

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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“Resources such as diamonds, rubber, and timber have sustained civil war in the Mano River Basin and provided buying power to purchase the estimated eight to ten million small arms circulating in West Africa. Despite (and in some cases, because of) the presence of United Nations missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia, political, criminal, and violent factions have continued participating in the international weapons trade. Recently concluded disarmament and demobilisation in both places have not made a significant dent in the functioning of illicit gun markets. On the contrary, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes have created their own weapons markets across borders because prices for handing over a weapon vary from country to country.”

State-centred solutions to illicit arms proliferation do not work when the state in question cannot fund traditional security operations. Borders are porous, and though they should be closed or better monitored, that is not a short- or medium-term option. Instead, this monograph looks at the factors behind the demand for weapons in Sierra Leone and Liberia, focusing on the buyer side of the market to determine whether proliferation can be stemmed, or at least slowed down, through more creative measures. Increasing funding for education that reduces the number of illiterate and at-risk young people; creating youth agricultural empowerment initiatives; continuing demobilisation for ex-combatants beyond cantonment sites; encouraging civic education for adults; and building infrastructure to connect border communities to legal markets in urban centres are all measures that will impact deeply on the way Sierra Leone and Liberia continue to emerge from the destruction of war and rebuild infrastructure for a better future.