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HOW-TO GUIDE

Developing Strategies and National Action Plans on Small Arms Control

Kheira Djouhri and Julien Joly

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small arms survey

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
C-IED	Counter-improvised explosive device
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
ER	Expected result
IED	Improvised explosive device
MOSAIC	Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium
NAP	National action plan
PoA	Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
PSSM	Physical security and stockpile management
RBM	Results-based management
RevCon4	Fourth Review Conference of the PoA
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SO	Specific objective
SOP	Standard operating procedure

SSG/R	Security sector governance/reform
UN	United Nations
WAM	Weapons and ammunition management
WPS	Women, peace, and security

THE AIM OF THIS GUIDE

This How-to Guide aims to support the development of national action plans (NAPs) that effectively address small arms control within the broader framework of national priorities and international commitments. It is in line with the guidance provided at the Fourth Review Conference (RevCon4) of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) in June 2024, which underscored the importance of aligning NAPs with sustainable development, security, and gender-responsive policies, in addition to the need for inter-agency collaboration and the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders in small arms control efforts (UNGA, 2024).

Building on the Small Arms Survey's extensive engagement with national authorities on small arms control, particularly in West and Central Africa, this How-to Guide offers practical, context-specific approaches to enhance the coherence, adaptability, and inclusivity of NAPs. It promotes multi-stakeholder engagement, based on the Survey's observation that both inter-agency collaboration and partnership with civil society actors are necessary to align small arms control with public policy objectives, and ensure effective resource allocation for implementation.

The present guide also seeks to address the limitations observed in previous approaches to NAPs and introduces innovative strategies tailored to contemporary challenges and national priorities. Emphasizing a 'whole-of-society' model, the guide integrates principles of human security, sustainable development, good governance, and gender sensitivity to enhance coherence, foster national ownership, and improve coordination.

This How-to Guide further seeks to leverage NAPs as tools for integrating recent normative advancements in small arms control. Since the adoption of the PoA in 2001, international and regional instruments have evolved significantly, raising standards and promoting alignment in small arms control. Simultaneously, a deeper understanding of armed violence and its complexities has reshaped the small arms control community's approaches to these challenges.

Incorporating both updated normative frameworks and these nuanced perspectives within NAPs will enable countries to adopt small arms control strategies that are responsive to contemporary security challenges and positioned within globally recognized frameworks.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This How-to Guide is designed as a practical and adaptable tool to support national authorities, policy-makers, and practitioners in developing NAPs on small arms control. It is structured to provide both foundational knowledge and actionable steps tailored to a range of diverse contexts.

Navigating the How-to Guide: The guide is organized into three main sections, beginning with the origins, purpose, and intent of NAPs. It goes on to outline five key dimensions that, based on the Survey's experience, should be carefully considered when designing and implementing NAPs. Finally, it presents a detailed five-phase methodology and offers reflections on expanding the scopes of NAPs in relevant contexts.

Tools and adaptation: The guide offers practical tools such as log frames and 'problem' and 'solution' trees, as well as suggestions for populating small arms control strategies and action plans. These tools are illustrative and provide practical examples to support the design and implementation of NAPs. They are not intended to be prescriptive, and users are strongly encouraged to tailor and adapt them to the specific realities, challenges, legal frameworks, and operational needs of each intervention context.

Target audience and feedback: Designed as a practical resource, the guide is primarily intended for policy-makers and practitioners to provide them with the tools necessary to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate NAPs in a bespoke fashion. It also aims to align NAPs with both national priorities and international standards and commitments, thereby enabling resilient and effective responses across varied national contexts. This How-to Guide can be most effectively used as a tool to guide collaboration with other relevant civil society stakeholders, donors, and implementing partners, whose support is crucial

to the success of NAPs. Suggestions on how to improve this guide are welcome, and any feedback can be sent to publications@smallarmssurvey.org.

Integrating gender in NAPs: Those seeking to integrate a gender lens into their NAP process may find it helpful to use this guide in conjunction with the *How-to Guide on Developing Gender-responsive National Action Plans on Small Arms* (Djouhri and Watson, 2025a) and the *How-to Guide on Assessing Gender Responsiveness in the Implementation of Small Arms Control Action Plans* (Djouhri and Watson, 2025b). Together, these resources provide complementary tools to ensure gender considerations are fully embedded in small arms control initiatives, further aligning them with international best practices and national priorities.

KEY CONCEPTS

Gender responsiveness refers to policies, actions, or approaches that recognize and address the distinct impacts of a situation on different genders. This approach considers the specific needs, roles, and experiences of men, women, and gender-diverse individuals in order to promote gender equality and empower marginalized groups. In the context of arms control, a gender-responsive approach ensures that interventions are sensitive to the varied effects of armed violence on different genders and aims to include diverse perspectives in decision-making (LeBrun, 2019).

Results-based management (RBM) is an approach that focuses on improving decision-making, accountability, and transparency by setting measurable goals, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes. RBM prioritizes achieving specific results and uses performance indicators to assess progress—guiding adaptation and learning throughout the implementation process. This framework is widely used in development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding contexts to ensure that projects and programmes are outcome-oriented, efficient, and effective (UNDG, 2011).

The **triple nexus** is a concept that refers to the integrated approach that brings together humanitarian aid, development work, and peacebuilding efforts to address the root causes and impacts of conflict and crises. It acknowledges that addressing complex, protracted crises requires collaboration across these traditionally separate areas, with the aim of achieving more sustainable outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected settings (Hövelmann, 2020).

A **whole-of-society approach** is a collaborative framework that engages all relevant sectors of society—government, private sector, civil society, communities, and individuals—to achieve shared goals. It emphasizes that complex challenges, such as those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), require integrated responses that leverage the strengths and resources of diverse actors, fostering inclusivity and mutual accountability (Cázarez-Grageda, 2018).

A **whole-of-government approach** is a strategy that ensures that different government sectors and agencies work collaboratively to achieve cohesive and integrated outcomes. This approach is often used to address complex, cross-cutting challenges such as sustainable development, climate action, or crisis management, where efforts require alignment across departments to maximize efficiency, reduce duplication of efforts, and improve policy coherence (Cázarez-Grageda, 2019).

WHAT IS A NAP?

According to the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), a NAP on small arms control is a comprehensive, coordinated strategy developed at the national level to combat the illicit trade, excessive accumulation, and misuse of small arms (UNODA, 2016).

In principle, NAPs are structured to address the varied social, economic, and environmental impacts of illicit small arms proliferation, and tackle associated issues such as armed violence, insecurity, and development-related barriers. They are designed to be adaptable, encompassing short-, medium-, and long-term strategies that engage both supply- and demand-side measures for effective small arms control (UNODA, 2016).

In practice, however, NAPs often focus on the management of arms and ammunition with a view to mitigating the risks associated with their diversion, proliferation, and misuse. NAPs originated from the PoA in 2001, which urged countries to implement measures against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. These plans subsequently became essential for meeting the commitments of the PoA at the national level, aligning small arms control with international norms while addressing specific domestic priorities. The frameworks for NAPs have evolved, initially guided by the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS), and later by MOSAIC.

The MOSAIC module dedicated to 'Design and Implementation of National Action Plans' underscores the importance of incorporating national priorities, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and integrating gender and human security dimensions, thereby enhancing both the effectiveness and inclusivity of NAPs.

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For more detailed guidance on how to design a NAP for small arms control, see MOSAIC Module 04.10 on 'Designing and Implementing a National Action Plan' (UNODA, 2016).

KEY DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESSFUL NAPS

Past engagement with national commissions in West Africa (Chounet-Cambas, Henry, and Joly, forthcoming) and other regions of the world suggest that it is important to carefully consider the following five dimensions when designing and implementing NAPs for small arms control. These key dimensions can serve to anchor discussions around the planning of selected NAPs to ensure that they align with national priorities, are adaptable to local contexts, and foster long-term impact.

- **Scope:** Defining the breadth and depth of what the NAP will cover is essential at the outset. Focus areas covered by the plan may include specific issues such as small arms control, ammunition management, and associated violence prevention measures.
- **Alignment:** Aligning NAPs with international frameworks and national development goals and security policies is crucial to ensure that small arms control becomes part of the broader policy framework, increasing its effectiveness.
- **Strategic and operational:** NAPs are ideally practical tools to support the implementation of a strategic objective. Improving the articulation and alignment of their strategic and operational dimensions can help by ensuring that long-term goals can be broken down into concrete actionable steps for effective implementation and resourced adequately.
- **Inclusiveness:** The most successful NAPs involve a range of diverse stakeholders—government, civil society, private sector, and communities—throughout the NAP design and implementation process to reflect diverse needs and to foster broad-based support and shared responsibility.
- **Gender responsiveness:** Small arms control impacts men, women, youth, and marginalized groups differently. Integrating the specific needs and experiences of all constituents from the outset promotes equality and contributes to addressing gender-based impacts of armed violence.

The scope of NAPs

The scope of a NAP will set the parameters for all subsequent actions and decisions at both the planning and implementation stages, including resource allocations. A narrow scope may ensure a straightforward focus but can limit the plan's effectiveness and sustainability. Alternatively, a scope that is overly broad will lack focus and undermine chances of effective implementation.

Defining the scope of the NAP is the foundation upon which future implementation will be built. It should ideally be based on broad consultation with relevant stakeholders in order to develop a shared understanding of the problems and together identify priorities, as well as decide what will form part of the country's NAP and what may be outside its scope. This process may enable national stakeholders to ensure that the NAP addresses the most pressing small arms control challenges, but does not become overwhelming or unmanageable. A clear scope also contributes to broader objectives of communicating a clear intent to relevant national, regional, and international stakeholders.

In essence, small arms control is intimately connected to armed violence and security challenges posed by the proliferation of illicit small arms. As a result, the scope of a NAP varies according to specific local contexts and national priorities. This scope is therefore shaped by the following factors:

- **Ownership and possession:** A NAP may focus on national stockpiles as well as civilian-held weapons and ammunition.
- **Types of items covered:** A NAP can address various categories, including small arms and light weapons, ammunition, and other related materials.
- **Key functional areas:** A NAP may focus on select functional areas, such as physical security and stockpile management (PSSM), or encompass the complete life cycle of weapons and ammunition

In Burkina Faso, the 2017–21 NAP primarily focused on the PSSM of state-owned weapons and ammunition (Burkina Faso, n.d.a). The 2025–29 iteration, however, expands its focus to include firearms and ammunition owned and produced by civilians, reflecting the reality that, as of 2017, an estimated 67 per cent of firearms in the country were held by civilians (Burkina Faso, forthcoming a; Small Arms Survey, n.d.).

management. This includes components such as national coordination mechanisms, legal and regulatory frameworks, transfer controls, stockpile management, marking, record-keeping, arms tracing, ammunition profiling, processing and treatment of illicit arms and ammunition, weapons collection, and disposal, including destruction (Giezendanner and Shiotani, 2021).

The alignment of NAPs with national and international policies

A common challenge has been the insufficient alignment of NAPs with other key public policies, particularly those related to security (such as security sector governance/reform (SSG/R), countering violent extremism, and addressing transnational organized crime); socio-economic development (such as national development plans and social cohesion); and gender equality (such as women, peace, and security, WPS). Aligning NAPs with international frameworks, national development goals, and security policies is, however, critical for their effectiveness and sustainability. This alignment helps not only to position small arms control as a core element of broader national and international priorities, but also to leverage synergies, avoid duplication, and enhance coherence across policy areas. Linking small arms control to these wider frameworks promotes greater national ownership of NAPs and facilitates resource allocation for implementation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of small arms control initiatives.

The integration of small arms control within the 'triple nexus' framework is essential in regions where the proliferation of illicit small arms exacerbates crises and threatens human security. The unregulated flow of small arms intensifies humanitarian needs, destabilizes communities, and disrupts development, underscoring the need for comprehensive control efforts aligned with the triple nexus.

- **Humanitarian needs:** Small arms control directly mitigates the adverse impacts of armed violence on vulnerable populations. It can contribute to reducing the risk of civilian harm, displacement, and the breakdown of essential services often seen in crisis situations. Integrating small arms control into humanitarian efforts ensures that responses to armed violence prioritize civilian protection, disarm combatants, and promote stability, thereby safeguarding human rights and supporting long-term community resilience.

- **Development:** The proliferation of illicit small arms undermines socio-economic progress by fostering insecurity and deterring investment. Small arms control efforts that align with development goals contribute to a stable environment conducive to economic growth and improved public health and education. By reducing armed violence, these efforts enable resource allocation to essential development sectors, thus supporting SDG 16 and advocating for peaceful and resilient societies essential to sustainable development.
- **Peace:** Small arms control directly addresses the drivers of armed violence that disrupt social stability. Arms control strategies can enhance disarmament efforts, prevent weapons misuse, and contribute to post-conflict recovery. By fostering a secure environment, these efforts strengthen governance and support long-term peacebuilding, which are essential for sustainable security and resilience.

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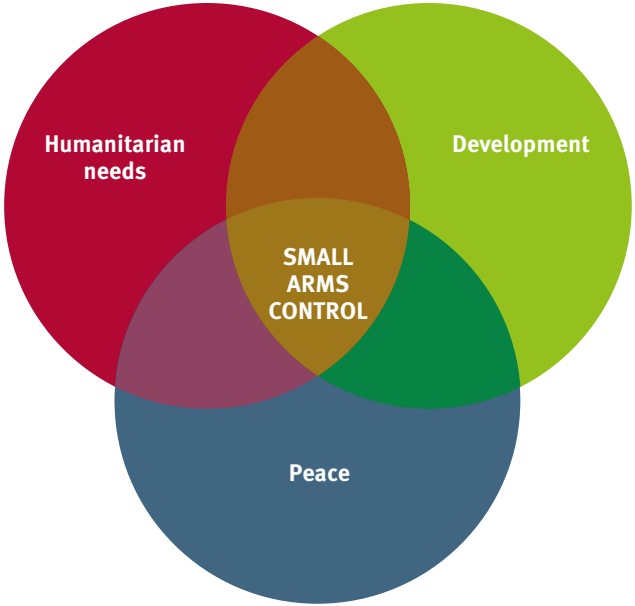
For more information on linking the triple nexus and whole-of-society approach to the small arms control agenda, see *Realizing the Triple Nexus: Experience from Implementing the Human Security Approach* (UNTFHS, 2021); 'Whole-of-society', in *OECD Public Integrity Handbook* (OECD, 2020, pp. 77–92); and *Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management* (UNODA, 2024).

Ways in which armed violence affects the three components of the triple nexus



Mali's National Commission for the Fight against the Proliferation of Small Arms (CNLPAL) effectively collaborated with the country's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and SSG/R commissions to develop a joint integrated operational plan for the coordinated implementation of activities between 2021 and 2023 (Chounet-Cambas, Henry, and Joly, forthcoming).

The strategic and operational dimensions of NAPs

The lack of alignment between NAPs and wider public policies often stems from the absence of strategic objectives in the NAP development process, as they are frequently treated as predominantly operational plans rather than comprehensive, policy-driven frameworks. Traditionally, NAPs on small arms have emphasized operational and technical measures, largely focused on supply control. For NAPs to be truly effective, however, they must bridge the gap between long-term strategic goals and practical, on-the-ground actions. While strategic goals provide the overarching vision for small arms control, operational elements define clear responsibilities, timelines, and resource allocation, translating the broader vision into concrete steps.

Whether derived from a dedicated small arms policy, embedded within broader policies, or directly integrated into the NAP itself, a strategic vision is vital to ensure a coherent approach that addresses both the demand and supply of illicit small arms. Aligning both strategic and operational dimensions enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of small arms control efforts by ensuring that objectives are achievable.

In recent years, several countries have adopted an RBM approach to public programming, integrating a focus on measurable outcomes and accountability. This approach incorporates long-term strategic planning within NAPs, typically defining strategic objectives over a five-year period. NAPs also often feature performance indicators and benchmarks to track progress. RBM approaches are particularly valuable to align small arms control efforts with broader government initiatives and national development agendas.

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For more information on RBM and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks for small arms control, see *Results-based Management Handbook* (UNDG, 2011); *Handbook: Results-based Management and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UNODC, 2018); and MOSAIC Module 04.40 on 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting' (UNODA, 2020).

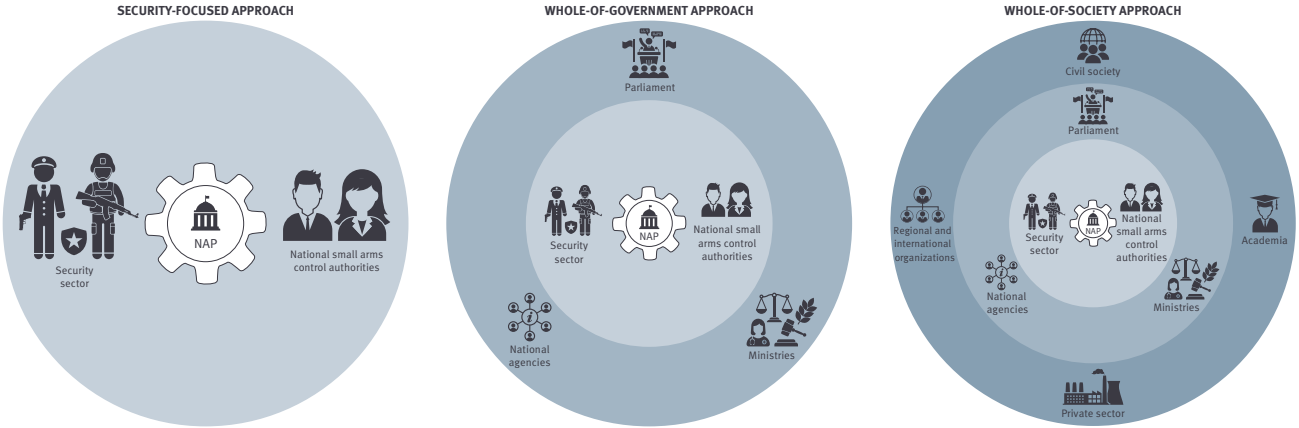
In Burkina Faso, the use of an RBM approach for national planning purposes has led to replacing the term 'national action plan' with 'strategic plan', underscoring a shift towards a more strategic focus. The adoption of an RBM approach has significantly transformed their practices, particularly within the National Commission on Small Arms. This shift is exemplified by the implementation of two interconnected key documents: a comprehensive strategy and an operational plan (Burkina Faso, forthcoming a; b). These represent a notable departure from the operational and PSSM-focused NAP developed in 2017.

Inclusiveness: A 'whole-of-society' approach

The Survey has observed that NAPs are often managed by a limited group of stakeholders—mainly national authorities, focal points, and security agencies—resulting in a narrow, security-focused approach that overlooks critical areas, such as socio-economic development, social cohesion, and gender. This limited scope can hinder broader national ownership, both within government institutions and across civil society, potentially undermining public trust and affecting resource allocation for NAP implementation.

In contrast, inclusive NAPs emphasize the importance of diverse perspectives and actively engage diverse stakeholders—including, potentially, government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and international organizations—during the design and implementation phases to ensure that the perspectives, needs, and expertise of all relevant groups are represented. NAPs that foster broad-based multi-sectoral participation and shared responsibility tend to generate stronger ownership and accountability. This approach enhances the legitimacy, sustainability, and overall impact of interventions by addressing the complex and interconnected factors driving the proliferation and misuse of small arms.

Enhancing inclusiveness towards a 'whole-of-society' approach



In Burkina Faso, with a view to ensuring inclusivity, the National Commission established a steering committee and an editorial working group as part of the 2024–29 NAP development process, comprising representatives from diverse national institutions and civil society. The steering committee provided strategic guidance, while the editorial working group was responsible for drafting the NAP documents. This process fostered national ownership, strengthened cooperation, and ensured the integration of diverse perspectives into the plan (Burkina Faso, forthcoming a; b).

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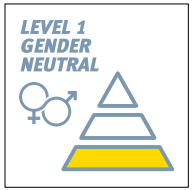
For more information on a 'whole-of-society' approach, see 'Whole-of-society', in *OECD Public Integrity Handbook* (OECD, 2020, pp. 77–92).

Gender-responsive NAPs

Small arms control impacts men, women, boys, girls, and under-represented groups differently. It is therefore essential to incorporate these distinctions into NAPs from the outset. Global normative frameworks such as the RevCon4 outcome document further underscore the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies (UNGA, 2024).

Drawing on its experience in supporting states to develop and assess the effectiveness of their respective NAP, the Survey has created two How-to Guides to provide practitioners with tailored advice and options for developing more gender-responsive NAPs (see the list of resources below). These tools were developed following the Survey's finding, revealed through consultations held with small arms control and WPS actors, that gender considerations are not systematically mainstreamed in small arms control NAPs (Watson, 2024). The consultations also identified inconsistencies and the potential for more alignment between small arms provisions contained in existing WPS NAPs on the one hand, and WPS-related provisions included in small arms control NAPs on the other. These consultations further highlighted that

The three levels of gender inclusion



Gender neutral:
The NAP ignores the role of gender but does not necessarily exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

Gender sensitive:
The NAP considers the impact of gender inequalities in achieving its objectives but does not seek to change gender roles or relations.

Gender transformative:
The NAP addresses underlying gender inequalities in order to promote shared power, control, and decision-making as an integral part of improving small arms control and supporting women's empowerment and the achievement of more gender-equal relationships.

Sierra Leone's 2025–29 NAP exemplifies good gender-responsive practice by prioritizing gender, inclusivity, and meaningful participation. Diverse needs were integrated into the NAP's development process through consultative platforms and deliberate consideration of gender, age, and disability (Sierra Leone, 2024).

national authorities may struggle to evaluate gender responsiveness in their mid-term or final reviews and evaluations of a country's NAP.

Both of the Survey's How-to Guides aim to make small arms policies and practices, more specifically of small arms NAPs, more inclusive and gender responsive. This means considering the specific needs of men, women, boys, girls, and under-represented groups, while acknowledging the differentiated impact of weapons on these populations. The tools also aim to strengthen diverse, meaningful participation at both local and national levels to better understand the root causes of violence and integrate small arms control into broader development frameworks.

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For more information on gender-responsive small arms control, see *Gender-responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide*, Small Arms Survey Handbook (LeBrun, 2019); *Training Manual on Gender-mainstreaming Small Arms Control* (UNODA, 2022); MOSAIC Module 06.10 on 'Women, Men, and the Gendered Nature of Small Arms and Light Weapons' (UNODA, 2017); *Developing Gender-responsive National Action Plans on Small Arms*, Small Arms Survey How-to Guide (Djouhri and Watson, 2025a); and *Assessing Gender Responsiveness in the Implementation of Small Arms Control Action Plans*, Small Arms Survey How-to Guide (Djouhri and Watson, 2025b).

THE SMALL ARMS SURVEY'S APPROACH TO NAPs

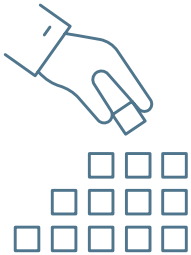
This section presents the Small Arms Survey's methodology for designing NAPs on small arms control. It also offers practical entry points and good practices to enable policymakers and practitioners to effectively implement the proposed approach. The section outlines five phases to guide this process:

- Phase 1: Laying the foundations;
- Phase 2: Assessment;
- Phase 3: Defining the strategy;
- Phase 4: Developing the operational plan; and
- Phase 5: Validation and dissemination.

Recognizing that the development of NAPs is a dynamic, iterative process rather than a one-time endeavour, this methodology emphasizes continuous learning and adaptation to evolving contexts and priorities. NAPs are intended to be revisited and renewed over time, forming part of a cyclical process. While the development phase of a NAP is a pivotal step—establishing a national framework for implementing concrete actions to enhance small arms control—it is only the starting point of a broader cycle that includes implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These subsequent stages are indispensable for assessing progress, addressing challenges, and refining the NAP to improve its effectiveness in future iterations.

NAP development process

Phase 1: Laying the foundations



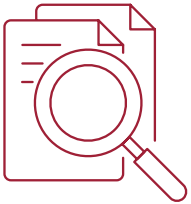
Laying the foundations of a NAP establishes the essential preconditions for its success and is therefore a crucial first step in the development of a NAP. This phase ensures that fundamental structures—such as a well-functioning national authority, a coordinated mechanism for small arms control, and clear legal frameworks—are in place. It also seeks to secure political commitment, fostering an environment where small arms control initiatives can be effectively implemented and sustained over time.

By addressing these foundational elements, the NAP is better able to align with national security and socio-economic objectives, ensuring it is both relevant and actionable. Political support is particularly important to facilitate resource allocation. Moreover, establishing a cohesive framework for coordination across government agencies and with civil society promotes a collaborative approach, which further enhances the NAP's impact. This preliminary phase ultimately lays a strong groundwork, maximizing the potential for the NAP's successful implementation and for fostering a unified, national response to small arms challenges.

Laying the foundations of a NAP can be achieved by:

- **Establishing clear responsibilities and an inclusive framework** by creating an effective national authority dedicated to small arms control, backed by a robust coordination mechanism that engages relevant stakeholders. The latter may include a steering committee composed of a variety of stakeholders involved in small arms control in order to oversee the NAP development process.
- **Obtaining buy-in and feedback** by securing political buy-in from relevant institutions, in order to legitimize the NAP and facilitate resource allocation. Conducting initial stakeholder consultations fosters alignment across sectors and enables the integration of small arms control with broader national priorities, thereby creating a solid foundation for the NAP's development and implementation.
- **Providing clear regulatory frameworks** by establishing or strengthening legal frameworks and policy guidelines to provide a structured, regulatory basis for the NAP.

Phase 2: Assessment



The assessment phase of a NAP on small arms control entails an analysis of both the demand and supply factors driving illicit small arms proliferation, along with a thorough review of the current state of weapons and ammunition management (WAM) national capabilities. This includes both evaluating existing WAM practices and identifying factors that drive illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence. By analysing these elements, this phase seeks to determine the challenges and enablers of effective small arms control. It also examines how small arms control intersects with broader policies. This detailed understanding will then inform targeted, context-specific strategies for the NAP.

Depending on the scope of the intended NAP, the assessment phase can include one or several elements, such as:

- **Conducting a small arms and light weapons survey** by systematically collecting and analysing data on the availability, distribution, and impact of small arms within a specific area. This element aims to inform policy by identifying trends, risks, and gaps in small arms control, supporting evidence-based interventions to enhance security and mitigate armed violence (UNODA, 2012).
- **Conducting an evaluation of national WAM capacities and practices** to evaluate, at the policy level, a country's capacities, practices, and needs in managing weapons and ammunition. This element provides a foundational understanding to guide effective WAM improvements, highlighting strengths and gaps across regulatory frameworks, PSSM, and control measures for safer, more accountable systems (Giezendanner and Shiotani, 2021).
- **Conducting assessment visits** to systematically evaluate, at the operational and technical levels, site conditions, operational readiness, and compliance with WAM standards. This element may involve on-site inspections and consultations to identify security gaps, assess risks, and recommend improvements, thereby enhancing safety, accountability, and management practices across facilities (MSAG, 2013, p. 9).

Overall, the purpose of the assessment is to identify the problems that the NAP will subsequently seek to address.

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For more information on small arms control assessments, see *A Practical Guide to Life-cycle Management of Ammunition*, Small Arms Survey Handbook (Carapic et al., 2018); *A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments* (Giezendanner and Shiotani, 2021); and *Multinational Small Arms and Ammunition Group Handbook* (MSAG, 2013).

Phase 3: Defining the strategy

Defining a strategy is a pivotal phase in developing a NAP, as it transforms assessment findings into a cohesive roadmap for action. This step involves identifying core priorities and setting clear objectives based on the insights gathered during the assessment. By establishing strategic goals, this phase directs the NAP's focus and ensures that initiatives address both immediate challenges and long-term aspirations within the national context.

Defining a strategy also involves aligning the NAP with socio-political realities, existing legal frameworks, and national capacities, ensuring that the plan is both relevant and achievable. By setting a well-defined strategic direction, this phase enables a coordinated approach—an essential component for advancing small arms control. It also provides a strong base for interventions that not only enhance national security but also contribute to peace and the SDGs, creating a plan that is adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to evolving challenges.

Good practices for defining a strategy include:

- **Building on what already exists** by mapping out existing public policies and strategies that are relevant to small arms control in order to identify synergies and complementarities. Enquiring about potential existing templates that can be retrieved from planning institutions such as the ministry of economy and planning or from planning units within relevant ministries (that is, the ministry of defence, the ministry of security, etc.) will also be useful, and may involve requesting technical support from planning institutions or units when available.
- **Providing clarity on root causes and desired effects** by developing a problem tree in order to identify and analyse the root causes and effects of illicit small arms proliferation, as well as a solution tree outlining a pathway to address these causes and achieve the desired outcome (see Annexe 1). Formulating a result chain will map the necessary steps to achieve the desired impact and show how each step contributes to fulfilling programme objectives (see Annexe 2).
- **Providing clear indicators and targets** by developing impact indicators in order to evaluate a strategy's effectiveness. Where data collection is challenging, existing indicators from national initiatives such as development plans, WPS action plans, or SSG/R frameworks can indirectly support the assessment of the NAP's impact, ensuring efficiency and alignment with national priorities.

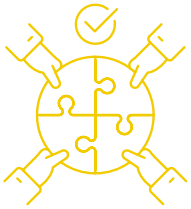
Phase 4: Developing the operational plan

Designing an operational plan is a vital phase in developing a NAP on small arms control, as it transforms the strategic vision into actionable, detailed actions and activities. This stage involves defining specific tasks, assigning responsibilities, and establishing realistic timelines and budgets. A well-constructed operational plan ensures that each component of the NAP is actionable, and that resources are allocated efficiently, thereby enhancing accountability and facilitating effective implementation.

Furthermore, the operational plan involves identifying key stakeholders and establishing coordination mechanisms across relevant sectors, such as defence, justice, and social services. By fostering multi-sectoral collaboration, countries can address illicit small arms proliferation comprehensively and, consequently, integrate small arms control into broader national efforts. Additionally, embedding monitoring and evaluation frameworks with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) indicators within the plan provides a structure for ongoing assessment, allowing for timely adjustments and ensuring progress towards strategic objectives. An operational plan draws directly from a strategy and typically involves:

- **Outlining detailed activities** by setting specific, scheduled tasks or actions for each objective, and indicating the steps necessary to implement the strategy. Each activity should have associated outputs and outcomes.
- **Identifying roles and responsibilities** by designating the entities responsible for each activity, ensuring clear ownership across governmental departments, national committees, and other stakeholders.
- **Outlining resource requirements** with the necessary financial, technical, and human resources for each activity, including potential funding sources or partnerships.
- **Setting a timeline with milestones** to track progress and adjust as needed.
- **Establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework** that incorporates indicators and regular assessment methods to measure effectiveness, ensuring accountability and alignment with strategic goals. In contexts where data on illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence is limited, drawing on existing indicators from relevant frameworks—such as national development plans or SSG/R strategies—can be an effective means to monitor and assess the impact of the NAP.
- **Ensuring risk management and adaptation** by identifying potential challenges and defining mitigation measures to address risks.

Phase 5: Validation and dissemination



Validation and dissemination are essential steps in finalizing a NAP on small arms control, as they confirm its relevance and sustainability. During the validation phase, the plan undergoes rigorous review at both technical and political levels. At the technical level, experts, practitioners, and stakeholders assess the strategies, interventions, and operational components to ensure they are feasible, effective, and aligned with best practices in small arms control. This collaborative review process refines the plan, enhancing its practical impact.

On the political level, validation involves securing support and endorsement from relevant government authorities and policymakers. Political commitment is essential, as it ensures that the NAP will be integrated into broader national priorities, ensuring that small arms control initiatives align with and contribute to the country's overarching goals.

Dissemination, following validation, involves sharing the finalized NAP with stakeholders and the public to foster transparency and encouraging multi-sectoral involvement. By embedding small arms control within national development frameworks, the validation and dissemination phases enhance the plan's sustainability and promote long-term peace, security, and socio-economic development. These steps ensure the NAP's objectives are effectively integrated into the broader policy landscape, thereby maximizing its impact.

Good practices for validating and disseminating a NAP include:

- **Providing clarity on validation** by ensuring engagement early in discussions on validation processes, and thus establishing a strong foundation for the project. Involving the validation authority throughout the NAP development process serves to ensure alignment and compliance.
- **Ensuring sustained collaboration and information exchange** by collaborating with relevant authorities to conduct a budget review of the NAP, aimed at evaluating its financial feasibility and sustainability. Whether or not a formal national validation process exists, engaging a broad spectrum of relevant stakeholders in the NAP fosters a sense of ownership.
- **Encouraging broad dissemination** by decentralizing the validation and dissemination of the NAP to enhance reach and impact. Conducting a media campaign to support NAP dissemination beyond capital cities can similarly broaden the reach and legitimacy of the endeavour.

WIDENING THE SCOPE OF NAPS

There are multiple international and regional normative frameworks that guide the management of weapons, ammunition, and explosive hazards. Initially designed to support the implementation of the UN PoA, the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), and the Firearms Protocol, NAPs have evolved to integrate subsequent small arms control instruments, such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Additionally, newer frameworks such as the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (2023) and relevant UN resolutions on countering improvised explosive devices (C-IED) have been adopted to address emerging threats. These frameworks help shape global responses to illicit proliferation and armed violence and are essential for coordinating international efforts.

At the regional level, arms control frameworks such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, and the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA) seek to foster regional harmonization and cooperation in favour of more effective anti-proliferation efforts.

NAPs offer national authorities a platform to align with these frameworks using a single, cohesive national strategy and operational plan. The flexibility of the present NAP guide allows for the integration of weapons management, ammunition control, and explosive hazard management, aligning with both global and regional frameworks. This adaptability ensures that NAPs can respond to the evolving landscape of armed violence and proliferation challenges, while remaining aligned with national, regional, and global arms control normative frameworks.

As a result, NAPs provide a strategic platform to promote integrated responses to arms control and violence reduction.

Countering the threats posed by IEDs

In regions such as West Africa, there may be significant overlap between small arms control and efforts to address the threats posed by IEDs. The UN Secretary-General's 2024 report on IEDs highlights the interconnected nature of these threats, noting that conventional ammunition is frequently used in the construction of IEDs. To address these risks, the report emphasizes the need for measures such as strengthening stockpile security, enhancing tracing mechanisms, and ensuring the proper disposal of surplus ammunition (UNSG, 2024, pp. 13–14). It is also worth noting that non-industrial light weapons can sometimes be classified as IEDs due to their technical features (Small Arms Survey, Instituto Sou da Paz, and UNIDIR, 2024, p. 5).

The UN Secretary-General's 2024 report also advocates leveraging international frameworks, including the ATT, the UN PoA, and the Global Framework for Through-life Ammunition Management, to reduce diversion risks and promote stability (UNSG, 2024, p. 13). Additionally, forums such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) emphasize the need to address the humanitarian and security impacts of IEDs through coordination, capacity building, and awareness raising (UNSG, 2024, pp. 6–7).

What NAPs can address regarding arms control

- Weapons management: Programme of Action, International Tracing Instrument, Firearms Protocol, Arms Trade Treaty
- Explosive hazard management: Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
- Ammunition management: Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management

Developing integrated strategies that include IEDs

In this context, the five-phase methodology outlined in the present How-to Guide can be effectively adapted to address the challenges posed by IEDs. This approach provides a structured framework for integrating C-IED considerations into broader arms control and security strategies. By incorporating elements such as establishing a national lead entity, conducting comprehensive baseline assessments, defining strategies through RBM, designing operational plans aligned with C-IED frameworks, and ensuring validation through existing national processes, this methodology enables the development of cohesive and adaptable responses to the IED threat. Further examples of practical considerations for practitioners are provided below:

- Laying the foundations may include:
  - establishing or identifying a national lead entity (Amoroso, 2024a); and
  - determining whether C-IED is framed within the contexts of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, a war model paradigm, or a criminal justice framework.
- C-IED baseline assessments may include:
  - the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) *Counter-IED Capability Maturity Model and Self-Assessment Tool* (Seddon and Malaret Baldo, 2020); and
  - an IED threat picture assessment.
- A strategy can be defined through an RBM process connected to counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, a war model, or a criminal justice approach depending on the nature of the IED issue.
- Designing an operational plan can be approached in line with a C-IED enterprise framework (Amoroso, 2024b).
- Validating and disseminating may depend on current national planning and validation processes.

In Burkina Faso, the Small Arms National Commission was entrusted with leading the national response to the threats posed by IEDs. Consequently, it developed a dedicated strategy and action plan, employing the same methodology utilized for its strategic plan on small arms control (Burkina Faso, n.d.b).

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ANNEXES

The annexes to this How-to Guide include illustrative problem and solution trees, a logical framework, and a generic outline for a NAP. These tools are intended only as illustrative examples to assist practitioners and should not be considered prescriptive or exhaustive. They are designed to guide the planning and implementation process, and should be refined and tailored to each country's unique context, circumstances, priorities, and national processes for small arms control and related security efforts.

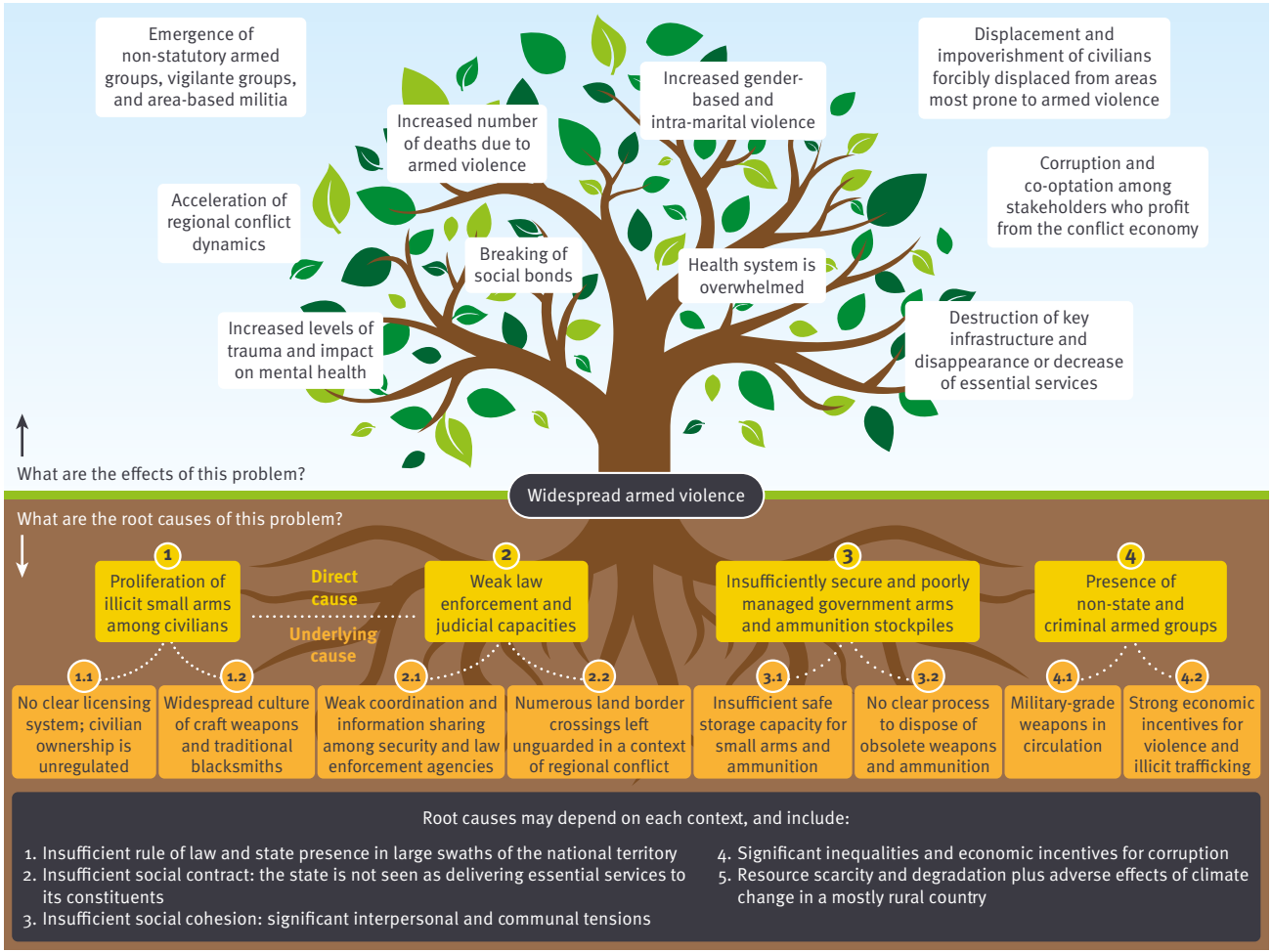
ANNEXE 1

Turning problems into solutions: Problem and solution trees

A problem tree

Components of a 'problem tree'

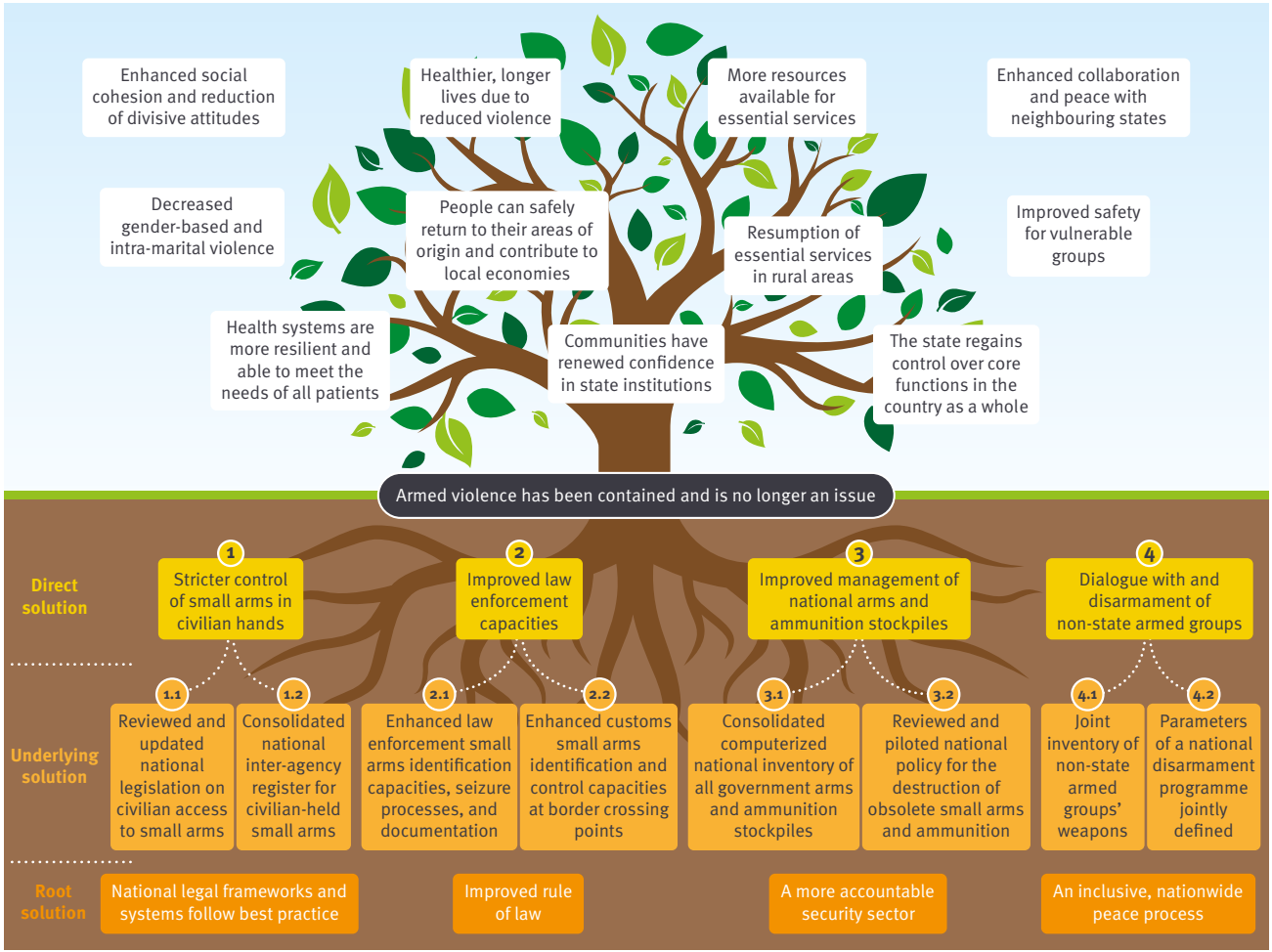
- **Core problem:** The central issue being addressed, to which all causes and effects are connected—positioned at the tree's core as the 'trunk'.
- **Direct causes:** The immediate factors contributing to the core problem—positioned as primary branches directly below the trunk.
- **Underlying causes:** The specific and detailed factors that explain why each direct cause exists, often composed of multiple levels to provide a comprehensive analysis—located beneath each direct cause.
- **Root causes:** The fundamental, systemic issues that lead to the core problem, often requiring changes at policy, institutional, or cultural levels—found at the base of the tree.
- **Effects:** The consequences and impact of the problem if left unaddressed, showcasing the broader implications—positioned as branches above the core problem.


Emergence of non-statutory armed groups, vigilante groups, and area-based militia
Increased number of deaths due to armed violence
Increased gender-based and intra-marital violence
Displacement and impoverishment of civilians forcibly displaced from areas most prone to armed violence
Acceleration of regional conflict dynamics
Corruption and co-optation among stakeholders who profit from the conflict economy
Breaking of social bonds
Health system is overwhelmed
Increased levels of trauma and impact on mental health
Destruction of key infrastructure and disappearance or decrease of essential services
What are the effects of this problem?
Widespread armed violence
What are the root causes of this problem?
1 Proliferation of illicit small arms among civilians
Direct cause
Underlying cause
2 Weak law enforcement and judicial capacities
3 Insufficiently secure and poorly managed government arms and ammunition stockpiles
4 Presence of non-state and criminal armed groups
1.1 No clear licensing system; civilian ownership is unregulated
1.2 Widespread culture of craft weapons and traditional blacksmiths
2.1 Weak coordination and information sharing among security and law enforcement agencies
2.2 Numerous land border crossings left unguarded in a context of regional conflict
3.1 Insufficient safe storage capacity for small arms and ammunition
3.2 No clear process to dispose of obsolete weapons and ammunition
4.1 Military-grade weapons in circulation
4.2 Strong economic incentives for violence and illicit trafficking
Root causes may depend on each context, and include:
1. Insufficient rule of law and state presence in large swaths of the national territory
2. Insufficient social contract: the state is not seen as delivering essential services to its constituents
3. Insufficient social cohesion: significant interpersonal and communal tensions
4. Significant inequalities and economic incentives for corruption
5. Resource scarcity and degradation plus adverse effects of climate change in a mostly rural country

A solution tree

Components of a 'solution tree'

- **Core solution (goal):** The central, long-term objective or ultimate goal the NAP aims to achieve—represented as the 'trunk' of the tree. All contributing solutions lead towards this goal.
- **Direct solutions (specific objectives or outcomes):** The immediate actions or changes that address the core solution—positioned as branches below the core solution and representing significant milestones or achievements.
- **Underlying solutions (expected results or outputs):** Specific, tangible results to support direct solutions—located beneath each direct solution. Outputs provide a concrete foundation for achieving outcomes and often have more immediate, short-term results.
- **Root solutions (activities or inputs):** Essential resources, activities, or inputs necessary to address root causes—found at the base of the tree. They include policy changes, capacity-building efforts, funding, and other foundational elements.
- **Effects (impact):** Anticipated long-term impacts or broader benefits of the solution—positioned as branches above the core solution. They demonstrate the positive changes expected if the core solution is achieved.


Enhanced social cohesion and reduction of divisive attitudes
Healthier, longer lives due to reduced violence
More resources available for essential services
Enhanced collaboration and peace with neighbouring states
Decreased gender-based and intra-marital violence
People can safely return to their areas of origin and contribute to local economies
Resumption of essential services in rural areas
Improved safety for vulnerable groups
Health systems are more resilient and able to meet the needs of all patients
Communities have renewed confidence in state institutions
The state regains control over core functions in the country as a whole
Armed violence has been contained and is no longer an issue
Direct solution
1 Stricter control of small arms in civilian hands
2 Improved law enforcement capacities
3 Improved management of national arms and ammunition stockpiles
4 Dialogue with and disarmament of non-state armed groups
Underlying solution
1.1 Reviewed and updated national legislation on civilian access to small arms
1.2 Consolidated national inter-agency register for civilian-held small arms
2.1 Enhanced law enforcement small arms identification capacities, seizure processes, and documentation
2.2 Enhanced customs small arms identification and control capacities at border crossing points
3.1 Consolidated computerized national inventory of all government arms and ammunition stockpiles
3.2 Reviewed and piloted national policy for the destruction of obsolete small arms and ammunition
4.1 Joint inventory of non-state armed groups' weapons
4.2 Parameters of a national disarmament programme jointly defined
Root solution
National legal frameworks and systems follow best practice
Improved rule of law
A more accountable security sector
An inclusive, nationwide peace process

ANNEXE 2

Turning solutions into a result chain: Example of a logical framework

Small arms control national strategy			
Overall goal – Enhance national security and stability through comprehensive small arms management and control			
Expected outcomes: ● Outcome 1 (that is, the expected outcome from pillar 1 and stemming from direct solution 1): Improved control and accountability for small arms in civilian hands to reduce the threat of unauthorized or illicit use. ● Outcome 2 (that is, the expected outcome from pillar 2 and stemming from direct solution 2): Enhanced law enforcement capacities for identifying, seizing, and controlling illicit small arms. ● Outcome 3 (that is, the expected outcome from pillar 3 and stemming from direct solution 3): Effective security and accountability of government stockpiles to reduce the risk of diversion. ● Outcome 4 (that is, the expected outcome from pillar 4 and stemming from direct solution 4): Negotiated and effective disarmament of non-state armed groups present in the country to improve public safety and reduce the risk of illicit small arms proliferation.			
Strategic pillar	**Specific objectives (SOs)**	**Expected results (ERs)**	**Indicators**
Pillar 1: Strategic outcome statement 1 **Improved control and accountability for small arms in civilian hands**	SO 1.1: Regulate the proliferation of illicit small arms within civilian populations	ER 1.1.1. The country's legal framework on small arms and ammunition has been revised and formally adopted, and is in line with international instruments.	Number of policies designed, reviewed, or amended to show alignment with international normative frameworks. This may need to be broken down per type of policy and stages of adoption (such as drafting, legislative debate, official decree, or executive approval).

Strategic pillar	Specific objectives (SOs)	Expected results (ERs)	Indicators
		ER 1.1.2. Law enforcement agencies have strengthened capacities to identify and implement new laws and policies concerning civilian-held small arms and ammunition.	Number or percentage of individual participants of activities held in relation to this result statement who report having gained skills and knowledge as a result of the intervention.
		ER 1.1.3. The population has been informed of new firearms regulations and supports the rationale for strengthened civilian small arms control.	Percentage of the target population demonstrating increased awareness about firearms regulations, as measured through surveys or assessments.
	SO 1.2: Develop and operationalize a centralized, inter-agency register to track and monitor small arms in civilian possession	ER 1.2.1. A national register of civilian-owned small arms has been digitalized and is accessible to relevant law enforcement agencies.	Number or percentage of civilian-owned small arms registered in the national database, disaggregated by location and firearm type.
		ER 1.2.2. Streamlined processes and improved communication among national agencies ensure effective management and oversight of civilian-held small arms.	Extent to which national policymakers involved in processes under this result statement report enhanced coordination as a result of the intervention.
	SO 1.3: Regulate and control the production of artisanal craft small arms	ER 1.3.1. A national census and register of all craft weapons producers, including but not limited to blacksmiths, has been established.	Percentage or number of craft weapons producers registered in the national database, disaggregated by location and firearm type.

Strategic pillar	Specific objectives (SOs)	Expected results (ERs)	Indicators
Pillar 2: Strategic outcome statement 2 **Enhanced law enforcement capacities for identifying, seizing, and controlling illicit small arms**	SO 2.1: Improve inter-agency coordination and information sharing	ER 2.1.1. Mechanisms for coordinated efforts and intelligence sharing to combat illicit small arms trafficking have been established.	Extent to which national policymakers involved in processes under this result statement report enhanced coordination as a result of the intervention, on a four-point Likert scale.
	SO 2.2: Enhance border control mechanisms	ER 2.2.1. Advanced procedures and tools for border security agencies to detect and intercept illicit small arms at key entry and exit points have been developed and implemented.	Extent to which national policymakers involved in processes under this result statement report enhanced border control as a result of the intervention, on a four-point Likert scale.
	SO 2.3: Strengthen law enforcement forensic capabilities	ER 2.3.1. Specialized training programmes and technical resources for law enforcement personnel to improve their ability to identify and document illicit small arms have been provided.	Number or percentage of individual participants of activities held in relation to this result statement who report having gained skills and knowledge as a result of the intervention.
Pillar 3: Strategic outcome statement 3 **Enhanced security and accountability of government stockpiles**	SO 3.1: Train and advise national authorities to design and implement weapons and ammunition policies for the security and justice sector	ER 3.1.1. Policies have been designed and adopted, which are in line with international norms.	Number of policies designed, reviewed, or amended to show alignment with international normative frameworks. This may need to be broken down per type of policy and stage of adoption (such as drafting, legislative debate, official decree, or executive approval).
		ER 3.1.2. Relevant security and law enforcement personnel have been trained and received technical assistance to pilot and roll out new policies.	Number or percentage of individual participants of activities held in relation to this result statement who report gaining skills and knowledge as a result of the intervention.

Strategic pillar	Specific objectives (SOs)	Expected results (ERs)	Indicators
	SO 3.2: Strengthen the PSSM of government stockpiles	ER 3.2.1. Security measures at armouries and ammunition depots have been increased.	Percentage or number of stockpiles with improved security, disaggregated by location and type.
		ER 3.2.2. Small arms under government control have been marked and registered.	Percentage or number of government-held small arms marked and registered in line with international norms, disaggregated by agency, location, and firearm type.
	SO 3.3: Manage the safe destruction of obsolete and surplus small arms and ammunition under government supervision	ER 3.3.1. Policies and processes are in place to ensure the timely destruction of obsolete and surplus small arms and ammunition in the hands of security and justice actors.	Existence of a relevant policy and standard operating procedures (SOPs).
		ER 3.3.2. Safe, controlled demolition takes place on a regular basis.	Number of small arms and tonnage of ammunition destroyed, disaggregated by location and type of material.
Pillar 4: Strategic outcome statement 4 **Control and oversight of weapons and ammunition under criminal and armed groups' control**	SO 4.1: Manage the safe processing of small arms and ammunition retrieved from armed groups	ER 4.1.1. A DDR programme has led to the collection, registration, and destruction (as required) of small arms and ammunition previously under armed groups' custody.	Number and percentage of individual voluntary participants of the DDR scheme. Number of small arms and tonnage of ammunition destroyed, disaggregated by location and type of material.
		ER 4.1.2. Law enforcement and customs agencies have clear policies and systems in place to process seized and collected small arms and ammunition.	Existence of a relevant policy and SOPs.

Strategic pillar	Specific objectives (SOs)	Expected results (ERs)	Indicators
		ER 4.1.3. Security agencies have policies and systems in place to process small arms and ammunition seized during military operations, to avoid the risk of diversion.	Existence of a relevant policy and SOPs.

ANNEXE 3

Example of a generic outline for a small arms control strategy

Introduction

- Contextual background on illicit small arms proliferation issues
- Rationale for the strategy's development

Situation analysis

- Political and security context: description of the security challenges posed by small arms
- Institutional and legal frameworks: overview of existing laws and institutional structures related to small arms control
- Resource analysis: assessment of available resources (human, financial, technical)
- Previous policies and interventions: evaluation of past efforts and their effectiveness
- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT): summary analysis to identify key challenges and opportunities
- Assessment findings and associated problem tree

Strategic framework

- Vision: long-term aspiration for small arms control
- Guiding principles: core values, such as national ownership, inclusivity, and adaptability

- Strategic objectives: specific goals, such as enhancing weapons management, reducing illicit proliferation, and promoting gender inclusion
- Logical framework

Implementation and monitoring

- Implementation structure: roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
- Monitoring and evaluation: mechanisms for tracking progress and evaluating impact

Resource mobilization and financing

- Funding sources: identification of national and international funding opportunities
- Resource mobilization strategy: approach to secure necessary resources

Risk management

- Risk identification: potential risks, such as political instability or resource shortages
- Mitigation measures: strategies to address identified risks

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About the **Small Arms Survey**

The Small Arms Survey is a centre for applied knowledge dedicated to preventing and reducing illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence. The Survey informs policy and practice through a combination of data, evidence-based knowledge, authoritative resources and tools, and tailored expert advice and training, and by bringing together practitioners and policymakers.

The Survey is an associated programme of the Geneva Graduate Institute, located in Switzerland, and has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, criminology, and database and programme management. It collaborates with a network of researchers, practitioners, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

The Survey's activities and outputs are made possible through core support as well as project funding. A full list of current donors and projects can be accessed via the Small Arms Survey website.

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