

THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are wielded and abused by diverse actors around the world, including individuals, state militaries, and non-state actors. Their widespread availability, relatively low cost and ease of concealment and transport make SALW universally appealing to violent individuals and groups during war and peace. The proliferation of SALW in fragile contexts, which often lack functioning governance structures like border controls, often catalyzes or exacerbates violent conflict. To this end, SALW function as a violence multiplier that impedes human security and sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges the development and human security threats posed by SALW and provides a unique opportunity for states to address them through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.4, which calls for a significant reduction in illicit financial and arms flows. The Sixth Biennial Meeting of the States on the Programme of Action (BMS6) provides states a platform to reinforce their commitments to addressing SALW and identify ways to increase political will, generate resources and increase donor coordination on SALW in support of SDG 16 implementation. This brief considers evidence related to the effectiveness of SALW control efforts and proposes tools and processes that would improve their efficacy.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

There is a broad and comprehensive set of instruments in place to control and monitor SALW proliferation; however, their implementation is inconsistent and, at times, ineffectual. Implementation approaches often lack context-specific nuances, gender analyses and links to other relevant security and development frameworks. For example, implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted in 2013, has drawn a significant amount of attention to the need for improved export control systems. The ATT does not, however, offer sufficient specificity to respond to the context-specific needs inherent in SALW proliferation.

When locally implemented disarmament programs lack sufficient context- and conflict-sensitivity, they risk creating security imbalances between stakeholder communities, within and across national borders. In Mali, for example, where previously successful programs had been able to reduce weapons flows from Libya, progress was later reversed as the result of shifting conflict dynamics that were not incorporated into the control programme.

SALW is a highly gendered issue that requires gender-sensitive approaches in any implementation efforts. For instance, SALW are often used to facilitate sexual and gender-based violence, such as the abduction of 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria, in 2014 and mass rapes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010. They also reinforce violent masculinities and gendered social norms wherein men must exhibit dominance and physical aggression to affirm their masculinity. The inclusion of a provision on gender-based violence in the ATT was monumental. However, little has been done to incorporate broader gender concerns into arms control and disarmament activities on the ground.

The incorporation of SALW proliferation into broader human security and development discourses is key to building political will and encouraging multi-sector approaches. The latter is especially important in fragile contexts where complex security threats and development challenges require multifaceted approaches to SALW, not least through measures that go beyond international export control. In the 1990s, coordinated efforts in the



western Balkans successfully built networks between officials, established trust-building and information-sharing networks among key SALW control actors, and secured stockpiles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Refocus efforts to address SALW proliferation on the UN Program of Action (POA)

- Recognizing context specificities does not preclude collaboration and coordination between states on common challenges. Global mechanisms like the UN POA, which promotes coordination and exchange between nations, could help to customize control mechanisms and implementation approaches to unique country contexts in a way that takes into account lessons learned and best practices.
- States attending the BMS6 in June 2016 should articulate their commitment to the POA and recognize that it must be implemented parallel with ATT implementation.

2. Incorporate a broader spectrum of actors and analyses into the development of arms control and disarmament approaches.

- Acknowledging the gendered aspects of SALW proliferation is central to understanding the social structures associated with weapons, namely the linkages between violent masculinities and gendered social norms and the proliferation and ownership of SALW. Gender-sensitive analyses might be able to identify approaches that better address the gendered aspects of SALW proliferation. Inclusion of women's rights and gender equality advocates will ensure that gender is mainstreamed across SALW non-proliferation activities.
- To be successful, disarmament and arms control programs must include stakeholders from different sectors and expertise areas. As such, implementation approaches should be developed in consultation with legal, political and technical experts as well as development practitioners and civil society representatives from affected communities. Civil society should play a critical role in promoting disarmament and preventing SALW proliferation by facilitating local dialogue, building local ownership and changing attitudes about weapons and violence.

3. Use networks and new knowledge to build political will for arms control and disarmament.

- The establishment of parliamentary networks is one way to promote the ratification of arms control legislation and encourage and oversee national implementation efforts. Such networks can also be used to facilitate regional and global exchanges between legislators from different countries, increasing political ownership of non-proliferation. SALW-related issues must be understood in technical and political terms in order for sustainable solutions to be developed and successfully implemented.
- Increase research on the effects of SALW proliferation and the efficacy of various control mechanisms, particularly with regard to the indicators on SALW and armed violence in the 2030 Agenda.