



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Illegal small arms proliferation and trafficking in Africa happens in a context far removed from traditional definitions of the state and state control. Where marginalized communities form part of ‘unofficial’ economies, conflict easily thrives under the policy-making radar. Local peace building groups have grown as a grassroots opposing force to ‘low-level’ conflict, offering conflict resolution and small arms demand reduction strategies where more ambitious state-sponsored projects fail. There is currently a lack of dialogue between governments that regulate small arms and the local peace builders who reduce the demand for them, although such communication can pave the way to new forms of human security. Policy makers and donors can learn from the challenges and realities of small arms work in areas outside of traditional government control to plan interventions that fall on the spectrum between the more common supply-side regulation and emergency response.

This research examines local peace building and small arms demand reduction work at the organization level in five diverse areas of Kenya. By looking at strategies, challenges, and successes of community-based organizations, NGOs, and local peace committees, and juxtaposing them with the successes and failures of relevant policy, a gap in demand-side measures at the policy level becomes evident. Demand-based interventions diverge from what one NGO fieldworker called “traditionally despotic” measures of addressing gun proliferation and allow more creative security policies with the potential to shrink gun markets from the bottom up.

Factors fuelling the demand for guns include identity-based conflict, availability, economies on the margins, and lack of education and development. Mainstreaming small arms reduction and awareness into other areas of government and policy will be the first step towards alleviating the major factors driving small-scale gun economies. Governments and donors can:

- provide alternative economies through stimulus projects and development,

- create and promote school and adult education curricula based on proactive conflict resolution and peace building,
- integrate adult literacy drives into disarmament initiatives, and
- fund cross-cultural and youth activities that divert potential gun users from violence. Some communities have succeeded in decreasing the buyer side of the market on a local scale using variations on these ideas, indicating that partnerships between local peace builders and policy-level decision-makers could effect even more widespread change.