

## CONCLUSION

# FACTORS BEHIND DEMAND AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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The regional case studies examined in previous chapters reveal trends about the common factors underlying the demand for guns. These common factors are explored below, along with policy implications. Following this discussion, a bigger-picture conclusion about challenges facing the dialogue between local groups and policy makers leads to further questions for research.

### **Factors behind demand**

#### ***Identity-based conflict***

A majority of Africa's population can be classified as children or youth. The percentage of African countries' population under 14 years old ranges from 35 to 49 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The success or failure of child and youth development can destabilize nations and entire regions. States have a responsibility to provide their underage citizens with education, health care, and safe shelter, rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. They often fail to prioritize youth involvement in positive activities that promote peace building and conflict resolution, leaving a lack of safe space for the most vulnerable—and in many cases the largest—section of the population. Youth are then open to recruitment in activities that facilitate the worst kinds of marginal economies: buying and selling guns and conflict.

In peacetime, citizenship is defined according to a narrow set of criteria; historically, this has included only men, or men of a certain age who were property owners, or men of a certain race or economic background. Citizenship in most modern states, while often more inclusive, still defines youth and women as special 'sub-categories'. Youth and women's leagues of political parties keep these groups out of the mainstream with a focus on fringe rights. In times of conflict, however, both gender and age prerequisites are often re-formulated to fit conscription needs.

Easy-to-use weapons allow power brokers to assemble and train these troops from a seemingly never-ending pool of poor, disenfranchised, and uneducated young people, including refugees, orphans, and internally displaced people. As a group like any other element of society, children and youth develop strategies for survival and find resources wherever they can. When conflict decimates schools, health care systems, and other support networks for children, the only options left involve violence. One participant at a “Shrinking Small Arms” seminar said, “Our children look at guns as power. It is difficult to focus on guns, because in the minds of youth, the gun is the way to instant money, an opportunity for them where there is no other opportunity.”<sup>2</sup>

Social status and ethnicity are also used to promote involvement in conflict. ‘Ethnic clashing’ is a term associated with large-scale violence, but it is not innate divisions between groups that push them to take up arms. Ethnicity is just another dividing line used by those in power to perpetuate conflicts for political or economic gain. The rise of civil tension usually stems from economic, social, and political grievances with no other outlet. Extreme poverty, competition for resources, political power brokering, and other factors make disenfranchised groups (whether ethnicity-based, age-based, or other) easy prey for those seeking to build their own militias, crime syndicates, or simple gun-running empires.

In the urban slums around Nairobi and in the rural pastoralist areas around Lokichoggio in Turkana, youth are empowering themselves by forming associations that promote inter-ethnic and inter-group dialogue and provide opportunities not only for peace building, but also for joint activities that promote economic self-sustainability and growth. A member of the Lokichoggio Youth Association Society (LYAS) said, “Peace is development.”<sup>3</sup> Involving members of the community and building grassroots support has proven challenging but necessary for the success of these activities.

Whether this has occurred through group lobbying or religious persuasion and prayer, as with the relationship of the local priest to the group called ‘*Watu ya Amani*’ (People of Peace) in the Samburu district, local government needs to act as a link between local needs and higher-level policy. The implementation of policy plans such as the Nairobi Declaration cannot be successful without some level of community buy-in. Kenya’s Minister in charge of internal security and provincial administration was quoted in March 2003 as saying:

“The government of Kenya will soon disarm all communities owning illegal firearms in the country...the government is left with no other

alternative but to round up all the guns so that matters of maintaining security are completely left to the government.<sup>4</sup>”

In contrast, a member of LYAS promoted a bottom-up process rather than a top-down intervention, saying:

“First, you have to get communities on board from the grassroots. Have discussions with various groups to educate them: provide an understanding of conflict in schools. Listen to what people say. The issue of peace is not just something you wake up tomorrow and find there is no peace. There is a process. Peace is not a new idea, but to be successful we have to listen what the community says about the failure of past initiatives.<sup>5</sup>”

In many interviews in every region of Kenya, respondents noted that the government should emphasize peace rather than disarmament. There was a collectively expressed desire for the government at every level to partner with local groups. In the words of one peace worker:

“It’s not just a question of a state minister waking up one morning and deciding to disarm a community. They must bring the things lacking in the community first: roads, schools, development. First build peace. Get close to the people. Right now, our district is effectively a government of churches.<sup>6</sup>”

It would be impossible to postpone disarmament and security measures until development had fully taken root in any country. However, a concurrent approach to development, peace, and small arms reduction is a close second choice.

## ***Availability***

Availability drives demand for weapons. Because they are sturdy, durable, and reusable, small arms are extremely difficult to get rid of. Once they are present in a country they tend to stay there, either fuelling crime or flowing over boundaries to serve the needs of neighbouring conflicts. One of the purposes of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programmes is to confiscate and take small arms out of circulation following a conflict period, but arms caches are rarely effectively destroyed in the wake of fragile peace agreements. In unstable regions with bleak economic fore-

casts, former combatants have little hope of finding a job in civilian life. The option of keeping a gun and seeking mercenary work is more enticing than turning over their only chance at earning a livelihood. This has proven to be true in West Africa: youth from Sierra Leone, where there was an extensive DDR process, are rumoured to have gone on to fight in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>7</sup> The mere presence of weapons in situations where the balance of power is already delicate frequently plunges post-conflict states back into complex emergencies before significant development and reconstruction gains can be realized.

Poverty, unequal access to resources, large youth populations with limited access to education or jobs, and other socio-political factors contribute to instability, but it is the presence of guns that enables conflict to escalate into the type of violence that is beyond state control or mediation. Guns create another self-perpetuating cycle: an internal arms race. The more people accept that weapons are necessary for survival and economic advancement, the more insecurity spreads and drives further demand. Small arms proliferation hinders development and conflict resolution efforts, creates space for war economies to grow and become entrenched, and contributes to a growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

In analysing the informal economies on the Kenya-Somali border, it becomes clear that the circulation of guns from one small-scale conflict to another is easy and widespread. The Wajir Peace and Development Committee worked with one group in Somalia to create an informal armoury. With the support of elders, people were encouraged to place their guns in a communally guarded armoury during times of relative peace. The guns would therefore be present if needed, but unavailable for easy sale that might fuel other nearby conflicts.

Simply confiscating guns only leads to 'forced upgrades', as they were described in the Arid Lands districts. Those who have lost their weapons in government raids must find a way to replace them: this can often mean selling valuable resources like cattle, which depresses the local economy, and then acquiring whatever newer model of assault rifle is on offer. Governments, both local and national, must take a realistic approach to understanding the demand side of the gun market before designing an intervention. If the availability of weapons in a given area is high, forced confiscation of guns will only lead to upgrades and replacements. Demand-based alternatives could include trading development for guns and allowing NGOs or CBOs to establish locally based armouries that function as 'banks' in such trading.

### ***Economies on the margins***

Pastoralist groups in the Horn of Africa, specifically in Northwest Kenya and along the undemarcated border with Somalia, have long operated outside of state control. With scarce water resources and grazing land, cattle rustling and conflict between groups has been present for a long time. With the introduction of firearms into the region, however, the traditional cattle raiding activity in which young men were initiated into manhood but few people died has turned into a bloody and protracted conflict that has claimed many lives. The commercialization of cattle rustling, where cows are no longer kept in the raiding community but stolen and immediately sold at the market, has contributed to creating pastoral economies that rely on a cycle of violence with guns as the primary currency.

Decreased dependency on pastoralism as a sole source of livelihood would greatly improve the situation, but only if viable long-term alternatives are offered. This can be achieved by building and staffing schools in underserved areas and supporting vocational training that contributes to more varied skill sets among youth. Education would also empower pastoralists to be more effective in their chosen lifestyle, with a greater understanding of animal health and resource use. Efforts to mainstream activities in marginal economies, such as the selling of livestock in more urban markets, can create opportunities for both economic growth and cultural integration.

In urban borderlands, rent disputes fomented by land ownership conundrums are the primary dividing factor between ethnic populations living together in squalid and cramped conditions. The government has an obligation and an incentive to address land tenure in informal settlements such as Kibera. It is not ethnic tensions, but economic inequality that forms the basis of frustrations and internecine violence. In the larger sense, informal settlements are breeding grounds for informal economies involving guns, drugs, and human trafficking. Mainstreaming small arms demand reduction in departments of urban planning could stave off the disaster that comes with overpopulation and a lack of adequate low-income housing.

### ***Lack of education and development***

The role of donors and governments in managing peace building efforts in low-level, sustained conflicts is closely related to economic factors, but presents a different challenge. Both education and development in the broadest

sense of both terms form the foundations of frameworks laid out by local peace organizations for addressing conflict and building lasting peace. Education for both adults and children can change cultural perceptions, create opportunities for growth and changing economies, and produce more active, informed citizens. It is not a coincidence that areas in Kenya with the highest adult illiteracy rates are also the ones with the biggest demand for small arms. Organizations like the Turkana Literacy Bureau have recognized the benefits of a reading adult population, including the higher likelihood that they will send their children to school rather than keeping them in the fields. Likewise, educated children from marginalized communities grow up and often go back to their communities to work for peace and development.

Development can change the entire face of a community and its relationship to guns and conflict. Done poorly and without knowledge of local pressure points, it can wreak havoc and create fighting among competing groups, something often seen with the building of scarce boreholes for water in the Northeastern Province. However, small-scale projects like the paving of an access road to water points in Tana River have the potential to render conflict obsolete as resources become equally shared and tension over gun trafficking is resolved by the patrolling of potential gun running routes. Development on a large scale creates infrastructure with which communication and education can thrive. Guns thrive in the borderlands because they are cut off from the rest of the nation. People living in remote areas have little sense of their membership in the state. Without the benefits of government, the laws become meaningless. Many local groups want development as a precursor or a companion to disarmament. Mendera Women for Peace and Development went so far as to say that trading guns for development would be one of the only effective ways to decrease ownership and use of illegal weapons.

## **Conclusions and questions for further research**

When there is a vacuum of useful intervention for peace, communities fill it with their own solutions. These 'local' initiatives are not inherently positive: they offer a different set of problems, as in the case of the Al Fatah Declaration, which challenges the Kenyan Constitution and the rule of law. The overarching framework that emerged in talking with local peace groups, however, is the idea of mainstreaming development for peace. Can policy makers creatively draw links between the 'softer' issues of development and the 'traditionally despotic' mechanisms of security and disarmament?

The emphasis on development in the context of small arms reduction does not require a sequential framework. For example, alleviating poverty does not have to occur before tackling illegal guns. Initiatives like the Arid Lands project and other development-oriented funding are to some extent and need to continue mainstreaming agendas that will also address informal economies, small arms trafficking and use, and the role of conflict in the target population's well-being and outlook. This may, initially, require a multi-sectoral approach to funding. If an environmental agency finds it difficult to incorporate a small arms platform into its programmes, it may need to partner with or 'outsource' the conflict-based platforms to a more security-focused organization. At the local level in Kenya, this kind of partnership has worked, particularly in Wajir and Mandera. Still, policy mainstreaming of small arms reduction measures remains the ultimate goal.

Security sector reform and other more defence-oriented solutions were rarely raised in interviews. Likewise, peace workers referred to ethnicity and identity-based conflict mostly as tools of power brokers in the larger context of inequality. Rather, local groups want to change the status of the economy, education, environment, and resource management in pursuit of peace and the eradication of small arms. This suggests a growing awareness of structural inequality underlying conflict among educated peace building staff even on the most remote geographical and socio-economic borders. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the globalisation not just of guns, but also of information: CNN's popularity in remote areas of the Horn is unrivalled. Families in Mandera living in traditional structures often keep a separate shelter made out of sticks for their satellite dish. They may not live with clearly demarcated national borders, but they clearly understand the 'us' and 'them' of the so-called Western world, both politically and in the more concrete arena of donor funding.

With the United States building military bases in Africa and increasing a presence there to fight the 'war on terror,' will local peace building groups have the opportunity for meaningful dialogue with their own governments? African governments, not just those in Kenya, may find that the militarisation of relations with the world's only superpower may challenge and impact on the possibilities for honest dialogue with local concerns. With even local conflict increasingly being defined by global perspectives, it will be important not to forget that peace is always political. Achieving peace and eradicating small arms proliferation will require a shift in policy design and an openness to bottom-up feedback for democratic interventions.

Having shown that demand-based interventions focusing on small arms and light weapons exist and thrive at a local level in Kenya, some questions are particularly salient when assessing the next step: their relevance to policy.

Larger questions raised by the research include:

1. Can small, under-funded organizations actually instigate change or find their way into a larger dialogue with state, government, and policy? If they do, will it make a difference to the status of the conflict?
2. Should human rights ideology be bargained with and possibly traded for more oppressive local politics to keep the pragmatic peace and stifle the deadly gun trade? Are there ways of using tradition and customary law in peace building within a modern constitutional framework?
3. Can dialogues about peace exist outside of an economic and environmental framework? If not, how can we best integrate the security framework with traditionally 'softer' areas of policy concern?

Specific questions about the relevance of local concerns:

1. How can we link local practice with national and international policy?
2. What mechanisms could be used?
3. Who should use such mechanisms, and how?

Some mechanisms for linking local practice with national and international policy are:

- Formal local government involvement in local peace building. Local government support and knowledge of grassroots peace initiatives can be reported regularly to higher levels of government, resulting in a combination between a 'situation report' accurately reflecting the level of violence and illegal arms in the borderlands, and a 'policy report' recommending higher-level action. Rather than government choosing coercive disarmament to address illegal arms without knowledge or communication of local concerns, it can reference an information pipeline into the heart of local peace and conflict issues.

- Sharing responsibility at both the local and national level for small arms concerns between government departments, and where appropriate with non-governmental organizations. Rather than giving sole custody of the problem to the Ministry of Safety and Security (and the District Security Committees at the provincial level), the creation of multi-sectoral task forces to implement mainstreaming of small arms reduction throughout activities such as urban planning, youth development, education, health, and economic stimulus should be contemplated. An example of a mainstreaming project would be an education department using international funding for security issues to craft a peace building curriculum for government primary schools.
- Government and donor agency co-ordination and awareness of funding local peace building efforts as part of small arms reduction activities. The links between building peace, reducing the demand for small arms, and stifling local gun economies are clear. Structuring and monitoring funding so that it reaches active local peace building groups, especially those working across international borders, for the specific purpose of working on small arms issues, will raise the profile of gun proliferation and local successes in eradicating it. Building the capacity of local groups to negotiate peace and travel long distances to remote areas will ease the burden of low-level conflict resolution on governments.
- Environmental awareness in development and urban planning. The construction of dams, power plants, and other large projects can alter the natural resource landscape of an area drastically. Such projects should be vetted through a process that includes a conflict analysis and projections of future gun markets in areas where grazing and agricultural options will change. When planning and constructing urban settlements, land use and ownership should be clearly defined, infrastructure planned for garbage removal and waste disposal, and clear boundaries for building and occupancy set so that both landlords and renters have fair redress through a systematic grievance process. Planning in these areas should include input about small arms policy and disarmament goals.
- Offering development in exchange for guns. Rather than paying cash for surrendered weapons, governments in conjunction with donor agencies can offer development projects in exchange for voluntary weapons collection. Large-scale development projects should capacitate, train, and employ local people to invest in building their future, while ensuring that adequate state security will be provided during and after the projects.

- Supporting informal armouries. As a step towards building peace and disarming communities, government can support local groups' collection and storage of 'illegal' weapons in safehouses guarded by trusted elders. This kind of storage prevents guns from flooding alternative markets during times of peace, and can lead to the building of security in slow stages.
- Promoting women and youth development in both local and large-scale projects, especially those related to peace building and disarmament. Women's empowerment allows them to facilitate trade and dialogue with women in 'opposing' groups, and recognises that they are often the biggest victims of gun-related violence. Identity-based conflict can be avoided through youth co-operation and training in peace-oriented activities, youth participation in development and politics. The reconciling of so-called 'ethnic' differences becomes easier when both the non-combatants in a society and the members most likely to be recruited into combat are both encouraged to build social and economic bridges to traditional enemies.
- Making national civilian gun possession laws consistent and enforceable. Eliminate the procedure of arming some civilians for 'protection' duty and not others. In areas where insecurity is rampant, create effective and reasonable gun registration laws that allow citizens to petition for ownership on the basis of self-defence. If 'reasonable' gun ownership can be controlled by the government, individual ownership and accountability laws will be more easily and frequently policed.

## Notes

1. *CIA Factbook*, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook> (28 March 2003).
2. Conference report: *Shrinking small arms: A seminar on lessening the demand for weapons*. Sponsored by the Quaker United Nations Office. Durban, South Africa, November 19–24, 1999, p 8.
3. Lokichoggio Youth Association interview. Lokichoggio, Turkana. 15 August 2003.
4. NCKK update issue 121. March 31, 2003
5. LYAS interview, 15 August 2003.
6. Name and organization withheld by request.
7. K Aning of African Security, Dialogue and Research, presentation at the Institute for Security Studies seminar on "Youth and human security: Perspectives on African conflict", 28 February 2003.