Enhancing international cooperation and assistance modalities and procedures within the framework of the UN Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument, taking into account good practice and lessons learnt

Input from Switzerland with regard to NV ODA/2022/00043/SALW

1. General considerations

States bear the primary responsibility for preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW). In turn, international cooperation and assistance supports national capacity-building to that effect and fosters the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI).

Switzerland reiterates the importance of adequate, effective and sustainable cooperation and assistance measures. In recent years, States have particularly recognised the added value of sustainability. In the context of cooperation and assistance, Switzerland understands sustainability as the capacity of a State to take up capabilities acquired through assistance activities and to maintain their performance at the desired level without external support. If performance is to be maintained over a longer period of time, all aspects of the life-cycle of the required specific capability need to be taken into consideration. Sustainability hence requires a long-term perspective and a holistic approach. The sustainable management of SALW for instance requires not only technical and logistics expertise, but also inter alia institutionalised training, financial, human resource and infrastructure management capabilities as well as established processes and roles. The conjunction of these organisational capabilities will allow for the institutionalisation of the SALW management capability. In the framework of the PoA and ITI, States have recognised the essential role of organisational capabilities to that effect. International cooperation and assistance modalities and procedures need to take this striving for sustainability into account.

In order to be adequate, effective and sustainable, assistance efforts should also follow international guidance such as norms and standards. They have become a central element in international cooperation and assistance and help work towards a desired end state. In turn, ‘feedback loops’ are needed to feed new lessons learnt from implementation back into guidance. In Switzerland’s view, regular reviews and adaptations of international norms and standards have proven their value in this regard.

Against this backdrop, Switzerland proposes in this paper further discussion within the PoA on establishing structured procedures for processing assistance requests, using baseline assessments more systematically, and enhancing processes for updating international guidance.

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1 Sustainability of cooperation and assistance relating to the management of small arms and light weapons, Working paper submitted by Switzerland, Third Review Conference of the PoA.
2 Outcome of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/IBMS/2021/1, paras 37 and 115. See also Sustainability of cooperation and assistance relating to the management of small arms and light weapons, Working paper submitted by Switzerland, Third Review Conference of the PoA.
2. Specific areas to enhance international cooperation and assistance modalities and procedures

**Matching needs, expertise and resources under the PoA**

Under the PoA, States may submit requests for assistance as part of their national reports. While the Secretariat presents trends from those requests to Member States regularly, requests do not prompt an institutionalised follow-up. Indeed, the PoA has traditionally lacked structured processes to match needs with resources and expertise from States and other stakeholders. Switzerland believes that the lack of such a dedicated mechanism or channel represents an impediment to responding effectively to needs. This issue needs further attention, in line with the commitments taken at the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States to explore options to establish relevant arrangements for the provision of training and expertise.  

Structured procedures for processing assistance requests can significantly increase coordination and efficiency among all States involved. At best, they prompt various contributing States to rally around the needs of a receiving State and pool their resources together. This heightens the prospects for long-term engagement of both receiving and contributing States, and for sustainable improvements in national SALW management.

States should explore what such a structured procedure for processing assistance requests could look like in full respect of the voluntary nature of the provision of assistance. They could explore what type of information a requesting state could submit, how the Secretariat should react upon reception (e.g. clearing house role), what next steps could be undertaken, etc. The objective of such a discussion should be to find common ground to advance the implementation of the PoA through enhanced cooperation and assistance procedures.

**Baseline assessments as follow-up on national assistance requests**

Switzerland is of the view that the first substantive measure following the reception of an assistance request should be a baseline assessment in the receiving State.

Baseline assessments help gather the technical information needed to substantiate the assistance request, synthesise needs comprehensively and determine the starting point for the provision of assistance. Importantly, they provide a useful framework to assess existing organisational capabilities (including processes, roles and enabling capabilities) needed to manage SALW sustainably, identify areas for improvement and define clear criteria to assess risk and progress. As such, baseline assessments have proven to be a key modality for all involved stakeholders to move towards a comprehensive approach and sustainability in international cooperation and assistance – as opposed to piecemeal approaches.

It has become successful practice in international cooperation and assistance that contributing States support partner States, at their request, in conducting baseline assessments. This preliminary step contributes to the identification of areas for assistance in a subsequent phase. Such a joint endeavour, especially at an early stage, helps create trust between partners, provides credibility to subsequent assistance requests, and may contribute to longer-term engagement by all parties involved.

The OSCE region serves as a useful illustration of this approach. Upon submission of an assistance request within the OSCE and after its approval by the OSCE’s Forum for Security Cooperation, technical experts, some of them from contributing and receiving States, jointly conduct an assessment under the auspices of the OSCE. Such an assessment clarifies technical issues of the request and proposes concrete courses of action for the set-up of an assistance project. In this regard, Switzerland also values the contribution made by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to distil good practice in conducting baseline assessments.  

Such reference material can support a common understanding among stakeholders on suitable assessment processes and harmonise capacity-building efforts.

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3 Outcome of the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/2, para 38(c).

Switzerland strongly advocates for increased use of baseline assessments as the basis for detailed, comprehensive assistance under the PoA and ITI. The establishment of baseline assessment templates, based on existing good practice, for voluntary use and capacity building could be valuable steps to that effect. States could explore the relevance and modalities of such baseline assessments, posing questions such as "What are the relevant standards against which to conduct the baseline assessment?" and "Who is conducting the assessment?".

Improving international standards and good practice

International good practice, guidelines and standards are pivotal in strengthening national practice. They underpin the provision of international cooperation and assistance and the conduct of baseline assessments. As a set of voluntary practical guidance notes, the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) was developed to assist national authorities in SALW control and management efforts that include the implementation of the PoA and ITI.

Switzerland values MOSAIC and believes that its governance could be further strengthened. Good practice, guidelines and standards need to evolve constantly in order to remain up to date. At present, MOSAIC seems to be reviewed in an ad hoc manner. A periodic and systematic MOSAIC review cycle could enhance its relevance and adequacy.

While MOSAIC has proven useful to many stakeholders, Switzerland observes that it has not gained as much institutional backing and political acceptance as similar guidance notes such as the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) have. This results, in part, from their differing origins: MOSAIC emerged from within the UN system, whereas the IATG’s development was mandated by Member States. Strengthening the role of MOSAIC as an essential part of international cooperation and assistance calls for strong involvement of Member States in MOSAIC governance. A periodic MOSAIC review cycle process led by States could be one effective avenue to that end.

3. Conclusion

International cooperation and assistance are crucial pillars for the full and effective implementation of the PoA and ITI. It is Switzerland’s view that related modalities and procedures could be strengthened. Promising avenues include establishing structured procedures regarding cooperation and assistance under the PoA, using baseline assessments more systematically to substantiate assistance requests as the basis for providing assistance, and enhancing MOSAIC governance. These and other pathways for strengthening international cooperation and assistance deserve further consideration in discussions at the Eighth Biennial Meeting of States of the PoA, with a view towards taking effective steps at the Fourth Review Conference in 2024.

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