to support ongoing best practice in

management of state-held SALW.

**The role of the Armed Forces**  
According to MOSAIC (Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium – a voluntary set of international guidelines for the safe storage and management of weapons), storage of armed force weapons at unit level “should be achieved by the use of an armoury, a secure room or, for small locations, a secure cabinet”. In Sierra Leone, many existing storage sites were constructed decades ago, with some dating back to the turn of the 20th century, and suffered

damage and theft during the Civil War. A major need was identified for improved storage facilities and training in international standards to ensure facilities are managed in line with best practice to limit the opportunities for diversion and the likelihood of unplanned explosions at munitions sites. With funding from Germany and support from MAG's technical experts, the RSLAF were able to respond to these infrastructure and training requirements, to reduce the probability of these events occurring.

The RSLAF has made strong

progress in reducing stockpiles of obsolete and surplus ammunition and weapons, destroying 10,000 rounds of SAA and 4,579 small arms in 2016-17.

Working with RSLAF, SLP and SLeNCSA, MAG built or upgraded 39 facilities to the end of 2020, with 117 participants from the security and defence forces attending training sessions facilitated by MAG on armoury and ammunition storekeeper and manager skills. These interventions focus on building accountability among staff responsible for storing and managing weapons and ammunition, as well as improving transparency by establishing clear accounting systems and processes.

The foundations for record-keeping and eventual tracking of weapons were also laid through a UK-funded project implemented with support from MAG in 2017, when the RSLAF and SLP marked 9,419 of their weapons, and continued to mark the weapons of the Presidential Guard under the coordination of SLeNCSA. Weapons marking has advanced significantly in Sierra Leone due to strong commitment from security and defence forces and SLeNCSA.

## The role of the Police

The SLP are also key actors in the fight against illicit arms proliferation, not just by securing their own stockpiles and improving management of their weapons, but due to their role in tackling crime and seizing illegal firearms from civilians.

Weapons seized in the wake of criminal activity have been a mixture of standard firearms and artisanal guns, with both being

## More to do on munitions

In March 2021, four explosions at a military barracks in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, resulted in more than 100 deaths and 600 injuries – a tragic reminder of the risks associated with poorly stored or ageing munitions, which present a major threat to the safety of communities around the world and especially in West Africa.

That incident – along with the port blast in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2020 – has led to increased scrutiny of the risks of unplanned explosions in populated areas, an issue already prioritised by Sierra Leone.

In 2019, the government undertook the destruction of decaying ammunition from a large depot in Freetown, with technical support from the UK and USA, thereby reducing the risks posed to people living in the city.

However, there is more to be done, both in Sierra Leone and the wider region; for ECOWAS member

states, legal obligations relating to SALW also extend to ammunition due to its specific inclusion in the scope of the Convention.

MAG has provided technical support to Sierra Leone in reducing the risk of both ammunition diversion and unplanned explosions at munitions stores.

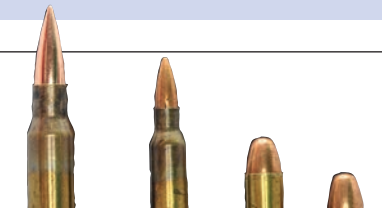
In 2018, 50 military personnel attended firefighting training, and fire extinguishers and fire point signs were installed at the Military Joint Logistic Unit (JLU) in Freetown.

And in October 2019, eight high-level officers from the SLP and four from the RSLAF attended a MAG-facilitated workshop on Munition Safety Programming.

This provided an opportunity for senior staff to find out more about broader training and other initiatives delivered by MAG and SLeNCSA.

It was also an opportunity to raise awareness and build political will, as well as imparting technical knowledge as a basis for improved coordination and operational practices.

Continued on Page 16





Continued from Page 15

used to kill, injure and intimidate Sierra Leoneans. However, the SLP and SLANSA say they have also witnessed a reduction in gun-related criminality since registration of civilian weapons was introduced. For this reason, the registration of civilian firearms, whatever their origin, is seen by the national authorities as a key driver in the reduction of rates of homicide and accidental death.

In this sense, the SLP also have an important role to play in their day-to-day interactions with the public, in encouraging people to behave safely and register any weapons that they hold. They work closely with SLeNCSA on this, ensuring a joined-up approach. For example, after weapons have been seized and used in criminal prosecution cases, they are sent to SLeNCSA for destruction, to ensure that they cannot be diverted for use in illicit activities again. The SLP also work closely with SLANSA to improve relationships with the public and to mark civilian weapons as part of the registration process.

#### The role of SLANSA

In general, SLANSA's work has focussed on advocacy, research and communication to understand the complexities of SALW in Sierra Leone. For instance, surveys of blacksmiths producing artisanal weapons highlighted the economic benefit of producing arms as well as the challenges of finding alternative sources of income, skills training and identifying economic incentives to cease production of weapons.

SLANSA has also worked with the Organised Crime: West African Response to Trafficking (OCWAR-T) Project to understand the impact of small arms on women, working with women's groups and encouraging women to 'whistle-blow' when weapons were found. Different surveys have been completed targeting different groups,

understanding that the SALW issue intersects with multiple socio-economic factors, and that accessing information and data relating to SALW can be a valuable tool in sustained progress.

SLANSA's national level advocacy and lobbying efforts have achieved significant gains for Sierra Leone, including the establishment of SLeNCSA, funding and partnerships with the UN and international NGOs, government support to the Arms Trade Treaty, and implementation of the ECOWAS Convention. Local level communication is a key component to SLANSA's work, including

A police officer at the containerised facility in Bo

community sensitisation on the issue of participating in elections without weapons and violence. The successful building of networks across the country will continue to increase capacity and disseminate and reinforce messaging to drive behaviour change in communities.

#### The role of regional and sub-regional cooperation

Following the civil war, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended increased cooperation and coordination between the states of the Mano River Union (MRU) as a key priority to reduce the likelihood of an outbreak

of further armed conflict in the future.

SLeNCSA attended a sub-regional meeting of MRU National Commissions held in 2018 with UK funding, and facilitated by MAG, to share best practice and establish strong links on cross-border monitoring. These links are now regularised, with the RSLAF working with Guinean counterparts and the police forces on both sides of the border, and monthly security meetings taking place.<sup>16</sup> This close collaboration reduces the opportunities for proliferation and allows for better control of cross-border weapons and

ammunition flows.

The ECOWAS SALW Division plays a critical regional role supporting states to meet their obligations under the ECOWAS Convention, generating political will and support, including from international donors. This includes annual regional meetings with the National Commissions on SALW, which enables states to share progress on efforts to mark weapons, increase public awareness, strengthen border controls and reduce opportunities for diversion through corruption or theft, as well as the other themes covered by the instrument.

## How licensing has reduced violence

Licensing of civilian-held weapons in Freetown began in 2016 and subsequently in provinces following the opening of regional offices.

Mobile licensing exercises were carried out in 2017 and 2018 prior to the expansion of SLeNCSA operations outside of the capital city. In order to receive a license, civilians must undergo a background check, receive a safety briefing and carry out practical training at a firing range.

Storage facilities for the weapons in the home are examined, and communities are interviewed prior to a licence being granted.

Since the introduction of the licensing scheme, anecdotal evidence shows that incidents of domestic violence and robberies involving weapons have reduced.

Sensitisation has been a key component in the collection of civilian-held weapons, with radio shows proving to be a successful way of sharing the work of SLeNCSA.

Community-led initiatives have included trading in weapons for boreholes or motorbikes, providing incentives to remove weapons from the community.

For example, the Weapons for Development initiative of the OCWAR-T project, in coordination with ECOWAS and SLeNCSA, saw the destruction of 72 weapons collected by communities in border regions in 2020.

Community wells were constructed and motorbikes were provided in exchange for the weapons, at the request of the community.

Economic incentives and input to the destruction of SALW are crucial community engagement tools for sustaining progress on destruction of civilian-held weapons and reducing reliance on weapons as a means of survival.



177  
Total training participants

2012

Arms and Ammunition Act (to control the transfer of small arms and light weapons and other related materials from or throughout Sierra Leone, to regulate the manufacture of SALW, and to provide institutional and operational capacities to regulate possession and the use of SALW within Sierra Leone)

2014

Sierra Leone ratifies the Arms Trade Treaty

16. SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf (smallarmssurvey.org)  
17. <https://www.slundp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/72-small-arms-destroyed-by-rural-communities-in-sierra-leone-wit.html>



# A commitment for the future

**R**egional and international frameworks are key to ensuring a collective approach across West Africa, enabling a harmonised response to this regional problem. They provide mechanisms for states to identify shared priorities for action at global and regional level, and fora such as CSP7 enable the sharing of learning and best practice, as well as being an opportunity to reflect on challenges and successes.

This can clearly be seen in the example of the rollout of the ArmsTracker database, provided by the Centre for Armed Violence Reduction (CAVR) under a Memorandum of Understanding with ECOWAS. Sierra Leone is setting up the database and establishing the accompanying processes for registration and record-keeping of state-held (and, where legislation requires, civilian) weapons, with support from MAG and funding from Germany. It is expected that ArmsTracker will be fully rolled out by the end of 2021, with relevant personnel also fully trained to register weapons. This is particularly relevant in a country like Sierra Leone, where so much progress has been made in marking state-held weapons.

Sierra Leone has achieved a great deal in the fight against the illicit proliferation of SALW in recent years, and there is excellent capacity and strong will in the country to continue working towards the obligations of the ATT and other international and regional instruments. Although most of the achievements have been linked to SALW control, Sierra Leone also aims to make progress on the other conventional weapons obligations under the ATT. MAG will continue



to work closely with SLeNCSA, with a focus on long term mentoring, as well as with the security and defence forces, where needed.

The gendered impact of armed violence and the importance of women's participation in arms control have emerged as key priorities in the global response to SALW proliferation.

Preventing arms transfers to end-users that commit or facilitate human rights violations, including gender-based violence, is at the centre of the ATT; in recent years gender has also emerged as a key concern for many states under the UNPoA framework. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sierra Leone is currently

**58**  
Technical  
assessments

in the process of addressing the fact that “policies, programmes and processes designed to address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have been socialized as a domain for men”.

Sierra Leone has already been tackling the issue of women's equal participation in matters of peace and security, and this is a strong basis on which to build future activities to contribute to this goal.

A gender mainstreaming forum was held in Freetown in April 2021, facilitated by UNDP under the OCVAR-T project. This forum set an agenda for the rest of the year to advocate at all levels for the equal inclusion of women in SALW control, suggesting

innovative approaches to training, lobbying stakeholders on gender mainstreaming and encouraging a change of mindset in the security and defence forces.

There was consensus that data is critical to informing a gender responsive approach to arms control.

Beginning in 2021, UNDP will undertake data collection relating to SALW impact, disaggregated by both sex and age. A gender analysis of SALW activities will also be conducted to help guide the way to a more inclusive approach to programming.

In line with this progress, SLeNCSA will also be reviewing their previous National SALW Action

Plan, with a gender lens, in order to renew it and provide a new, gender responsive plan for SALW control activities in 2021-22.

SLeNCSA plans as a next step to establish a local presence in the provinces outside Freetown, aiming to mark and register civilian-held firearms as a key priority.

A more cost effective and sustainable solution than previous mobile marking missions, embedding this presence at the local level is an opportunity for dialogue with communities, as well as providing access for easy registration of weapons.

Two offices are now operational, in Bo and Makeni, and two further offices are expected to open under

**Officers at the containerised facility at Police East Division HQ, Bo**

## First women to complete courses

In October 2020, 12 personnel (six each from the RSLAF and SLP) participated in ammunition storekeeper training facilitated by MAG with funding from Germany.

The six highest-scoring personnel were then invited to take the ammunition store manager course.

Among the students, two female personnel from the SLP and the RSLAF successfully completed both courses. PC Hannah and Private Kallon are the first women to participate in ammunition storekeeper and store manager courses in Sierra Leone, demonstrating that female colleagues are interested in weapons and ammunition management training opportunities.

the OCVAR-T project in 2022.

Finally, the problem of illicit flows of SALW in West Africa has always been regional. It will not be possible for any one country to win the battle against this problem without the support and commitment of its neighbours, making frameworks such as the ECOWAS Convention and bodies such as the MRU Secretariat critically important to prevent weapons moving freely across borders.

Ongoing and increased collaboration between states will ensure strong communication and coherence of approach, allowing countries to face the threat of proliferation in a spirit of solidarity.

18. Report on the EU, GFFO and ECOWAS supported Women's Forum on Mainstreaming Gender in Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Processes in Sierra Leone

**2014** Sierra Leone launches weapons marking and registration programme

**2019** OCVAR-T project launched

**2019** Sierra Leone National Action Plan published



# The Path to Peace:

## Key learning and recommendations

**1** The international community should prioritise arms control as a critical tool in conflict prevention and armed violence reduction. More than two decades since the end of the civil war, Sierra Leone continues to wrestle with the drivers and consequences of SALW proliferation. Enormous progress has been made, but these efforts must be diversified and mainstreamed, and above all they must be sustainable, to ensure continued peace and prosperity. This shows us that there is no quick fix; it is also a stark reminder of the lasting impact of weapons proliferation before, during and after conflict.

**2** All states should maintain commitments to initiatives that combat diversion, including stockpile management, and embed these in sustainable capacity development. This requires long term engagement by national authorities and donor states, which will be its most resource-efficient when linked to clear strategies and milestones. Sierra Leone's investment in SLeNCSA over more than a decade has enabled the achievements set out in this report, while consistent support from Germany since 2016 has been significant in accelerating progress. The 2019 WAM Capacity-Building Action Plan is a strong example of a framework for monitoring progress and establishing shared priorities between national actors, donors and implementers.

**3** National authorities should draw on the ATT, UNPoA, Firearms Protocol, and other international treaties and processes for measuring progress, identifying shared priorities and engendering cooperation. States can make the best use of these instruments and uphold the underpinning principles of transparency by ensuring timely and comprehensive reporting. Inclusion of stockpile management initiatives under the ATT is an opportunity to make use of synergies between instruments as well as informing the matching of needs with resources.

**4** Donors and multilateral organisations should ensure arms control initiatives are integrated into broader conflict prevention strategies. The role of SALW proliferation in fuelling violence is explicit in Sierra Leone's history, and similar patterns can be found in many countries and regions. A better understanding of the intersection between weapons proliferation, conflict, and threats such as climate change and the impact of Covid-19 can also be most effectively taken into account through a proactive and multidisciplinary approach that reflects the intersections between weapons proliferation and instability.

**5** National authorities and implementing partners should use an armed violence reduction lens to produce an evidence-based and impact-driven approach. This will ensure that arms control and broader conflict prevention is responsive to the needs of the people most affected. Ongoing collection and analysis of disaggregated data at the community level should be prioritised to underpin such an approach; this must be facilitated through partnership and improved coordination between stakeholders.

**6** Civil society actors should advocate for responses to weapons proliferation that are gender-responsive and informed by the needs of communities. Organisations like SLANSA can play a vital role in amplifying issues such as gender-based violence and in joining these efforts to broader advocacy to bring about change at national and regional level. Sierra Leone's planned actions around the drafting of a gender-sensitive national SALW action plan can provide a case study for other states to address inequality, long recognised as a key cross-cutting driver of conflict.

**7** Regional and sub-regional organisations should prioritise knowledge sharing and information exchange at the operational and political level. Leadership by ECOWAS on implementation of the regional SALW Convention is essential to engender cooperation and build political will. The

African Union's 'Silencing the Guns' campaign also plays a key role in advocacy, awareness raising and bringing together key stakeholders. Initiatives to develop and implement regional SALW roadmaps can bolster coordination, but will only be sustainable with financial and political support to regional bodies.

**8** All states should empower national commissions to convene national stakeholders, and lead engagement at regional and national level. National commitment and political will is decisive in the success or failure of SALW control. Sierra Leone's progress has been possible as a result of SLeNCSA's establishment and leadership. Cooperation and transparency with other institutions is essential; in Sierra Leone, engagement by the army and police demonstrates Sierra Leone's determination to address weapons proliferation.

**9** Security sector actors should establish dialogue with communities with the aim of building the confidence needed for a comprehensive response to weapons proliferation. Extension of SLeNCSA's presence at the local level is an important step towards regulating civilian weapons; for weapons marking initiatives to be effective, it is critical that the population is able to voice concerns around safety and security in an environment conducive to trust.

# Conclusions



A blacksmith's in Sierra Leone. Work is in progress to turn some blacksmiths away from producing weapons

The bustling King Jimmy Market





Traders and customers at the King Jimmy Market

Afterword by Albrecht von Wittke, Head of Division for Conventional Arms Control in the Federal Foreign Office of Germany

Germany's conventional disarmament and arms control efforts are guided by three main principles. Firstly, Germany works to promote international disarmament and arms control norms, standards, and relevant treaties, such as the ATT.

Secondly, Germany is committed to strengthening regional exchange and networks. Finally, we support concrete capacity-building measures to improve partner states' capacities in small arms control. Germany is therefore delighted to be a key partner for Sierra Leone in their efforts towards improved SALW and ammunition control, in particular diversion, and ultimately better compliance with the ATT.

Over the last five years, the German Federal Foreign Office has supported Sierra Leone in their efforts to prevent diversion of SALW from state-held stockpiles in

line with Article 11 of the ATT and relevant provisions of the UNPoA through a variety of control activities conducted by the Mines Advisory Group. These range from physical security and stockpile management measures to the destruction of obsolete and surplus weapons and ammunition.

Alongside these urgent short-term interventions, German funding has helped to support the development of standard operating procedures, tailored to the Sierra Leonean context. In 2021, Germany's contribution will also finance the rollout of the ArmsTracker database, providing ECOWAS-approved software to record and manage SALW effectively. Sierra Leone has also made good use of the opportunities afforded by the provision of the Voluntary Trust Fund, in order to develop their national action

plan as a usable framework to guide ongoing work to meet obligations under the ATT and the UNPoA.

This report demonstrates that national authorities with a clear mandate can coordinate with national and international partners to achieve great progress in securing state stockpiles and preventing diversion of weapons to unauthorized users. It also highlights the need for a holistic approach to the SALW and ammunition diversion problem and comprehensive and regionally coordinated measures under national and regional ownership to arrive at better results in fighting this scourge. Germany is happy to support such efforts in the ECOWAS region, as it has done with the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap and the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap.

This report outlines steps for governments and national authorities, civil society, international donors and implementers, to tackle the issue of weapons diversion in a comprehensive manner, as Sierra Leone has done.



Glossary

- ATT**  
Arms Trade Treaty
- CSP7**  
Seventh Conference of States Parties
- ECOMOG**  
Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
- ECOWAS**  
Economic Community of West African States
- ITI**  
International Tracing Instrument
- MAG**  
Mines Advisory Group
- MOSAIC**  
Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium
- MRU**  
Mano River Union
- OCWAR-T**  
Organised Crime: West Africa Response - Trafficking
- RSLAF**  
Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
- RUF**  
Revolutionary United Front
- SALW**  
small arms and light weapons
- SAS**  
Small Arms Survey
- SLANSA**  
Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms
- SLeNCSA**  
Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms
- SLP**  
Sierra Leone Police
- UK**  
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- UN**  
United Nations
- UNDP**  
United Nations Development Programme
- UNPoA**  
UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
- USA**  
United States of America
- VTF**  
Voluntary Trust Fund
- WAM**  
Weapons and ammunition management

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