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## SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW)<sup>1</sup>

**Programmes that tackle the proliferation of small arms and light weapons can transform a culture of violence, increase security and open space for sustainable development.**

This issues brief outlines the problems associated with the proliferation and misuse of small arms, particularly in relation to conflict and poverty. It aims to help officials and aid workers in countries affected by armed violence, who see that their programme is being undermined or restricted by the presence and use of SALW, by setting out components of small-arms control programmes.

Underlined words are hyperlinks to other topics available at [www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/issuesbriefs](http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/issuesbriefs).

### KEY MESSAGES:

- The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons is a major contributor to insecurity, violent crime and poverty.
- The presence and use of SALW can inhibit access to basic services and key infrastructure such as health clinics and schools, as well as markets. The injuries caused can overwhelm fragile health and social services in poor countries. This is undermining progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- Limiting the availability and misuse of weapons is a practical tool in crime and crisis prevention.
- Programmes to control the proliferation SALW can have a lasting impact not only on the availability of the weapons themselves – they can also transform a culture of violence, increase security, and open space for sustainable development.
- International actors can help reduce armed violence by linking disarmament incentives to development programmes, supporting livelihood opportunities that provide a real alternative to crime and violence, and improving governance and access to justice.

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Why do Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) matter?**

*“the weapons of choice in civil wars, organised crime and terrorism”*

Although SALW do not themselves cause conflict, easy access to weapons increases the lethality and duration of violence and conflict, undermines peace and significantly hampers development.<sup>2</sup> Small arms are frequently the weapons of choice in civil wars, organised

<sup>1</sup> The drafting of this issues brief was led by the UK's Department of International Development.

<sup>2</sup> Conflicts are an unavoidable part of processes of social change in all societies. This issues brief deals with violent conflict but, from here on, uses "conflict" as shorthand for it.

crime and terrorism. Estimates of the numbers of weapons in circulation vary, although it is clear that millions of people have been killed, or injured and countless livelihoods destroyed by SALW.

The escalation of conflict in countries like Israel/Palestine and Sudan has increased demand for weapons. In Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia and Sri Lanka, as conflicts are being resolved, control over illicit weapons has perversely weakened, and availability of weapons within society has increased. If protagonists perceive that they have been disadvantaged in peace negotiations or settlements, they may try to derail the peace process through violence. Similarly, as the profitable war economy dries up, weapons may be used for criminal purposes. SALW are easily transported, and circulate across borders, spreading conflict from country to region.

### What are Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)?

There is no internationally agreed definition of SALW. However, they are generally considered to be weapons that can be used by one or two people. Small arms are designed for individual use and include pistols, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons are designed to be deployed and used by a small crew, such as man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), recoilless rifles, and mortars of less than 100mm calibre.

### What is the impact of SALW on development?

The availability and use of small arms has both direct and indirect impacts on development and [poverty](#).<sup>3</sup> Small arms are responsible for the majority of direct conflict deaths (which totalled 100,000 in 2003), and play a central role in the many thousands of additional indirect conflict deaths due to loss of health access, forced displacement and other causes. At least 200,000 people die as a result of gun violence each year in countries "at peace" (SAS 2004, 2005). Non-fatal injuries are far higher, and these have a direct impact on economic wellbeing and national development. Most victims of gun violence are young men, who have the highest earning potential and whose loss is felt mostly keenly in economic terms (Muggah and Berman, 2001). Typically, this increases the burden of income generation and care giving, which often falls on women.

Small arms are also used for gender-based and sexual violence and the availability of small arms places women and girls at increased risk for severe injury or death during an assault. Levels of abuse and domestic violence tend to increase during and after conflict as men return home with arms.

The costs to treat and rehabilitate those injured by guns are incurred by individuals and households and community and national health services. A study in one South African hospital found the costs of gun violence to be close to USD 10,000 per victim (Peden and Van der Spuy, 1998; in WHO, 2002). In countries with less sophisticated health care systems, more firearms injuries are likely to be fatal, and, here, the social and economic costs are likely to be far higher.

Even in the absence of an armed conflict, the use of firearms in crime can seriously impede the development of a country. A report on Jamaica estimated the direct cost of crime (including healthcare

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<sup>3</sup> See DFID (2003), [Tackling Poverty by Reducing Armed Violence. Recommendations from a Wilton Park workshop](#).

costs, lost production days, and public security expenses) to represent at least 3.7 per cent of GDP in 2001 (World Bank, 2004, p 122). Over time, this represents a huge cumulative loss in productivity and wealth.

There are also many indirect impacts. The proliferation of SALW increases the fear of violence and intimidation. This can adversely affect the resumption of normal economic activities as well as the daily lives of citizens. People may be afraid to go to work, to the market or to school. They may be afraid in their homes.

There is a strong association between armed violence and deteriorating public services; as a result, people have to spend their own resources to compensate for the lack of public services, reducing the investment capacities of the country (SAS 2003). Armed violence, or even just the threat of armed violence, can lead to reduced foreign direct investment. This is particularly true where violence is politically motivated. Armed violence has a particularly important impact on tourism, whether it is political violence or criminality. According to one study, over the long run, tourism is reduced by 25% when there are substantial increases in political violence, and in countries with small tourism industries the reduction tends to be substantially greater (Neumayer, 2004).

Insecurity may force government services and aid programmes to be curtailed or withdrawn. In a recent survey, more than one-fifth of humanitarian and development workers said that 25% or more of their beneficiary target groups was rendered inaccessible in the previous six months, due to the presence of routine armed threats. (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2005). Armed violence may simply prevent people from conducting business and accessing services, leading to reduced levels of school enrolment and literacy, lower levels of immunization, and increased maternal and child mortality. The destruction of physical infrastructure and insecurity disrupt trade; communities affected by armed violence may become socially and economically marginalized. For example, following an outbreak of intense violence in one of Rio's *favelas*, residents were too frightened to leave their homes. Some lost their jobs because they failed to arrive at work for several days. Some small businesses closed after trade significantly reduced, and many children did not go to school (Kirsten and Richardson, 2004).

## KEY COMPONENTS:

### THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A CONTROL PROGRAMME

#### International agreements

Much progress has been made in recent years to harmonise controls and regulations on SALW. At the global level, the UN has initiated a Programme of Action to tackle the illicit trade in SALW, to which member states have agreed to adhere. Regional organisations have agreed more advanced frameworks, such as the Nairobi Protocol for the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa, the SADC protocol, or the Organization of American States. These commit governments to a set of standards and principles that can act as impetus for improved national control. Donors, international organisations and [civil society](#) all have a role to play in encouraging governments to sign up to international agreements, and in assisting them in meeting their obligations under them.

## Weapons collection and destruction

Weapons collection is usually undertaken by authorised agencies of the government, or in some cases, by peacekeeping missions with a disarmament mandate. The destruction of collected weapons, sometimes through public ceremonies, is an essential confidence-building measure.

Weapons collection can be either voluntary, usually as part of an amnesty, or obligatory, in the context of a peace settlement or a change in weapons-possession legislation. Voluntary buy-back schemes that offer an individual cash reward in exchange for a weapon (or ammunition) are increasingly rare, because they can create new markets for weapons.

Instead, UNDP and others have pioneered collective incentives for communities that voluntarily disarm, by offering resources for a developmental project of their choosing. Communities have become increasingly involved in the collection process and the selection of development awards. Broad representation in these consultations, involving both men and women, helps create more sustainable initiatives (such as the certification of weapons-free villages) that reduce armed violence and remove weapons from society, while ensuring gender protection needs are integrated into all programmes.<sup>4</sup>

## Stockpile management

Improving stockpile management is key to reducing the numbers of weapons in circulation. Leakage from poorly secured stockpiles is a chronic problem in many countries with large numbers of surplus weapons. Under-resourced security forces may be unable to properly secure stockpiles, and individuals who are poorly paid may resort to use their official weapons in crime or rent them out to others to supplement their income. Many of these weapons find their way into the illicit market as a result of such theft or loss. This issue should be addressed as part of broader Security System Reform (including police and military). DAC Guidance on Security System Reform and Governance (and the [SSR issues brief](#)) highlights the need to address capacity and integrity issues within [institutions](#) in the security system (see [www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/ssr](http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/ssr)).

## Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)

DDR programmes for ex-combatants are an essential component of post-conflict transformation. The surrender of weapons by combatants helps ensure that the arms can no longer be used for conflict or recycled into crime. But disarmament must be accompanied by demobilisation and reintegration programmes so as to provide alternative livelihood strategies for former combatants and fully rehabilitate them into society. Voluntary weapons programmes to remove weapons from civilian control can often be used as a complement to DDR and as a way of encouraging community development. This is also an entry point to SSR.

## Reform of legislation

Approximately 60% of SALW are estimated to be in civilian hands. While most countries have some legislation to control these guns,

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<sup>4</sup> See tip sheets on safety and security-related topics produced by the DAC Network on Gender Equality ([www.oecd.org/dac/gender](http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender)).

many are unable to enforce it, especially countries emerging from conflict. Donors may provide capacity-building support to train law enforcement officials and to develop the [judicial system](#) to ensure that appropriate weapons possession legislation is enforced. They can also help ensure that all guns are registered and their owners are trained to a minimum standard before being licensed. National parliaments also have a critical role to play in enacting appropriate gun control legislation and monitoring its enforcement.

Lack of similar legislation reform, or weak enforcement in neighbouring countries, can significantly undermine progress. It is therefore important to seek to harmonise legislation across regions, to avoid displacing illegal activities across the border. An example of an attempt to introduce harmonised legislative reform is the Nairobi Protocol, which covers eleven states in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions.

### Public education and awareness-raising

In many countries, guns are closely linked to identity and culture, and to perceptions of masculinity. For example, in parts of Latin America, gun ownership is a sign of strength and power, particularly among young men. Changing the perception of weapons can be done in many innovative ways. For example, Viva Rio, an NGO working in some of the most deprived and violent areas of Rio de Janeiro, has worked to overcome this perception in partnership with one of Brazil's most popular television soap operas. Public education is also a vital means of creating popular pressure for better arms control.

## KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN GETTING INVOLVED:

### Analysis<sup>5</sup>

- How is security provided in the community, and what functions do weapons play in society (e.g. cultural, physical protection, criminal gain)?
- What impacts are weapons having on the physical security of residents, and on conflict and livelihoods in this community?
- What are the key sources of weapons in the community, who are the suppliers, the users and the victims of weapons?
- What is revealed by disaggregating data by gender and age?

### Entry points

- What measures has the government committed to through international or regional agreements?
- Is there a national focal point for small arms and light weapons (a requirement of the UN Programme of Action)?
- Has a national report on small arms been submitted to the UN?
- Is there strong public feeling about levels of armed violence that can be harnessed?
- What linkages exist between your programme and arms issues (e.g. stakeholders, geographical location)?

<sup>5</sup> Example agency guidance on conflict analysis is provided on the DAC's CPDC webpage at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/analysis>). The DAC Network on Governance is looking at political economy analysis to identify good practices in using the different approaches, such as drivers-of-change analysis, (at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance>). See also [www.conflictsensitivity.org](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org).

- It is important to address both supply and demand factors, but it may be more appropriate to focus on one rather than the other.

### Engaging stakeholders

- Ask both men and women why they feel the need to arm themselves, and encourage them to identify alternatives to, and incentives for giving up weapons.
- Adopt a holistic approach to the problem, engaging non-traditional actors, especially civil society and the media.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING:

### Programme planning and coordination:

- Any small-arms programme should be informed by and designed around the stated priorities, objectives and policies of the national government.
- Developmental tools such as participatory methodologies can help to identify sources of demand for weapons, their impacts and subsequent community needs.
- Engage as many stakeholders as possible throughout the design and implementation of the programme in order to develop a holistic approach, looking at the possible impacts on the security system as well. For example, in government-led programmes, it may be beneficial to engage with general ministries such as justice and education ministries. Working with the media, parliament and civil society can create mechanisms for accountability on SALW issues. Women's groups traditionally advocate for improved arms control.

### Implementation:

- Supply and demand dynamics should both be addressed. Some arms control interventions, such as arms collection and destruction, may make communities more vulnerable to violence. For example, if the local use of weapons centres around cross-border cattle raiding, disarming communities on just one side of the border will alter the power relations between communities and increase insecurity. Phased interventions may help ensure that underlying sources of insecurity are addressed before disarmament.

### Monitoring and evaluation:

- Donors can play a useful role by maintaining an overview of development and [peace-building](#) activities, and ensuring that the appropriate linkages are made.
- When carrying out monitoring and evaluation, it can be helpful to consider whether small-arms programmes have contributed to broader peace and security.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Websites and reference documents can be found through [www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/themes](http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/themes).

See also OECD (2001), *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* available at [www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/preventionguidelines](http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/preventionguidelines).

## References

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#### **Links**

##### **Intergovernmental organisations:**

[Economic Community of West African States](#)

[European Commission](#)

[Nairobi Secretariat on Small Arms and Light Weapons](#)

[Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#)

[The Organization of American States](#)

[UN Department of Disarmament Affairs](#)

[UNDP Small Arms Unit](#)

##### **NGOs and academic institutions:**

[Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue](#)

[Centre for International Co-operation and Security, Bradford University](#)

[Control arms Campaign](#)

[Institute for Security Studies](#), South Africa

[International Action Network on Small Arms \(IANSA\)](#)

[International Alert](#)

[SaferAfrica](#)

[Saferworld](#)

[The Small Arms Survey](#)

[Viva Rio - Brazil](#)