

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Research

In 2003 I travelled to Kenya to carry out a study of demand and availability on that country's borders, the results of which were published in an ISS monograph titled "Guns in the Borderlands: Reducing the Demand for Small Arms." That project looked at local-level efforts to build peace and reduce demand for illicit guns in areas where government control was weak and international standards exercised little to no influence. The historical, geographic, and economic factors in the Mano River Basin provide a different backdrop from the constant low-level conflicts in East Africa, but there are factors driving demand that exist across those boundaries.

The Institute for Security Studies sponsored research in Sierra Leone and Liberia to identify factors influencing the demand for weapons in post-conflict contexts and efforts currently in progress at a local, regional or international level to reduce such demand. The specific goals were:

1. To identify trends that drive the demand for weapons and responses that could be implemented from a policy level to reduce this demand and limit the availability of weapons in the region.
2. To find resilient factors behind demand across boundaries of geography and culture.

Key Terms

Interviewing buyers, potential buyers, and sellers in a situation where a war very recently ended requires tact and flexibility. Many discussions were framed in terms of "peacebuilding" and the "sustainability or fragility of peace" instead of on the "demand for guns" or "small arms" to avoid misunderstandings and to prevent the misconception that those involved in the research were either affiliated with military intelligence of some kind or were interested in acquiring arms for their own use. The terms below are

used to conceptualise the research but not always to implement focus groups and interviews in the field.

Demand. Refers broadly to the ‘buyer’ side of the gun market (as opposed to manufacturers and suppliers). Buyers include individuals, militias, gangs, armies, and crime syndicates. Demand factors influencing buyers include state failure to provide security, civil conflict, systemic violence, and availability of guns. As long as demand goes unchecked, no amount of control over supply can adequately address proliferation.

Supply. Refers broadly to the ‘seller’ side of the gun market. Supply-side stakeholders include manufacturers, distributors, dealers, strategic network builders, and an array of both large and small-scale black market gunrunners. Most national and international bodies act to stem proliferation by regulating, licensing, and monitoring suppliers.

Demand-reduction measures. Any project, policy, or activity with a focus on buyers or potential buyers, with the specific aim to prevent gun acquisition or use. This includes, for example, the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution, youth education and alternatives to violence, and positive environmental and resource management.

Supply-side measures. Regulating guns by targeting manufacturers and dealers and regulating the transfer of SALW shipments through mechanisms like end-user certificates.

Research Framework and Methods

Seeking to understand and identify factors behind the demand for small arms and light weapons opens conceptual doors to different ways of understanding both international and local gun markets. It would be foolish to suggest that policy approaches aimed solely at reducing demand are enough to close borders to illegal weapons shipments. However, a balanced approach that builds local capacity to reduce demand while employing resources at the national and international level to regulate suppliers can be effective.

This research attempts to describe the demand side of the market in a post-conflict environment, specifically making reference to disarmament programmes and their effect on local and regional markets for illicit weapons. Some literature on Sierra Leone and Liberia has been derived from a United Nations (UN) mission-based perspective; I spent only one part of

the fieldwork (in Kambia) travelling with UN staff and otherwise made my own arrangements to access interviewees and focus groups through local and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other contacts.

The research was carried out in October and November 2004 in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In Sierra Leone, I visited the following cities and their surrounding areas: Freetown, Kambia, Koidu, Kenema, Daru, and Bo. A field trip to Liberia was limited to one week in Monrovia; the security situation at the time did not allow for travel to the provinces. Because of the sensitivities in the post-conflict context of both Sierra Leone and Liberia, interviews and focus groups were loosely structured to allow for different ways of approaching questions about gun ownership, conflict, and the sustainability of peace. Questions also varied for different interview subjects: a discussion with a police officer was not framed the same way as a youth focus group in the Freetown slums. The following are questions that remained common to most interview subjects:

- Now that the war is over, what is the biggest challenge to sustaining peace?
- Can peace be sustained once the UN mission has pulled out?
- Was DDR successful? Why or why not?
- Are there guns still present in your community even after DDR and/or CACD?
- (If yes), who in the community is keeping weapons?
- (If yes), why do they feel the need to keep weapons now that the war is over?

Interviews were conducted one-on-one with government and UN officials, corporate representatives, police officers, soldiers, and NGO staff. Focus groups were conducted with youth in both urban and rural environments and in small communities where practicality prevented individual private discussions. Youth focus groups were convened with the assistance of local NGOs conducting social work and research on an ongoing basis with the youth and community. Rather than attempting to randomise the selection of participants or organisations, local partnerships were formed on an ad hoc, ongoing basis to facilitate maximum exposure and time spent in each location. The National Movement for Justice and Development, through

Kambia District Map (where AFD field research was done)

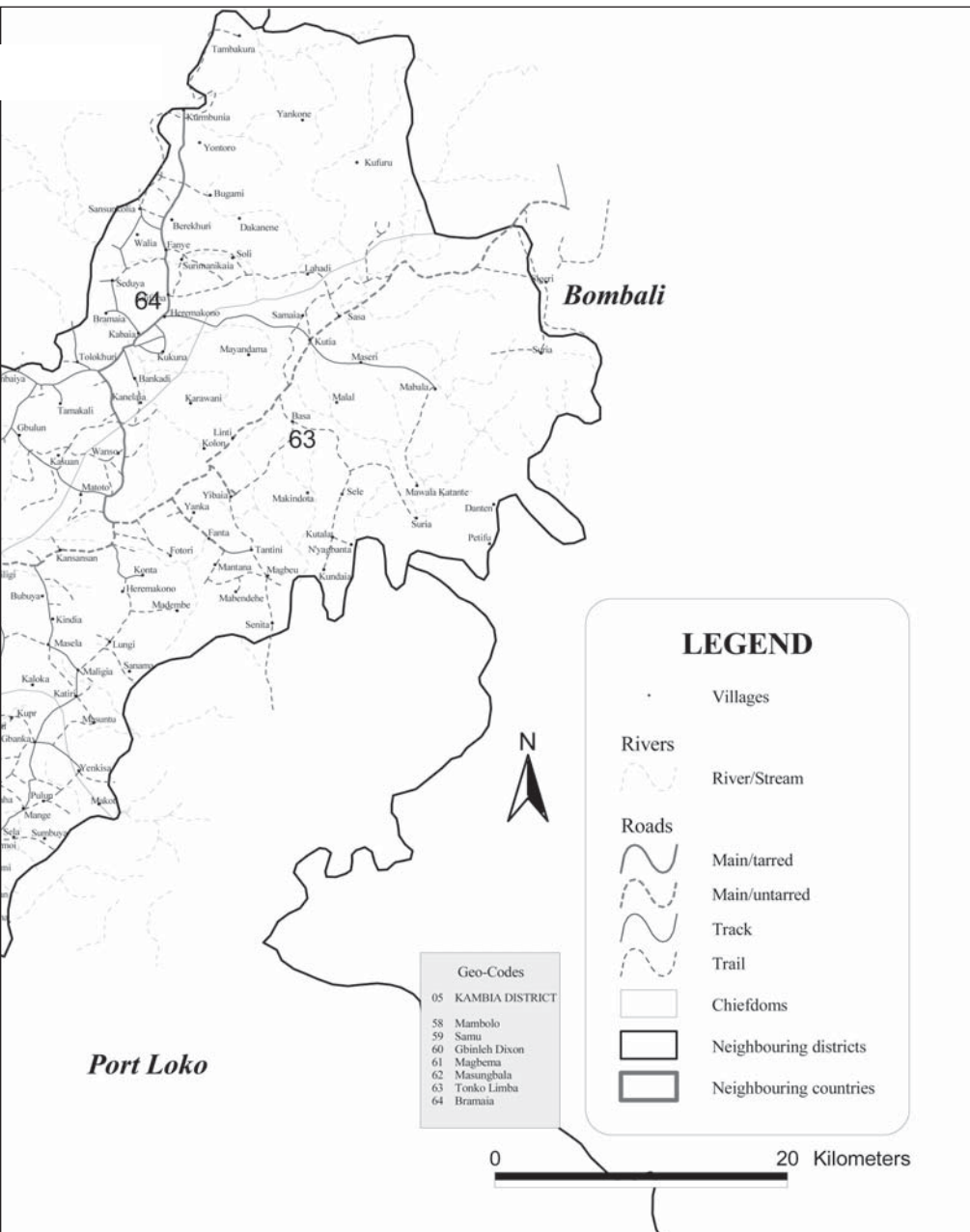


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The boundaries and names on this map do not imply official acceptance or endorsement by the United Nations

Please contact the Sierra Leone Information System, located at UNOCHA, MAP CODE: PL05_01





their head office in Freetown, staff in Koidu, and director in Kenema, were extremely helpful in locating community-based organisations, youth groups, and peace building programmes.

My time in Kambia was unique to other fieldwork locations because I travelled as an observer with the UNDP Arms for Development Programme. I was driven in a UN vehicle by a UN Civilian Police Officer and several representatives from the Sierra Leone Police Firearms Division in Freetown. The police conducted cordon-and-search operations in numerous villages, specifically with the purpose of certifying the area in question arms free so that development money could be released to the community. I observed and spoke with police teams as they went door-to-door, and entered many village homes to see how the search operations were conducted. A more detailed account of the operation, which was highly successful (no illegal weapons were found), is in Chapter Two, and a brief discussion of the Arms for Development Programme as it relates to DDR is in Chapter Five.

Sierra Leone, although it is far more peaceful than it was several years ago, still presents huge hurdles to travel and fieldwork, including both roads and bureaucracy that were at times impassable. Government and NGOs in Freetown have different goals and interpretations of problems than those in the provinces, a point which provincial interviewees never hesitated to make clear (“This isn’t Freetown!”). It was precisely for that reason that every effort was made to visit a representative number of people, groups, and organisations in various parts of the country. Although some factors behind demand remain consistent at the conceptual level, not only between provinces in Sierra Leone, but also across the larger divide between West and East Africa, it became clear that the challenges facing different parts of Sierra Leone must be understood in their individual contexts.

Because of the sensitive nature of some of the discussions, some names of interviewees, even relatively high profile ones, have been withheld. Recorded interviews and notes will be kept for verification purposes.