

Preface

One of the legacies of conflict in Southern Africa is the glut of light weapons and small arms. These are being transported illegally across borders, where they are used to generate political instability and for criminal purposes in many settlements, rural and urban. Under these circumstances, programmes for democratisation (which include demobilisation, disarmament and policing) are being jeopardised to the point that many people feel the need to acquire weapons for self-defence, thus consolidating the illegal markets that thrive on such instability, chaos and fear. In consequence, communities have abandoned their traditional, negotiated mechanisms of conflict resolution and conflict management, seeking instead to resolve violent situations with solutions equally violent. Although in its infancy, a culture of violence has begun to emerge in the region, threatening democracy and development. This is inevitable because an increased availability of unregulated and uncontrolled light weapons in a national society erodes its value system and changes its individuals, making them more insecure – not less – and more violent.

The connection between despair, violence and intolerance and the increased availability of small arms is, and will continue to become, ever more apparent in the daily lives of populations. Since this is a product of the unholy alliance between conflict, international crime, black markets and guns, the international community has no choice but to accept that the control and regulation of trafficking in light weapons has become a matter of equal, if not higher, concern than arms control of a different kind.

Besides, while there is a market for light weapons, there will always be one for major conventional weapons, since the destabilisation wrought by the former, generates the need for increased protection and control, which is reflected in increases in military and security budgets.

With this context in mind, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa has developed its Arms Management Programme (comprising the first-phase project entitled *Towards Collaborative Peace* (TCP), the follow-on, *The Implementation Project* and various others), the aim of which is to study the dynamics of the illegal trade in small arms in Southern Africa.

In the course of this study, the correlation between an increased availability of small arms and the emergence of a culture of violence in transit and end-user societies will be demonstrated. The countries in the geographic region chosen manifest a number of similarities which permit their linkage for the purpose of the study. All of the countries analysed are either victims of the violence accompanying small arms proliferation or act as transit points from where weapons are distributed further afield. Likewise, all have been affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the existence of porous borders joining them to nation-states that have accumulated a massive surplus of light weapons as a result of decades of internal strife and ill-managed disarmament operations during multinational peace processes (i.e., Angola, Mozambique). Finally, all countries in the study are members of the same regional and sub-regional organisations, namely the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).¹

The Programme, therefore, seeks to discover what the nature of the small arms proliferation problem is in each of these countries; how increased availability of weapons affects the societies; and what structures within existing regional groupings could be utilised to diminish the flow and effects of light weapons proliferation in Southern Africa. Furthermore, the Programme seeks to implement a South-South approach in dealing with this issue by contrasting the existing trends in Southern Africa with other regions in the south. The southern part of South America was chosen as a viable comparative structure for a number of reasons. The countries chosen (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) have a certain number of problems in common, similar to those of Southern Africa, namely:

- a recent return to democratic processes and end to external conflict;
- regional disparity in indigenous production facilities for military equipment, including small arms and ammunition;
- the existence of non-state actors specialising in distribution and circulation of illegal goods, including drugs and light weapons; and
- membership in the same regional and sub-regional organisations – the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Southern Common Market (*Mercado Commun del Sur* (MERCOSUR)).

Both regions, moreover, face developmental challenges. This influences their need to open borders and allow for the easy access of goods and people

between member states at a time when reduced internal security threats have lowered the capability of all countries for effective policing.

The Arms Management Programme has a series of components of which the most important are field research; mapping and surveying of rural and urban communities to discover the extent of illegal small arms possession; generating an increase in public awareness related to small arms proliferation among SADC member states; research and writing; policy formulation and recommendations for proposing viable mechanisms for both the regional control of weapons flows and the reversal of a culture of violence at local level; and the facilitation of meetings to allow for interactions between inter-agency officials and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to discuss a co-ordinated approach and effective strategy for controlling this scourge.

The main purpose of the field research is to establish what the impact of ineffectual demobilisation and disarmament is on countries such as Mozambique and Angola; and what the effects are of the resulting excess of weapons on the surrounding countries. Particular attention is being focused on the way light weapons, available in such massive numbers, pervert the societies through which they transit, in order to determine to what extent a culture of violence follows in the wake of such indiscriminate proliferation of light weapons. So far, the examples uncovered in the field research touch upon such diverse societal elements as demobilised soldiers, refugees and other migrant communities, rural communities and urban populations of Southern Africa.

If the Programme's field research is beginning to show why light weapons should be more effectively controlled in Southern Africa, its publications highlight the underlying reasons for the occurrence of the proliferation of light weapons, the present dynamics of this proliferation and the way in which existing regional structures could be used to stem the flows. There are four books in the TCP project series and a number of monographs. The books serve to give prominence to a number of critical issues. Thus Volume 1, *Society Under Siege: Crime, Violence and Illegal Weapons* (ISS, 1997), looks at the global environment in which the proliferation of weapons occurs and the causes for such a proliferation in Southern Africa. Other books in the series will examine the existing

regional mechanisms that might be utilised as control vehicles for stemming the proliferation of light weapons in Southern Africa; the culture of violence which has emerged as a result of ineffectual controls and easy availability of light weapons in the region; the problems of surplus stocks and destruction of surplus and captured stockpiles; and the needs, problems and recommendations applied to the study of the culture of violence related to increased availability of small arms in the region.

To accompany the set of books, the project is publishing a series of monographs. These are designed to produce a comprehensive view of the actual status of small arms proliferation nationally and to cover general issues which are relevant to the ultimate recommendations of the entire project. Thus the monograph series includes work on the status of weapons flows in Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland; as well as the status of arms flows in the four MERCOSUR countries of South America and the record of gun buy-back programmes. All publications reflect, to a lesser or greater degree, specific issues which define or influence the proliferation of light weapons, as well as looking at the potential that local communities and regional organisations have for limiting and controlling the proliferation of light weapons and the effect of this phenomenon.

Since the Programme brings applied research to the field of light weapons control, it does not stop at field research and writing. Two further components deal with proposing specific recommendations for application at national inter-agency level, at regional organisation level and at local community level.²

National level. The channel for implementing the first type of recommendations is a set of workshops and conferences designed as inter-agency discussions between point persons dealing with weapons control at national level. This includes government officials, parliamentarians, the media and committed NGOs.

Regional level. To implement the second type of recommendations, the programme will work on another set of workshops and conferences designed as inter-agency discussions between point persons dealing with weapons control at regional levels; across regions; and internationally.

These two sets of actions permit transparency in the discussion and analysis of problem areas that influence effective policing of illegal weapons throughout the territory of SADC member states. Focal points here include legislation for the licensing of weapons; status of border controls for the detection of the transit and import of illegal weapons; and management of the grey area between legal and illegal weapons moving into and through countries. Special attention is also given to problem areas emerging as a result of increased weapons proliferation (i.e., conflict status, the role of transnational criminal organisations in Africa, and surfacing ethnic and political strife) and these are explored to assist in the development of preventative controls for reducing likely proliferation. Other more technical discussion areas take into account problems associated with destruction of existing surplus stocks of official legal weapons (mostly state owned); those associated with collection and destruction of weapons confiscated by the police and stored in police stations; and those associated with keeping central records and/or a registry of arms in the Southern African region.

The purpose of these components of the Programme is to draw attention to the fact that the excessive and destabilising accumulation, circulation, and proliferation of small arms in Southern Africa touches upon both the legal and illegal sides of the arms trade. There is also a recognition that the legal trade in arms may become illegal in no time, since control mechanisms to prevent this are insufficient. The solution to this problem is to design and implement a set of national and regional co-operation and co-ordination structures to ensure that: 1) legal weapons stay legal and under responsible management and control; 2) illegal weapons are detected and reduced; and 3) the fine line between legal and illegal is controlled and eliminated. These objectives are regional, national and local in character. In consequence, enabling mechanisms must be created that will facilitate the implementation of control and reduction recommendations. In this formulation it is important to differentiate between countries and localities which serve as supply elements (home-made weapons, trading centres for the sale of guns, weapons producers, holders of large stocks of surplus weapons, etc.), transit areas (as the bought weapons move across borders to a third destination) and end-user points (having a client base in the major cities serving the international and national criminal organisations, as well as individual criminals; and client groups that are based in countries that are in conflict).

Conclusion: The Links Between Development and Security and Between Education and Arms Control

It is important to understand that what is most needed for solving the problem of small arms proliferation and putting a stop to illicit arms trafficking in Southern Africa is the accessibility of information and the creation of enabling mechanisms for co-ordinated action. Fundamental to this formulation is the emphasis on information gathering and sharing between agencies, public awareness (including parliamentary committees) and an understanding of the limitations provided by the budget, the environment and the resource problem associated with control.

For these reasons, the Arms Management Programme at the ISS will continue to assist in fostering both understanding of, and discussion on, these issues, by undertaking field research (including survey and mapping of supply, transit and end-use points for small arms in Southern Africa); research, writing and dissemination of policy papers; research and policy recommendations for legislation, licensing of civilian-owned firearms and destruction of surplus weapons in Southern Africa; and the facilitation of national and regional interactions for the effective implementation of plans for illicit weapons at national levels within SADC member states, as well as for the co-ordination of control mechanisms at regional level.

Furthermore, this Programme is considering an addition of two components for 1998-2000: these refer to a survey of the problem related to children in armed conflict in Africa, and their connection to the proliferation of small arms and the emergence of a culture of violence in the region. The second component refers to an in-depth mapping and survey of the culture of violence and the firearm linkage within the Republic of South Africa at national and provincial levels. Finally, the Programme has also concluded initial discussions for joint projects with Saferworld (UK), the British-American Security Information Council (USA) and the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (Germany), as well as with the University of Nairobi (International Resource Group) (IRG) project on small arms. These projects will reinforce the international interactions of the Programme.

New NGO-governmental interactions need to be established in the pursuit of goals aimed at stopping illicit arms trafficking and encouraging disarmament world-wide. The ISS Arms Management Programme has

applied the present methodology to ensure simultaneous concentration on various facets: primary field research, transparency and sharing of information collected, responsible writing of recommendations for action at regional and local levels, and facilitation of discussion at interagency and international levels of ways in which to enhance existing mechanisms for rapid control. At the same time, fully understanding the relationship between development and security, the Programme interprets this in terms of local education and regional control. It has identified the link between increased availability of small arms and the emergence of a culture of violence through field research and systematic surveys in rural and urban environments in Africa. It is therefore part of the mandate of the Programme to put forward solutions to the regional control of arms trafficking and the local reversal of a culture of violence among the people in source, transit and end-user societies. The Programme is undertaking a pilot experiment in 1998 and 1999, aimed at working with local communities to enlist their voluntary participation in managing the weapons they possess in a more responsible manner, as a prior step to surrendering or licensing those that may be illegal. This model project will be documented and made accessible electronically for analysis by researchers world-wide. It was instituted in response to the gaps exposed by traditional gun buy-back programmes and the problems they brought to light. Thus, for the Arms Management Programme at the ISS, the key lies in the voluntary, cultural conviction that weapons must be managed responsibly; and that their indiscriminate use can endanger the safety and security of the community, destroying attempts to find non-violent means of resolving conflict

Virginia Gamba
Halfway House, South Africa
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Endnotes

- 1 South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, and Tanzania. As a result of the inclusion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into SADC, the programme will also incorporate the DRC into its list of countries.
- 2 Local: The third type of recommendation focuses on the creation of an education package to be applied by local communities for the reversal of a culture of violence influenced by increased availability of firearms.