

Report



Review of Fifteen Years of Senior Mission Leadership Training in Africa: Critical Lessons

Background

Globally, assessments of peacekeeping operations, for newly two decades, have routinely cited leadership as key to their success.¹ In 2005, United Nations Specialized Training Materials (STM-3) were employed in the first UN Senior Mission Leaders (SML) course in Africa, hosted by the National Defence College Nigeria. Since then, Training Centres of Excellence (TCEs) and Training Institutions at various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) across the continent have been conducting SML courses for the UN, AU, and RECs. These SML courses, by the RECs have been generally denoted as Regional SML (RSML) courses. They are further characterized by the integration of regional peculiarities, specificities and a robust proliferation of initiatives derived at the regions.

Rationale

Over the past fifteen (15) years, RSML training across the continent has contributed immensely to the development of mission leadership capacities for UN, AU and RECs missions. In delivering the training, the regions have also fulfilled their crucial functions as pillars of AU global structure for security and stability². Furthermore, initiatives are welcome at the regions, on the basis of the principle of *subsidiarity* in relations with the AU, besides the logical reasons of contextual geopolitical peculiarities.

Against this background, in 2020, the African Peace Support Trainers Association, responding to concerns from Member Institutions and other TCEs, on the proliferation of initiatives and peculiarities in the conduct of RSML at various regions, embarked on the documentation of relevant lessons. This was achieved in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the review included baseline survey on assessment of importance and relevance of the contents of the 25 – 30 Modules of the RSML curriculum, as well as a critique of the methodology of delivery of these modules in recent. These were achieved over 3 days of workshops, guided by module-specific questions and discussion.

Critical Lessons

Crucial lessons identified by 30 SML experts yielded 80 module-specific recommendations³. The lessons underscored critical gaps in RSML training, with adverse implications for performance in missions. The lessons underscored notable disparities from region to region as well as differing emphasis on various modules and other aspects of the training. Critical lessons emerged notably from 1) selection of participants; 2) facilitation; 3) mentorship; 4) content; 5) delivery methodology; 6) leadership training; 7) integration of new technology; 8) and training in the management of strategic communication. On the basis of these

¹ See Kevin S. Kennedy and Laura Powers, “Senior Leadership Training in UN Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, February 2019.

² See African Union, African Standby Force Training Policy, 2006 p. 5

³ See Report on “Fifteen Years of Senior Mission Leaders Training in African: Experiences and Lessons Learned”, An APSTA-UNITAR Project, December 2020.

lessons and as long as performance gaps persist in missions, a minimum Harmonized Standards for RSML Training in Africa has become imperative.

Selection of Participants: Current selection process lacks robustness, and results in individuals attending the course without the required background knowledge or experience to make the most of it. This makes it difficult for such participants to keep pace with the workload. Thus, oversight for nomination, either from REC's level or from AU level, in the selection process, is imperative. Moreover, qualified female participants must be encouraged by national governments in the selection process.

Course Facilitation and Mentorship: experienced facilitators and mentors are crucial to the course. Each course must be accorded a core team capable of covering the essential range of issues. Moreover, there is always the need for facilitators covering highly specialized issues such as policies and human rights. However, duplications must be minimized or eliminated through detailed briefing for facilitators, in order to gain time.

Course Content: A significant increase in topics over time, has reduced time for interaction between participants and mentors, with adverse consequences for experience sharing. Moreover, focus has shifted to academic lectures and presentations at the expense of emphasizing key concepts and allowing ample time for reflection and internalization via interactions with mentors. There is urgent need for regaining balance.

Moreover, Modules dealing with primacy of politics and the political process, human rights, peacebuilding, mission support, civil affairs, accountability frameworks, and conflict analysis require greater emphasis as well as enhanced delivery methodology in accordance with respective recommendations. Conflict analysis for instance should be operationalized, recording best course of action to the mission leadership team as well as facilitates the prioritization of action. Above all, contents specific to the African context must be prioritized and accentuated.

Delivery Methodology: Point in emphasis is to move away from the current excessively theoretical and academic nature of the current delivery methodology towards a performance-oriented design. This entails explicit reflection of the new operational environments facing the leadership team. In-person training remains most apt, though should be made more interactive, dynamic and operationally-oriented in approach.

Leadership Instruction: Highlighting critical leadership skills and behaviour should be an intrinsic aspect of training, worked into modules as appropriate. This appears vague in the current SML training design by most RECs.

Conclusions

Lessons identified point to imperative move away from excessively theoretical approach to the delivery of RSML in Africa, towards a more operationally-oriented approach. In addition, RSMLS develop leadership capacity, useful beyond deployments, and therefore should be institutionalized as leadership training across the continent, by RECs and the AU Commission.

Recommendations

In light of the critical lessons identified, the RSML training in Africa should be enhanced by:

- Utilizing the lessons from the review to improve the content, design, and delivery methodology;
- Adapting the RSML training to contemporary UN and AU mission requirements, complex responsibilities of mission leadership team;
- Standardizing and harmonizing RSML training across the continent while allowing for the integration of regional peculiarities;
- Conducting a pilot on a re-calibrated RSML based on the lessons identified;
- Commence the conduct of RSML in French language for Francophone countries.

