Small Arms as a Barrier to Sustainable Peace and Development in Somalia

By

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Abstract

Somalia is frequently referred to as a fragile state due to decades of protracted conflicts, which have led to widespread instability and weak governance. Volatility in the country is linked to the widespread proliferation of illegal Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs). SALWs are any man-portable lethal weapons designed to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive. They are a category of firearms designed for individual use and characterized by their compact size and portability. For three decades, the country has been plagued by conflict and violence, primarily driven by the proliferation of these weapons, which are frequently acquired through illegal channels. These weapons are held by various actors, including armed groups, militias, and civilians, creating a significant challenge in regulating their distribution and use. This article aims to examine the relationship between illegal SALWs proliferation and sustainable peace and development in Somalia. The research employs a case study approach, analyzing primary and secondary data to understand how SALWs undermine peace and development in Somalia. Adopting social conflict theory, this study views the societal environment through the lens of power struggles, inequalities, and conflicts among different groups. According to this theory, social structures generate tension and disparities, ultimately leading to violence and conflicts. The findings suggest that the availability of SALWs make it easier for insurgent groups in Somalia to engage in violence and criminal activity, such as piracy and extortion, exacerbating the instability in the country. The study proposes that to achieve sustainable peace and development in Somalia, it is essential to address the issue of small arms and implement measures to reduce their proliferation and use, such as stricter laws and enforcement, disarmament programs, and efforts to disrupt the illegal arms trade. In addition, there is a need for greater regional cooperation as a recommendation to manage the problem of illegal SALWs in Somalia

Keywords: *Small Arms and Light Weapons, Development, Conflict, Sustainable Peace, Somalia.*

Introduction

Protracted armed conflicts in Africa have been driven by many factors, including poverty, poor governance, resource scarcity, competition for power, and external intervention (Mthuli, Ncube & Jones, 2013). These conflicts have left millions of people displaced, killed and maimed, causing immense economic damage and political instability. These conflicts have spanned several decades, ravaging communities and hindering social and economic development. One significant factor contributing to the perpetuation of these conflicts is the widespread availability of weapons, often obtained through illegal means (Joseph, 2013). These weapons serve as catalysts for violence, as they are utilized by various armed groups, militias, and even civilians. Controlling the spread and use of these weapons has proven to be a complex challenge, impeding efforts to restore peace and security in affected regions.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) are a category of firearms designed for personal use. They are characterized by their compact size and portability, including handguns, rifles, submachine guns, light machine guns, and various other weapons. In Somalia, SALWs are easily available including firearms, grenades, and other portable weapons. The Horn of Africa has been ravaged by conflicts catalyzed by increased SALWs. Somalia is one country in the Horn of Africa where SALWs have proliferated and been used by various actors, including government forces, armed groups, and civilians (Ken, 2013). The availability of SALWs in the continent has further triggered the creation of insurgent groups that seek to exert power and control over their territory. Sustainable peace and development involve building lasting peace, security, and stability within communities, nations, and alongside balanced social and economic progress (Igbuzor, 2011). The key features of sustainable peace and development include conflict prevention and resolution, social inclusivity and justice, good governance and rule of law, and economic development (Ssereo, 2013). The process involves defining and addressing the root causes of conflicts, supporting reconciliation, promoting human rights, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources. Sustainable peace and development seek to create thriving communities where every individual can prosper and is free from inequality and violence. It incorporates the absence of armed violence and conflict, as well as stability in social, political, and environmental spheres. Sustainable peace and development envision a society where communities and nations live in harmony, without the threat of conflict and violence. This leads to social and economic well-being.

It guides actions and policies aiming to create a just, equitable, and sustainable future for all in society.

The conflict in Somalia has been ongoing since 1991, when the civil war broke out following the coup d'etat against President Siad Bare (Ajú, 2022). The conflict has since been protracted by the lack of a unified governance of the country, regional conflicts, and the presence of numerous armed groups. Small arms have posed a significant barrier to achieving lasting peace. Their proliferation has surged since the civil war's onset, fostering a culture of violence, instability, and insecurity (Bradbury, Mark & Sally, 2010). Illegally acquired, these weapons continue to fuel violence and insecurity. Armed groups emboldened by the availability of arms challenge central government authority, leading to multiple conflicts and a dearth of political dialogue (Moller & Bjorn, 2009). This makes it challenging for the Somali government to implement effective security measures, as these arms can be used to intimidate civilians and undermine the rule of law. Consequently, achieving control and stability in certain areas remains elusive for the government and peacekeeping forces (Williams, 2020).

This article aims is to examine the nexus between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the fragile situations in Somalia that have impeded sustainable peace and development. Additionally, this article discusses the intervention efforts implemented toward building sustainable peace in Somalia and further provides recommendations for addressing the challenge of SALWs in Somalia. Qualitative research methodology was adopted with information sourced from primary and secondary sources.

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis for discussing the role of small arms as a barrier to sustainable peace in Somalia is rooted in social conflict theory. Social conflict theory examines society through the lens of power struggles, inequalities, and conflicts between different groups (Jeong, 2019). The theory focuses on the role of social structures and institutions in defining societal dynamics and how the social structures perpetuate tensions and disparities. Social conflict theory identifies the society as incorporating different groups with differing goals and interests leading to competition for power, resources, and influence. The social conflict theory provides valuable insights into understanding how small arms have been a barrier to sustainable peace in Somalia.

According to Väyrynen (2023), social conflict theory offers insights into the role of power, inequality, and social structures in generating and perpetuating conflicts. This theory helps us

understand how the proliferation of small arms worsens existing social tensions and contributes to ongoing violence. In Somalia, the unequal distribution of power and resources, stemming from weak governance, clan-based power dynamics, and political instability, has fueled competition among different groups (Zahar & McCandless, 2020). This competition has ignited inter-group tensions and led to state fragmentation. Weapons are viewed as symbols of power and dominance, with armed groups using them to assert their authority. This perpetuates a cycle of violence as factions arm themselves to gain power and control. Ultimately, this creates a security dilemma significantly influenced by the proliferation of small arms, acting as a barrier to sustainable peace in Somalia.

Methodology

This research applied case study research design for in-depth investigation and analysis on how SALWs have been a barrier to the realization of sustainable peace in Somalia. The study applied qualitative methods in data collection and analysis and aimed at understanding, describing, and exploring the phenomena of SALWs and sustainable peace in Somalia. For data analysis, themes were generated based on the study objectives, identification of emerging patterns and possible conclusions and recommendations. The main areas defining the study included Somalia and Kenya. The study incorporated 100 participants, including Somali government officials, officials of the African Union and IGAD Special envoy to Somalia, the citizens of Somalia both in Kenya and Somalia, personnel from peace organizations, clan elders, and security agencies in Somalia.

Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to recruit participants for this study and ensure that key informants were reached for the relevant information. The study data was gathered through a mixed approach from key informant interviews with relevant respondents (regional peace organizations, policymakers, officials from relevant Government Ministries, and security departments). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) complemented this, which was conducted through unstructured questionnaires (The Somali citizens, etc.). Secondary data (from books, journal articles, credible reports, etc.) was collected from published sources that included hard and soft library material available in national, institutional, and organizational libraries.

Results and Discussion

Information from primary and secondary sources provided key findings which aligned with the research objectives. This section provides an in-depth examination on how SALWs undermine sustainable peace and security in Somalia and discusses the key factors that facilitate the proliferation of SALWs, including terrorism and armed groups, porous borders, weak governance, youth radicalization, poverty, and clan conflict. The discussion also centers on efforts implemented at different levels that aim at combating the proliferation of SALWs in Somalia.

How SALWs Undermine Sustainable Peace and Security in Somalia

Post-1980 witnessed a surge in SALWs proliferation in Somalia, resulting in a staggering estimate of 600,000 to 750,000 weapons in civilian hands, with only about 14,000 registered, indicating the widespread presence of illegal weapons (GunPolicy, 2017). This increase of illegal SALWs can be attributed to clan-based self-defense militias and the activities of violent groups like Al-Shabaab, posing a substantial obstacle to sustainable peace in the country. Somalia's dire peace situation is reflected in its ranking of 156 out of 162 countries on the 2022 Global Peace Index (GPI), with a GPI score of 3.125 (Global Peace Index, 2020). The GPI places Somalia alongside Iraq, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Syria, and South Sudan as one of the world's least peaceful states. The GPI scale ranges from 1 (most peaceful) to 5 (least peaceful); the factors contributing to Somalia's low ranking include easy access to illegal SALWs, political instability, violent crimes, displacement of people, external and internal conflicts, among others.

Years of instability in Somalia have created fertile ground for the proliferation of illegal SALWs. This diffusion and proliferation of illegal SALWs have significantly fueled ongoing conflicts, directly impacting physical security and livelihoods (Joseph, 2013). Somalia serves as a prominent example. The inadequately trained and equipped police, military, and correctional services have limited capacity to manage this issue. Weak governance institutions have contributed to the rise of illegal SALWs in Somalia (Ken, 2013). The state of institutions in Somalia, and the absence of stable governance structures, have led to increased anarchy and militias, which remain a major obstacle to achieving lasting peace in the country.

Somalia has many clan-based militias and violent Islamist movements that trigger serious security threats to the citizens and government. The armed groups in Somalia include Al-Shabaab and AhluSunna Waljama'a, among others (Ahmed & Reginald, 2009). These groups have acquired arms and ammunition from national and international sources, and neighboring countries

(Bradbury, Mark & Sally, 2010). According to Small Arms Survey (SAS) report, illegal SALWs in Somalia have originated from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran (Small Arms Survey, 2014) through armed traffickers. SALWs have been diverted into Somalia by arms traffickers. The presence of large armed groups in Somalia has made the availability of illegal weapons easy and simultaneously created a roadblock to sustainable peace in the country.

The lack of effective state control over the flow of SALWs into and within Somalia has contributed to the country's high levels of violence and insecurity. The absence of a central government and the presence of multiple armed groups have made it difficult to regulate the trade in weapons. The porous nature of Somalia's borders has made it easy for smuggling weapons into the country.

Factors Facilitating Proliferation of SALWs in Somalia

Illegal arms trade is a major contributor to conflicts and violence in Somalia. The main drivers of this trade include weak or ineffective government regulations and enforcement, political instability, organized crime and terrorism, and a demand for weapons in conflict areas (Silvestri, 2019). The drivers of illegal SALWs operate in a cyclical fashion where one driver fuels another, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and conflict.

Terrorism and Armed Groups

Terrorism and armed groups have been significant drivers of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Somalia, posing a hindrance to sustainable peace and development. According to 75 percent of the responses, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has exacerbated the security challenges in Somalia, leading to increased violence, insecurity, and human suffering. One of the main ways terrorism and armed groups contribute to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Somalia is through their involvement in illicit arms trafficking (Ken, 2013). These groups often engage in illegal arms smuggling and trafficking, taking advantage of porous borders, weak law enforcement, and corruption. They acquire weapons from various sources, including illicit arms markets, transnational criminal networks, and state stockpiles.

Furthermore, 65 percent of the respondents emphasized that terrorism and armed groups in Somalia exploit social and economic grievances to recruit supporters, enticing them with access to small arms and light weapons. This has led to a surge in armed fighters and the spread of weapons. The presence of these groups also erodes the rule of law and weakens state institutions

(Joseph, 2013). They often challenge both central and local authorities, creating a power vacuum that hampers the state's ability to regulate and control the flow of small arms and light weapons. Insufficient governance and weak law enforcement have facilitated the widespread availability of weapons in the country, fueling their proliferation.

Porous Borders

Porous borders in Somalia have been significant drivers of SALWs proliferation, posing a hindrance to sustainable peace and development. The lack of effective border controls has facilitated the illicit flow of weapons, exacerbated security challenges, and contributed to violence and instability. One of the main ways porous borders contribute to the proliferation of SALWs in Somalia is through smuggling and trafficking. The country shares porous borders with neighboring countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia, which make illegal arms trade lucrative (Mohamed, 2010), especially among the pastoralist communities. The lack of proper border controls, including weak or corrupt customs and law enforcement officials, inadequate infrastructure, and limited surveillance, make it easier to smuggle weapons across the borders and enter Somalia.

Participants in the study were asked to identify the key elements that trigger the proliferation of SALWs. Multiple respondents affirmed that illicit arms trafficking networks take advantage of these porous borders to smuggle weapons into Somalia, including through clandestine routes, hidden compartments, and other smuggling techniques. These weapons often come from various sources, such as illicit arms markets, transnational criminal networks, and state stockpiles, and end up in the hands of armed groups, terrorists, criminals, and other illicit actors within Somalia. The flow of SALWs across porous borders can also fuel inter-communal conflicts and exacerbate existing tensions. In Somalia, where clan-based conflicts and disputes over resources are prevalent, the influx of weapons from different sources can escalate local disputes and result in further instability, displacement of communities, and loss of life.

Weak Governance

The prolonged conflict in Somalia for decades has weakened government institutions and structures (Musau & Stephen, 2013). Weak governance in Somalia has been a significant driver of SALWs proliferation, posing a hindrance to sustainable peace and development. The lack of

effective governance structures, institutions, and the rule of law has contributed to the uncontrolled flow of weapons, exacerbating security challenges and undermining efforts to achieve lasting peace and development. Somalia lacks effective arms control measures. The absence of robust regulatory frameworks for arms acquisition, possession, and transfer, as well as weak enforcement of existing regulations, has created an environment where weapons easily fall into the wrong hands. This includes illicit arms markets, armed groups, terrorists, criminals, and other illicit actors who exploit the lack of governance to acquire and use weapons for their nefarious purposes.

Participants also identified weak governance as a barrier to proper SALWs management in Somalia. This governance issue extends to the accountability and oversight of state security forces, including police and the military, leading to problems like corruption, mismanagement, and weapon diversion. Consequently, weapons intended for official use can end up in the illicit market or be employed by non-state actors, further fueling SALWs proliferation. Weak governance in Somalia has led to state fragmentation, with various actors competing for power and limited territorial control. This, in turn, has fueled the rise of armed groups and militias acquiring weapons through illicit means to advance their interests, perpetuate violence, and destabilize the region. These armed groups, including clan-based militias and extremist organizations, contribute to insecurity and the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons within the country.

Clan Conflicts

Participants recognized clan conflict as a key driver of instability in Somalia, hindering national unity and stability. Clannism has played a significant role in the prolonged collapse of the Somali state, with clan-based governance deeply ingrained. From 1969 to 1991, Said Barre employed a clan-based divide-and-rule strategy, appointing loyal politicians from specific clans to control the military and civil institutions (Moller & Bjorn, 2009). This resulted in a coalition government dominated by the Ogadeen, Dulbahante, and Marehaan clans at the expense of others, fostering animosity and suspicion among clans and giving rise to clan-based rebel groups (Joseph, 2013). The availability of arms further fueled the conflict, enabling these groups to consolidate power in line with their interests.

Clannism has been a political ideology in Somalia, including power, territory expansion, resource distribution, and appointment to influential positions (Bradbury, Mark & Sally, 2010). Clannism has become the modus operandi of the political-economic arrangement of the Somali society. Manipulation of leaders within the clans has been advanced to national levels as every clan leader

pushes for their selfish interests. These clans, therefore, seek to remain relevant by ensuring they have military power within their communities. They embark on arming their militia to remain powerful and influential. This derails sustainable peace as supremacy within the clan level which advances to national politics and governance, making Somalia fragile.

Factionalism has made governance in Somalia difficult as different clans amass power and compete over natural resources and political power (Ken, 2013). Sporadic clashes have also been imminent between clans over urban land ownership. Divisions across clans have weakened the country, increasing fragility situations. The resultant effect is an increase in the proliferation of illegal arms, further limiting the realization of sustainable peace.

The Somali government forces have also been getting the support of local clan militias in launching an offensive against Al-Shabaab (Hassan, 2023). The collaboration has been impactful in creating security coaction that has been important in fighting the Al-Shabaab. Different operations carried out by the pact have resulted in the killing and wounding of Al-Shabaab militants and displacing them from their areas of operation. The clan factor has thus been important in supporting government operations against Al-Shabaab.

Youth Radicalization and Poverty

Poverty has been a key driver of Somalia's fragile situation. Young people drop out of school as they are being lured into militias and criminal groups (Mustapha & Yerima, 2021). The school enrollment has been reducing owing to dropouts to join militia groups, poor education infrastructure, and lack of security. Radicalized groups in the country are deeply rooted, amassing many youths within their network. Groups such as Al Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), and Al-Shabaab have been pursuing Somali youths with the prospect of livelihood (Joseph, 2013). The study participants asserted that the country's poverty situation pushes the youths to consider joining criminal gangs and radicalized groups to earn a living. This further increases demand for small arms as these youths are trained to fight. In addition, the allure of religious fundamentalists coupled with bad governance has significantly contributed to youth radicalization in Somalia.

Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a high poverty rate and lack of access to basic necessities. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHDI) ranks Somalia as the third most destitute country in the world (OPHI, 2015). The country has been plagued by civil war, drought, and famine for decades, contributing to the dire economic situation. The lack

of infrastructure and government institutions has made the country's economic development difficult. Many Somalis rely on international aid and remittances from abroad to survive. The presence of insecurity coupled with Al-Shabaab and other terrorist organizations have scared off potential investors (Joseph, 2010).

Instability in Somalia has further worsened the country's economy, resulting in widespread poverty (Ken, 2013) and rendering many people jobless and unable to participate in economic activities. Further displacement has also limited economic activities as looting and extortion have become common. About 7.1 million people in Somalia suffer humanitarian crises and emergencies with 3.9 million in food security stress (AfDB, 2022). The Human Development Index ranks Somalia at position 165 out of 170 countries (AfDB, 2022). The severe lack of basic economic and social development has been blamed on the protracted conflict fueled by increased illegal arms in the hands of civilians and militias.

Efforts to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms in Somalia

Over the past two decades, Somalia, in collaboration with the international community, has taken significant steps to address the issue. The efforts have been at local and national levels as well as international arena. The policy framework has been advanced at different levels to control the spread of illegal SALWs. The policy framework includes:

International and Regional Efforts

The international community has been supporting efforts aimed at restoring sustainable peace. The main impediments to sustainable peace have been terrorist groups, including Al-Shabaab, that have infiltrated the country's security system and managed to amass a huge number of weapons. International efforts have been focusing on increasing the capacity of Somali security forces by bringing in more troops to support security efforts (Silvestri, 2019). The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), comprising troops from different countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Djibouti, and Burundi, have supported Somali security forces and managed to be in control of Kismayo, Mogadishu, and south-central parts of Somalia. Recovery of these regions from Al-Shabaab has helped restore the government's efforts towards peace. The international community and AMISOM have supported security efforts financially, with military hardware and logistics (Farah, Ahmad, & Omar, 2015).

In 2013, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) lifted the arms embargo on Somalia (UNSC, 2014). This decision aimed to bolster the Somali government's security systems by allowing the acquisition of weaponry to combat insurgents, including Al-Shabaab. The embargo lift facilitated the construction of security infrastructure and supported the Somali National Army. Collaboratively with development partners, the Somali government has constructed armor storage facilities, whereby some are designated for storing recovered illegal SALWs and ammunition (Uchegbu & Maiangwa, 2022). Capacity-building efforts have been led by the UN, including bodies like UNMAS, UNIDIR, UNDP, and UNISOM, along with other stakeholders such as the European Union (EU) and NGOs (Mustapha & Yerima, 2021). The international community's endeavors have been focused on assisting the government in fulfilling its responsibilities for managing weapons and ammunition.

Common Security and Defense Policy in Somalia (CSDP) – The European Council has been spearheading CSDP mission and operations in Somalia intending to consolidate and enhance EU's response towards the evolving security context and situation and strengthening its role as the maritime security provider (European Council. 2022). The EU CSDP has been providing support to Somali security forces regarding training and equipment capacity to ensure they take over security responsibilities. The mission is to assist Somalia in enhancing police capacity to contain illegal SALWs and strengthen the Interpol national bureau in Mogadishu.

Regional efforts, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), play a crucial role in mitigating the spread of arms and restoring sustainable peace in Somalia. AMISOM, authorized by the United Nations Security Council, has provided security and stability in Somalia. Its primary objective is to support the Federal Government of Somalia's efforts to establish a secure and peaceful environment. AMISOM has contributed to the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups, conducting operations to reduce the availability and influence of small arms in the country. Through its peacekeeping mandate, AMISOM has worked to build the capacity of Somali security forces and promote stability, creating conditions for sustainable peace.

IGAD has facilitated diplomatic negotiations and dialogue among different Somali stakeholders to address the root causes of conflict. It has played a vital role in mediating and supporting peace agreements, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering regional cooperation to restore stability in Somalia. These regional efforts have focused on comprehensive approaches to tackle

the arms spread and promote sustainable peace. They involve strengthening border control mechanisms to prevent illicit arms trafficking, supporting disarmament initiatives, and facilitating the reintegration of former combatants into society (Uchegbu & Maiangwa, 2022). According to a respondent from IGAD, the organization has prioritized capacity-building programs for the Somali security forces, including training and equipping them to address security challenges and enforce arms control measures effectively.

National Level

Efforts towards combating the proliferation of small arms have been advanced at the national level as the government develops and implements structures that promote sustainable peace. In August 2012, the National Constituent Assembly adopted the Provisional Constitution of Somalia (Silvestri, 2019). This marked a pivotal step in ensuring the government attains some level of legitimacy and authority. The international community recognized and backed the efforts, notably the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the United States (US), among other countries and organizations. However, the proliferation of SALWs and prolonged insecurity have kept the country isolated.

The Somali government has adopted the National Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Program to reduce the circulation of small arms. This program encourages the voluntary surrender of weapons by individuals, groups, and communities (Hassan-kayd, 2019). It includes creating a national database of small arms and light weapons and destroying these weapons and ammunition. The Somali National Security & Stabilization Plan (NSSP) incorporates several measures to reduce availability of small arms and light weapons (Williams, 2020). These measures involve establishing a Weapons Destruction Program, a Weapons Collection and Control Center, and a weapons tracking system. Additionally, the NSSP proposes a Weapons Identification and Disarmament Program for registering, controlling, and destroying illegal weapons and ammunition.

Somalia's National Arms Control Policy (NACP) resulted from collaborative efforts between the government, the African Union, and the United Nations to regulate arms, ammunition, and related materials transfers. The policy mandates that all such transfers must be authorized and documented by the Ministry of Interior and National Security. The Somali National Security Architecture focuses on strengthening security forces' capacity to combat SALWs proliferation, including establishing a national weapons register and implementing disarmament, demobilization, and

reintegration programs. To enhance small arms and light weapons control, the Somali government passed the 2014 Arms and Ammunition Control (LAC) law, which prohibits the import, export, manufacture, possession, transfer, and use of such weapons and establishes a National Arms and Ammunition Control Commission to oversee its implementation (UNIDIR, 2022).

The government offers amnesty to insurgents and conducts rehabilitation programs. Many participants stressed the importance of security sector reforms in countering small arms proliferation. These reforms include intensive training for security personnel, including police and the army. The government has also established a robust system to monitor the marking, registration, and licensing of arms held by civilians and private security firms. Marking weapons has positively impacted combating illegal arms, leading to a significant reduction in SALWs diversion to the illegal market (Snodgrass & Mwanika, 2009). Additional measures encompass eliminating the illegal SALWs market, developing policies for civilian arms licensing, constructing arms storage facilities with development partners, conducting training on governance focusing on transparency, accountability, and impartiality, and enhancing security training for the army and police.

A participant from the Ministry of Interior noted that the Somali government has been working with the United Nations and the international community to strengthen the capacity of its security forces and police to control the circulation of small arms and light weapons. This includes training, equipping, and deploying police and security forces to enforce the LAC and other relevant laws. President Hassan, early this year, declared a ban on people from carrying weapons on the streets of Mogadishu, the country's capital (Hassan, 2023). If effectively enforced, such a ban could help reduce the level of violence and insecurity in the city and limit the ability of criminal and terrorist groups to operate. The ban could help to reduce the risk of armed conflict, criminal activity, and terrorist attacks in the city. It could also make it easier for law enforcement agencies to identify and apprehend individuals involved in illegal activities, including the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Local Level

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been at the forefront at local levels in implementing initiatives aimed at promoting peace through curbing illegal arms in Somalia (Moller & Bjorn, 2013). The CSO introduced Neighborhood Watches, a community-level security system promoting nationwide conflict prevention and political dialogue. Local community organizations

are actively engaged in this effort. The Coalition for Grassroots Women Organizations (COGWO) supports voluntary demobilization programs, aiding the reintegration of former criminals and militias into communities (Mohamed, 2010). Additionally, COGWO offers alternative livelihood opportunities for unemployed youth and women through empowerment initiatives like business clubs and microfinance. This helps prevent the involvement of youth and women in radicalized groups, which often promise a source of livelihood to recruits.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Opportunities

The effective management of SALWs throughout their lifecycle has been crucial in facilitating operational readiness, reducing the risk of diversion or loss to non-state armed insurgents, and protecting national strategic assets. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). The FGS has placed the national security agenda as a top priority, ensuring efforts towards management of weapons have been on top gear. The Office of National Security has been working with state security institutions to develop a national ammunition and weapons management framework (Snodgrass & Mwanika, 2009). This has enhanced the government's management of weapons and helped to reduce arms in the wrong hands of civilians.

The partial suspension of the armed embargo imposed by the UN Security Council in 2013 allowed the FGS to strengthen its forces (Hassan-kayd, 2022). The FGS imported arms, ammunition, and military equipment to bolster the armed forces' capacity. They have successfully fulfilled their commitment to ensure government control over these weapons, preventing unauthorized use that would violate the arms embargo. In 2018, President Abdullahi Farmaajo signed the Control of Arms and Ammunition decree, signaling the country's strong commitment to effectively manage arms. This decree led establishing a centralized system responsible for authorizing the importation and transparent, accountable distribution of weapons and ammunition to federal and state forces.

The government, together with AMISOM, developed the Halane facility, a new training ground for the SNA (Ajú, 2019). This facility acts as the central armory for managing and processing imported weapons. It has improved weapon registration and marking and enhanced oversight and accountability in weapon distribution. With assistance from the international community, the government integrated arms registration into the security sector's biometric system, ensuring that individuals owning arms have their biometric data on file with the SNA. This has significantly reduced illegal arms in the country.

Establishing the Joint Verification Team (JVT) by FGS helped mitigate the risk posed by post-distribution diversion of weapons (Mustapha & Yerima, 2021). The JVT facilitated routine inspections on security forces stockpiles, supply chain, and inventory records. The team has conducted numerous site visits to verify weapons and ammunition across the Somali Police Force, Somalia National Army, and Custodial Corps (Mustapha & Yerima, 2021). The team has been physically counting weapons and ammunition and verifying them against records. The JVT has strengthened post-distribution control and oversight thus enhancing logistical capacity and working modalities as a key area for the FGS.

Challenges

Weak state institutions in Somalia present a significant challenge to addressing the small arms issue (Moller & Bjorn, 2013). The government faces limitations in regulating small arms, hindering efforts to control their proliferation. The informal economy presents a major challenge as small arms are often tied to illicit trade. Political instability and ongoing conflict in Somalia further complicate the issue, as armed groups and militias rely on small arms to advance their agendas. Despite previous efforts, SALWs proliferation remains a significant concern, fueling insecurity and conflicts. Stronger measures are needed to combat illegal SALWs trade and promote peace and development.

Prospects

The international community and other actors are committed to supporting Somalia in addressing the small arms issue. The UN and various international organizations have provided resources and expertise to bolster Somali security forces, improve border control, and enhance regional coordination to prevent small arms flow (Silvestri, 2009). The Somali government has shown a commitment to addressing the issue of small arms, and there is political will to make progress in this area.

Many respondents believe that peacebuilding efforts can address Somalia's conflict root causes, including small arms issues. These efforts can decrease small arms demand and foster stability by tackling underlying grievances. Strengthening state institutions is vital for handling the small arms problem, with a capable government regulating their use to curb weapon flow, promoting lasting peace and development. Regional cooperation offers potential by enhancing border control and preventing arms from crossing borders. Community-based approaches are also effective, engaging

communities in disarmament, raising awareness, and providing alternative livelihoods to deter violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite huge efforts in curbing illegal SALWs and pushing for sustainable peace at local and national levels, Somalia still faces challenges and resistance. These efforts have not adequately resolved conflicts in the country. This article recommends the following:

Ending the conflict: Ending the conflict in Somalia is crucial for reducing small arms proliferation. The conflict drives the demand for small arms. It normalizes their use in dispute resolution, enabling armed groups to easily obtain and employ them for violence against civilians and other groups. Ceasing the conflict will diminish the demand for small arms and limit armed groups' access to them. Furthermore, it will establish a stable, secure environment, instilling confidence in the government and security forces' ability to protect citizens from armed violence, reducing the perceived need for individuals to acquire small arms for self-defense.

Strengthen governance institutions: Enhancing governance institutions is vital to tackling illegal SALWs and Somalia's fragility. Ineffective information sharing and coordination between government agencies hinder resilience-building efforts, a major obstacle in managing illegal weapons. Strengthening governance capacity across institutions bolsters the government's legitimacy and authority to fulfill its mandates.

Address the proliferation of illegal SALWs: The government should develop a national institution to manage and control SALWs (Farah, Ahmad & Omar, 2015). The agency needs sufficient funding, personnel, and policy development to address the possession and spread of SALWs. Strengthening border security and implementing effective monitoring and control measures will help prevent SALWs from entering the country.

Sensitization on disarmament: Decades of conflict in Somalia have led to the accumulation of large stockpiles of illegal arms among civilians, fostering a pervasive gun culture deeply ingrained in societal beliefs (Snodgrass & Mwanika, 2013). There is a need to develop and implement mind and behavior change programs that focus on dissuading the population from the gun culture.

Post-conflict reconstruction: Prolonged conflict in Somalia has left most people illiterate, impoverished, and without essential social services. High youth unemployment and the proliferation of illegal SALWs lead to increased armed violence. Investing in socioeconomic

sectors is crucial to offer Somalis alternative livelihoods, reducing their reliance on armed conflict (Hassan-kayd, 2019). This will help curb illegal SALWs and an avenue for sustainable peace.

Regional cooperation: Porous Somali borders facilitate the illegal arms flow within the country. Regional security collaboration, particularly in countering illicit SALWs, is vital for achieving lasting peace (Gurses, Rost & McLeod, 2008). In addition, regional cooperation will help support political peace efforts in Somalia to ensure strong governance, political will, and stability.

Conclusion

The proliferation of SALWs in Somalia poses a major obstacle to sustainable peace and development. Key drivers, such as terrorism, armed groups, porous borders, and weak governance, contribute to the uncontrolled weapon flow, worsening security challenges and impeding lasting peace and development. These factors exploit the availability of small arms and light weapons, perpetrating violence, destabilizing the region, and threatening civilians and the state. The consequences of this proliferation are dire, leading to increased violence, crime, and instability, which hinder the government and international actors in establishing effective security and the rule of law. It diverts resources and attention from crucial development priorities, making it challenging to provide basic services, maintain law and order, and promote sustainable development.

Addressing the issue of small arms proliferation in Somalia requires comprehensive and multi-faceted efforts. This includes strengthening arms control regulations, improving border security, enhancing accountability and oversight mechanisms for state security forces, and promoting political stability, inclusivity, and state-building processes. It also involves addressing the underlying drivers of insecurity and instability, such as poverty, inequality, and grievances, through socioeconomic development, community resilience, and addressing root causes of conflict.

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