

## **Demand reduction in action**

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My name is Roselyn Mungai, I am Programme Officer for Peacebuilding and Conflict Management for Oxfam GB in Kenya. We are a proud member of IANSA.

I am going to give an example of a programme which has successfully reduced the demand for guns in Northern Kenya.

This is an arid area; communities practice nomadic pastoralism. There is a serious lack of basic resources – education, health, infrastructure and communications. Lack of opportunities for trade and commerce, means that the scarce resources must be carefully and jealously protected.

These are border areas, surrounded by countries which have undergone major civil strife. Because of the porosity of the international borders there is easy movement of human beings and arms, which threatens communities.

There are also ethnic tensions between groups because of clan differences, and clashes over access to water and pasture for cattle.

In some areas, cattle rustling have traditional cultural roots - as a rite of passage for young warriors and also to generate a bride price. However, the influx of semi-automatic weapons has made this a deadly pursuit, increasing the lethality and frequency of the raids.

Despite the political will of the Government of Kenya to provide protection to its citizens, lack of resources means that the security needs of the population in this vast expanse of land go unmet. This is further compounded by the nomadic nature of the communities and the lack of permanent settlements.

As a result of these huge challenges to security, communities have been forced to arm themselves to protect their family and property. Some small elements in these communities use the weapons for criminal purposes.

Until recently, the result of the availability of weapons and lack of security meant that travelling in the region was extremely dangerous. For example, the road from Nairobi to Wajir, at the Kenya-Somalia border, was completely impassable without the use of an armed police escort.

Indeed, Oxfam vehicles have been stolen, shot at, and staff seriously injured. This meant that Oxfam could not provide the level of service that it wanted to local communities. Even the police escorts have been attacked and people killed.

To address this problem, Oxfam in partnership with local communities, civil society and government, has developed an innovative programme to manage conflict and build sustainable peace.

The programme supports indigenous approaches to conflict resolution which include establishment of peace committees, using a council of elders, revitalising traditional justice systems, enhancing community policing initiatives, and other forms of community-government partnerships.

The programme works to develop a culture of peace through peace education projects in schools. Due to cultural and religious limitations, the programme has had to actively enhance participation of women – which it does by providing separate space for women’s participation and dialogue through women’s peace forums within the peace committees.

Oxfam also addresses one of the underlying causes of the conflict by providing water sources, health, schools and humanitarian assistance. All of these elements work together to reduce the demand for arms.

The success of the programme means that communities can now manage their own conflict.

A major retraining of police, especially in matters of human rights and women’s rights, has ensured that there is growing confidence amongst the communities to report crime and to work together to deal with crime.

Where community confidence has increased, people have voluntarily handed in their firearms – this reflects their lack of demand for firearms, as well as their confidence in the authorities that such arms won’t be sold back into the community.

Where this confidence is not yet present, arms are retained in the communities, but through community education, their use is reduced and controlled.

In one area, a government disarmament programme was planned in response to the extremely high level of armed crime and violence. But at the request of the communities, it was put on hold to allow them time to fully implement this programme and voluntarily surrender their firearms. This was highly successful, and must be replicated in neighbouring regions and countries to ensure its continuing success.

This example from Kenya, shows that work to address arms supply, must be complimented by integrated and multifaceted work to reduce arms demand.

Such programmes which seek to reduce arms demand can have 3 elements:

1. Firstly, address the root causes of the conflict/violence, to give people viable alternatives to picking up the gun. Poverty and violence are linked in a vicious cycle, with the easy availability of small arms, and particularly semi-automatic weapons, as in Kenya, making the situation worse.

People without other economic opportunities will take to armed violence as a way of securing money to support themselves and their families and thus small arms become tools of trade. Alternative and sustainable livelihoods must be provided.

2. Secondly, prioritise security sector reform. When people lack confidence in their government’s ability to protect them from criminals or armed insurgents, demand for small arms will increase.

Reform measures aimed at improving the functioning as well as transparency and accountability of security forces and criminal justice systems can reassure citizens that they need not be armed.

3. Lastly, incorporate local knowledge and recognise the importance of local-led initiatives.

Genuinely participatory and community-led initiatives have a greater chance of influencing the reduction in demand for weapons.