BUILDING THE BRIDGE

Commentary on Arms Control to Reduce Violence, Prevent Conflict and Advance Sustainable Development

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

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ARMS CONTROL TO REDUCE VIOLENCE, PREVENT CONFLICT AND ADVANCE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The impact of armed violence is significant in both conflict and non-conflict settings, ranging from direct effects such as deaths, injuries, or psychological harm, to long-term effects such as mass displacement and restricted access to health, education and livelihood, which impede investment and economic growth. Arms —in particular small arms, light weapons and explosive weapons—remain the primary tool of violence in affected environments.

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* places arms control, peace and security squarely within the scope of prevention and development thinking and actions. States acknowledge that sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security and that peace and security will be at risk without arms control. Uncontrolled proliferation, misuse and diversion of arms has implications for the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those relating to peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16), poverty reduction (SDG1), economic growth (SDG8), health (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5), and safe cities and communities (SDG11).

Yet, there is scope for enhancing the shared understanding among arms control, prevention and development communities on the many areas where the successful achievement of conventional arms control objectives would benefit the implementation of the prevention agenda and the SDGs. Research indicates that more can be done to identify and exchange on good and emerging practices across these communities; to gather data more systematically and to share and analyze lessons learned; and to promote an integrated approach among these communities during strategic and operational planning and implementation.

Recognizing this, in 2018 the United Nations Secretary-General called for the integration of arms control into preventative thinking and actions as part of his *Agenda for Disarmament*, *"Securing Our Common Future"*.[1] Building on this Agenda, UNIDIR, together with partners, has initiated research to brings new insights into good practices and lessons-learned for integrating conventional arms control into preventative thinking and actions in achieving sustainable development. Results from this research will be presented in form of meetings and written outputs.

1 WWW.UN.ORG/DISARMAMENT/SG-AGENDA/EN/.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS THAT GUIDE THIS EFFORT:

How well are arms-related risks and impacts understood by prevention and development practitioners?
How are arms-related risks integrated into violence monitoring and early warning mechanisms, development-related assessments, as well as conflict analysis frameworks? How are the impacts of arms understood by conflict prevention, development, and humanitarian actors to inform preventative thinking and actions?

How can the prevention and development communities better integrate and utilize arms control frameworks and tools?
How can arms control contribute to leaving no one behind and achieving the SDGs? How have development and prevention plans and assistance frameworks integrated arms control related activities? To what extent is arms control considered as part of programming to address violence and strengthen national institutions? What incentives and approaches exists to overcome current capacity and technical gaps?

What integration efforts are working?
What lessons have we learned? What are some examples of good practices at the national and regional levels to integrate arms control in achieving prevention and/or development objectives? What effective entry points exist for utilizing arms control into prevention and development activities? What are the essential elements and pre-requisites for successful integration efforts?

TO REDUCE ARMED VIOLENCE, DISRUPT THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR ARMS AND AMMUNITION

Robert Muggah and Katherine Aguirre

Every year hundreds of thousands of people die violently as a result of armed violence – in simmering conflicts, as a result of extremism, and especially crime. Millions more are permanently physically maimed and psychologically scarred by gun violence. These violent deaths and injuries constitute a massive loss of productivity and hold back achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

And while armed violence is a genuinely global challenge, it is overwhelmingly concentrated in **Latin America** and **Africa**. Reducing the incidence of armed violence in these two regions could make a significant dent on the global burden, contributing to the achievement of SDG 16 for arms and ammunition.

Whether it occurs in Latin America or Africa, armed violence is multi-factorial. Several structural risk factors stand-out including the political exclusion, social and economic inequality, concentrated poverty, prolonged under- and unemployment, high levels of impunity, the

mismanagement of resources and a legacy of conflict and crime. Measures to prevent and reduce armed violence – whether pursued in conflict zones or crime-affected inner cities – increasingly focus on mitigating risks and strengthening protective factors. They typically involve hard and soft measures, including controlling the supply and demand for arms and ammunition.

Figure 1.

Comparing global conflict-, terrorism- and homicide-related deaths: 2010-2017

	Conflict	Terrorism	Homicide
2010	30.867	7.827	370.187
2011	38.687	8.246	372.467
2012	73.725	15.497	374.070
2013	105.401	22.273	368.305
2014	174.615	15.881	368.713
2015	120.209	14.160	372.636
2016	106.640	12.809	369.964
2017	95.495	10.285	369.542

Sources: UCDP, GTD, Homicide Monitor

Figure 2.
Regional breakdown of homicide rate, 2000-2030

Sources: Igarapé Institute [2]
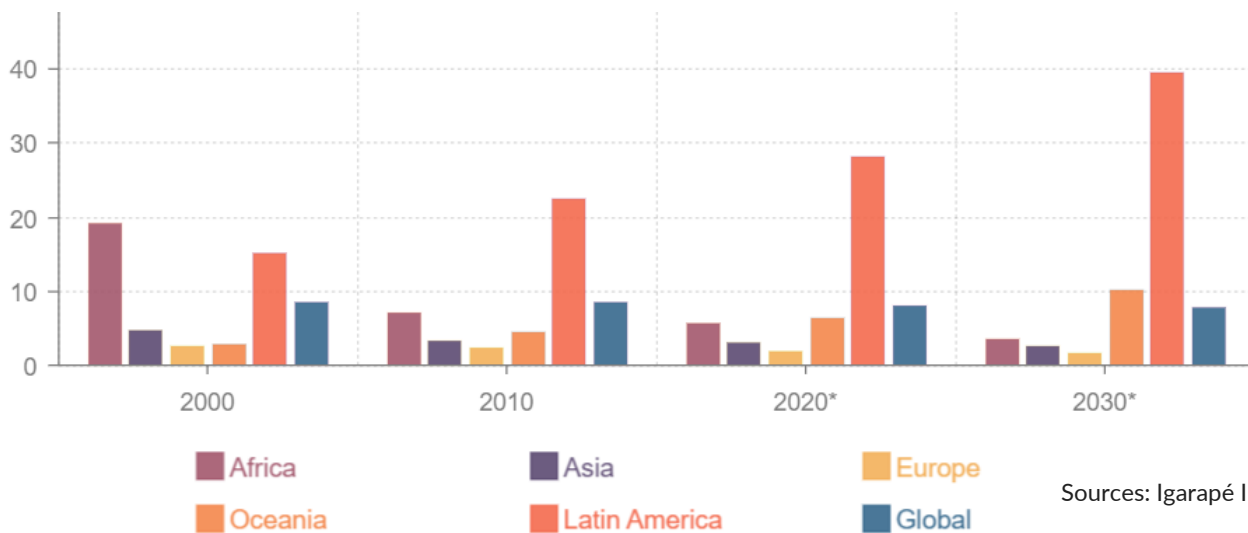
Shrinking Supply

Historically, conventional small arms control measures focused narrowly on regulating the supply of (illicit) firearms, parts and components, and ammunition in order to disrupt armed violence. The intention was to prevent the export, import, diversion, availability and end-use of weaponry to and by actors involved in conflict, extremism and crime. For example; **the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Program of Action on Small Arms (PoA), the OAS Protocol - CIFTA, and the AU Strategy on the Control of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons**

all set out legal and political norms, standards and rules to curb the movement of firearms from legal into grey or illegal markets, among other things.

Across Latin America and Africa, regional organizations, national governments, civil society groups and others have supported supply-side measures. Strategies involved restrictions on sales based on human rights criteria, transparent end-use verification, and robust regulations around retail, licensing, ownership and storage for public and private actors alike. The United Nations has supported large numbers of projects that, among other things, update national firearm legislation, mark and tracefirearms, and improve oversight over military, police and civilian stockpiles.

Peace support operations in Latin America and Africa have also deployed *supply-side* measures including seizing, collecting, and destroying illicit firearms. Ceasefires

2 Projections based in https://igarape.org.br/en/homicide-dispatch-2/

and peace agreements often include explicit provisions for the "micro-disarmament" or "disarmament" of government forces and armed non-state actors, including rebels, militia and paramilitary groups. This may involve the storage of small arms and light weapons in a verifiable manner or collecting and publicly burning arms as part of a wider disarmament, demobilization and reintegration campaign. In the absence of formal peace accords, the capture and voluntary collection and destruction of arms and munitions is common.

Disrupting Demand

Over the past few decades, **demand-side efforts** have evolved to reduce the misuse of arms and ammunition. These measures tend to be more "developmental" in character, and have been tested by a wide range of international, national and community-based organizations.

The emphasis on demand-side reduction can be traced to the initiatives such as the **Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence**, as well as policy guidance on armed violence reduction generated by the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,

the **International DDR Standards,**

the **MOSAIC (formerly International Small Arms Control Standards**

and programs adopted by the United Nations Development Program, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, and many others.

Demand-side efforts focus on adjusting the individual and collective rationale and justification to access and use illegal firearms. Projects may seek to re-engineer the preferences, prices and resources available to acquire weapons and ammunition. Demand-reduction measures have also included monetary and non-monetary incentives – **though strict "buy-backs" are now avoided** owing to lack of impact. Today, weapons collection programs are often paired with the provision of public goods to communities and neighborhoods. Investments are intended to improve safety and security, strengthen social cohesion and efficacy, and encourage residents to reject norms condoning (illegal) firearms carrying and use.

There are many examples of demand-driven firearms control measures in Latin America and Africa. For example, in United Nations mission and non-mission settings, so-called **"weapons for development"** projects flourished during the 1990s and 2000s. These interventions were mobilized on the basis of participatory plans defining community

development priorities. Working through local leadership structures, they offered a range of investment options for beneficiaries who voluntarily surrendered arms and ammunition. In other instances, the focus was on "putting weapons beyond use" by creating confidence-building mechanisms to ensure arms are carefully stored and managed. Likewise, **"weapons free zones"** are a common strategy in areas experiencing high levels of crime and gang violence.

Integrated Approaches

In recent years, there have been concerted efforts to bring both supply- and demand-reduction measures more tightly together. In Latin America, so-called "citizen security" programs are common. These typically combine community policing, focused deterrence and firearms collection together with preventive strategies emphasizing early childhood prevention, education and employment for at-risk youth, and place-based urban renewal schemes. The Igarapé Institute has mapped more than 150 separate interventions featuring arms control components in Latin America.

Integrated strategies are associated with significant improvements in safety and reductions in violence. Today, many of them are supported by

multilateral development banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank, agencies that have statutory constraints when it comes to engaging on issues related to firearms and ammunition.

Meanwhile, in Africa, the United Nations and others are also experimenting with so-called "**community security**" and "**community violence reduction**" programs that combine supply and demand reduction. The United Nations Development Program, for example, has invested in several

Community security strategies often seeking to align them with national development plans or equivalent frameworks. Meanwhile, the Department of Peace Operations has supported community violence reduction in half a dozen peace support operations with a view of shifting individual and group preferences for firearms through the provision of tailored incentives. In some instances, these initiatives also include the updating of firearm legislation, strengthening of policing and penal capacities, and the collection and destruction of firearms and ammunition from non-state armed groups.

There are real opportunities to dramatically reduce armed violence in Latin America and Africa. This requires setting bold targets – such as dropping homicide by half in the next 15 years. It also necessitates investment in data-driven and evidence-informed strategies, **informed by what works**, at the regional, national and metropolitan scale. If public, private and civil society authorities can redouble efforts focusing on **hot spots** and combining supply and demand measures, it may be possible to achieve the bold targets set by the SDG 16.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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