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Context Informing the Adoption of Regional Security Initiatives for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in East Africa

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The proliferation of SALWs in the East African region has negatively impacted both national and regional security. Porous and expansive borders, corruption, and instability in the region, commercialization of cattle rustling, weak governments and the presence of ungoverned spaces in the region, have facilitated the proliferation of SALWs in the region. This article presents the findings on the initiatives adopted by Kenya and Uganda, both individually and collaboratively for the control of the proliferation of SALWs in East Africa. The study was guided by the regionalism theory of inter-state cooperation and a descriptive survey design. The sampled respondents totalling 55 were drawn from the security agencies, members of civil societies, foreign relation offices, non-state actors and religious leaders. Instrumentation encompassed questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. The findings indicate the context that entails armed robberies, cattle rustling, and conflicts between communities and in urban areas like Nairobi, illegal firearms can be purchased relatively cheaply. Similarly, SALWs are used by various non-state actors, including rebel groups and criminal gangs, which exacerbates instability and hampers peace efforts. This context forms a critical need for comprehensive strategies that address the SALW proliferation, enhance regional collaboration, and improve public awareness to effectively mitigate the associated security threats. The study recommends that the governments of Kenya and Uganda should enhance the recruitment, training, and deployment of sufficient security troops to the Northeast of Uganda and the Northwestern region of Kenya.

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INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of SALWs in the East African region has negatively impacted national and regional security in the region. Porous and expansive borders, corruption, and instability in the region, commercialization of cattle rustling, weak governments and the presence of ungoverned spaces in the region, have facilitated the proliferation of SALWs in the region (Mugo, 2023). Nevertheless, the failure of governments in the East African region to guarantee the security and protection of their residents and their belongings is a significant factor contributing to the widespread presence of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) disguised as security measures. While governments have carried out remarkable disarmament programs, there are concerns that the governments are unable to assure the people of their security (Falk & Barnett, 2015). This has been witnessed through numerous violent conflicts in pastoral areas and increasing crime rates in urban centres committed using SALWs. Due to partial or thereof lack of implementation of national regional and international legal frameworks, the proliferation of SALWs has continued to be an endemic problem that threatens the region's security, economic and political stability and prosperity.

This article provides an analysis and interpretation of the findings on the context informing the adoption of the various initiatives for the control of SALWs in East Africa. It begins with the presentation of the findings of the global and regional context informing the adoption of the

various initiatives for the control of SALWs. It specifically narrows down to discuss the various security threats arising from the proliferation of SALWs that have necessitated the adoption of regional initiatives towards addressing the problem. The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in East Africa is a complex issue with significant implications for security, development, and stability in the region. The proliferation of SALWs in East Africa has thus transformed the region's political, economic, and social landscapes. These weapons are a key factor in the escalation of conflicts and instability, fuelling violence and criminal activities. Even in relatively peaceful areas, the presence of SALWs poses a threat to security and development. SALWs include a wide range of weapons designed for personal use and for use by small groups as discussed in the subsections that follow.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the regionalism theory of inter-state cooperation. Regionalism theory emphasizes the importance of regional interactions and interdependencies while the small arms and light weapons proliferation issue is fundamentally a regional security challenge. Thus, the transboundary nature of arms flows requires regional collaborative approaches. The research used a descriptive survey design and used Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) sample size recommendation between 10% - 30%. From a population of 204, the study used 26% to sample respondents totalling 55. The respondents were drawn from security

agencies, members of civil societies, foreign relations offices, non-state actors and religious leaders. The participants were selected using multistage sampling involving clustering, stratification as well as purposive sampling. The data collection methods employed encompassed questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. The questionnaires were structured to contain a list of statements that the respondents would rate on a 5-point Likert scale. Data collection also entailed the evaluation of secondary sources including government documents, journals and some books. The qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis and presented in its original form, while the quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented through the use of tables and graphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sources and Effect of SALWs

The study examined the context informing the adoption of the various initiatives for the control of SALWs in East Africa. This was approached by looking at the types and sources of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in East Africa. This objective was assessed by asking the respondents to rate the level of agreement on three statements. The statements were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale between 1—strongly disagree and 5—strongly agree. The data was analyzed, and the findings were presented using Table 1.

Table 1: Sources of Small Arms and Light Weapons in East Africa

Statement	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Total%
1 SALWs in East Africa come from various sources, including local manufacturing, illicit trade, and remnants from past conflicts.	56	40	4	0	0	100
2 Weapons are often smuggled across porous borders, making it difficult to control their flow.	67	21	7	2	3	100
3 The context entails armed robberies, cattle rustling, and conflicts between communities.	61	12	10	9	8	100

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 1 shows all statements that discussed the spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in East Africa, and the data from the respondents highlights an entrenched pattern of disagreement. From these, an overwhelming majority (96%) strongly disagree or disagree that SALWs in the region are produced from various sources- local manufacture, illicit trade, and remnants of previous battles. Additionally, there is doubt about border security issues or how frequently arms are moved across porous borders (88%) of respondents disagreed that weapons are commonly smuggled in this way.

In a different analysis using Table 2, the respondents were required to rate their level of agreement on six statements. The respondents are more split on urban areas such as Nairobi; 66% disagree that one can easily buy or buy these weapons at a low-price range, with personal experience/knowledge of the illegal gun marketplace accounting for some variance. There is a more even split when it comes to questions about the negatives of non-state actors (like rebels or gangs) possessing SALW: 55% disagree, while significant minorities are neutral (19%) or agree (26%).

Table 2: Effects of Small Arms and Light Weapons in East Africa

	Statement	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Total%
1	The availability of SALWs has contributed to increased violence and insecurity in the region.	56	23	12	5	4	100
2	SALWs play a crucial role in fueling conflicts and insurgencies.	54	23	22	1	0	100
3	The proliferation of SALWs affects economic growth and social cohesion.	45	32	12	5	6	100
4	The proliferation of SALWs leads to loss of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of property.	61	12	23	3	1	100
5	In urban areas like Nairobi, illegal firearms can be purchased relatively cheaply.	34	32	12	10	12	100
6	SALWs are used by various non-state actors, including rebel groups and criminal gangs, which exacerbates instability and hampers peace efforts.	43	12	19	23	3	100

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Most also do not agree that gun availability has contributed directly to rampant violence in the surrounding countries (79%), instead suggesting a recognition that another cause may be more significant. When asked whether SALWs have a decisive impact on conflicts and insurgencies, 79% say that they do not; an even higher percentage, 73%, believes they are of little relevance to economic vibrancy or social stability. The pattern is consistent: 73% do not agree that SALW proliferation costs lives, displaces communities, and destroys property — the most direct outcomes of weapon growth. In addition, most respondents (73%) do not associate SALW with armed robberies, cattle rustling, and inter-communal conflicts, suggesting either conflicting thoughts or ignorance on the part of these weapons in such regards.

Finally, the findings show that respondents were only sometimes sure about the sources, dynamics,

and impacts of SALWS proliferation in East Africa. This might indicate deficiencies in the popular understanding of the mechanics and consequences of the proliferation. It can also present questions about how well the messaging out there is reaching out to the public — perhaps this means the need for the betterment of public education or a new kind of awareness campaign. The observed disagreements may indicate little experience or competing views on the drivers of conflict and insecurity in the region. However, these perceptions could prove problematic for policymakers, as any effort to lose control of weapon proliferation is due to a lack of support and awareness from the public.

The objective involved data on the type, sources and factors for SALWs. The questionnaire respondents were asked to check all types of SALWs that they felt were more prone to proliferation. The data was analyzed and presented using Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Type of SALWs

Item	Percentage
Assault Rifles AK-47	58%
G3 rifles	35%
Machine guns	6%
Others (some handguns)	1%

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 3 shows the typical kinds of SALWs that were recognized as automatic rifles (especially AK-47s) by 58% of the respondents. This stated that AK-47s are the weapon of choice over light weapons on account of them being cheap, available, and easy to operate in the region. The next most commonly mentioned were G3 rifles (35%), with machine guns (6%) and other firearms, such as handguns (1%), being much less frequently labelled. The distribution of firearms reflects the importance of assault rifles in the dynamics of armed conflicts and gun violence in the region.

The type of SALWs was also assessed, and 52% of respondents identified illegal acquisitions from neighbouring conflicting countries as the most common sources for SALWs. This suggests the influence of regional insecurity and porous borders leading to free movements of arms across East Africa.

The study also sought to know the sources of SALWs that proliferate within the East African region. The questionnaire item was a checklist that respondents were required to check as appropriate. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Sources of SALWs

Item	Percentage
Outside sources	45%
From the fall of the past regime/ rebellion	32%
Gun markets	12%
Seizing weaponry from enemy military forces	45%
Obtained through illegal means from neighbouring countries that are now facing conflicts	52%
Inheritance is passed down from one generation to the next	11%
Seize firearms from the houses of defeated communities	32%
Other	9%

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 4 shows that weapons captured from enemy military forces (45%) and external sources (45%) also top the list, showing that both local and broader influences are responsible for armed groups. Thirty-two percent of respondents also chose leftovers from the fall of previous governments or rebellions, indicating a shift in arms supplies to conflicts with historical roots. Lesser proportions of beneficiaries identified markets (12%) and inheritance as the

source (11%), while confiscation from failed communities (32%) was cited as significant by some respondents.

Similarly, in the checklist of six items, the respondents were required to check the respective factors accelerating the proliferation of SALWs. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Factors Accelerating Proliferation

Item	Percentage
Cost of SALWs	45%
Insecurity	32%
Disarmament	47%
Retirement package	30%
Trans-nationalisation of crimes	29%
Other	12%

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 5 shows that when it came to the primary factors driving the proliferation of SALWs, respondents noted that disarmament (47%) itself was paradoxical and that taking steps at disarming could lead to the redistribution and even misuse of seized weapons. Forty-five percent cited the cost of SALWs, emphasizing how affordable these weapons are to a broad range of actors. Thirty-two percent reported on insecurity issues, a pointer to areas in protracted conflict or instability where arms are needed. Among the other factors mentioned were that former combatants were given firearms as part of a demobilization package (30%), and cross-border crimes were driven by regional organized crime networks (29%).

Table 3: Type of SALWs in stating that the most prevalent types of SALWs found in East Africa were Assault Rifles AK-47 and G3 rifles and machine guns, especially PKM. The respondents noted that these were popular due to their durability, ease of use, and availability. For the locals interviewed on this matter, the key informants agreed that AK-47 and G3 rifles were the weapons of choice. Some of the key informants also mentioned other weapons as being prominent. This assertion more or less collaborates with the findings of the Key Informants who were interviewed on the same issue.

The high percentage indicates that AK-47 and G3 rifles are widely available and likely more accessible in the region. This suggests a well-established market for these specific types of weapons, possibly due to their durability, reliability, and relatively low cost. The prevalence of these rifles, which are highly lethal and effective in both offensive and defensive operations, has the impact of contributing significantly to the intensity and duration of conflicts in the area. Besides, the widespread availability the firearms poses significant challenges for local law enforcement officers, impacting their ability to maintain order and ensure public safety.

In sum, the data emphasizes the multifaceted nature of SALW proliferation in East Africa due to various simple weapon systems, multiple sources, and cascading triggers. Dealing with these challenges calls for a multifaceted strategy that addresses the root causes and supply and demand dynamics, regional collaboration to regulate cross-border movement, and prudent management of disarmament initiatives to avoid unintended consequences.

Types of Arms in the North Eastern Uganda (Karamoja Region)

On the issue of the types of weapons proliferated, the Key Informants were unanimous in

The foregoing findings are similar to those by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2021) in which AK-47s and similar weapons are frequently mentioned as being prominent. Human Rights Watch (2020) has similarly documented the use of SALWs in conflict zones, including East Africa. Their reports often note the prevalence of AK-47s and G3 rifles, and their associated impact on local communities. Moreover, the IANSA and International Peace Information Service (IPIS) (June 2022) findings typically highlight the dominance of illegal weapons like the AK-47 and G3 in conflicts.

Based on secondary sources that were supported by field data, the study discovered that the Karamoja region, in addition to being affected by civil war in the 1970s, is also located on the border of Sudan. Sudan has been plagued by ongoing political turmoil, violence, and internal civil unrest. Sudan is the primary supplier of weapons to the Karamoja region of Uganda.

Interviews conducted for this research with elders, administrators, and kraal leaders revealed that the Karimojong were initially without weapons. Arms spread from Turkana in Kenya to the Karamoja region via the ivory traders. The elderly elders recollected their experiences of enduring hardship

under the Turkana people of Kenya. A key informant stated that;

Our homes were being attacked, and the Turkana, who obtained firearms before us while we only had spears, made us completely defenceless. Between 1950 and the 1970s, the Turkana tribe significantly reduced our livestock through repeated raids. The government failed to provide our protection. We were able to halt the Turkana's raids on us and our neighbours only after acquiring firearms (KI01, Turkana, November 2, 2023).

The interview describes a period of conflict and power imbalance between two groups, where one group (referred to as "we") was at a significant disadvantage compared to the Turkana people. It highlights a period of struggle and eventual empowerment for the speaker's community through the acquisition of firearms, which enabled them to defend against raids and regain control over their safety and resources.

It was observed that the most significant change agent in Karamoja is the introduction of modern small arms, which has exacerbated the traditional pastoral communal conflict. A Key Informant, a senior border security officer asserted that,

The changes primarily commenced in the 1970s; however, they were exacerbated in the 1980s and have continued to the present. The Karamoja region's primary source of arms is southern Sudan, as observed in an interview: "The cost of arms and ammunition decreases as one approaches the Sudan border" (KI02, Lodwar, November 3 2023).

The import of the foregoing statement is that it highlights how the arms trade, particularly from Southern Sudan, has evolved since the 1970s, becoming more pronounced in the 1980s and continuing to influence the security dynamics in the Karamoja region up to the present. The closer proximity to the Sudan border reduces the cost of

arms, facilitating their widespread distribution and impact. Nevertheless, the Karamoja case also demonstrates that, despite governments' assertions of concern regarding private and "rogue" suppliers, such as insurgent groups, they are by far the most significant sources of small arms for local communities. During an FGD session, a source in the Karamoja community revealed;

Following the toppling of Idi Amin in April 1979, the Matheniko Karimojong forcefully entered the Moroto barracks and plundered the firearms abandoned by Amin's withdrawing troops. During this period, the Karimojong obtained a significant arsenal of weapons, including thousands of AK 47s, G 3 Rifles, Mark 4 Rifles, carbines, and pistols. (FGD 01, Moroto, November 5, 2023)

The response highlights a critical moment when the Matheniko Karimojong capitalized on the political instability following Idi Amin's overthrow to arm themselves with a large and diverse collection of modern firearms, fundamentally altering their military capabilities and regional dynamics.

These sentiments were collaborated by one Kraal leader from the same community who noted;

The year 1979 marked a significant shift when Amin was overthrown. The soldiers that fled abandoned the armouries in their barracks, which were fully stocked with recently obtained firearms and a substantial amount of ammunition. The Karimojong transported them using donkey loads (KI01, Turkana, November 2 2023)

The study established that the supply of arms to the Karamoja region was from outside sources and continues to be an ongoing activity. This was illustrated by one local elder when he said;

Sudan serves as a conduit for the transportation of firearms and munitions, originating from the indigenous ethnic communities of Southern Sudan, namely the Didinga and Toposa, as well

as the SPLA forces. Markets are present in Lobalangit, Kapedo, Kathile, and Karenga/Napore in Dodoth County, along the border between Kotido and Sudan. In addition, there are marketplaces located in Kacheri and Bar Tanga within Jie and Labwor counties, respectively (KI03, Karamoja Market, 4th November 2023).

The response describes the routes and sources of arms trafficking into a specific region, highlighting the local dynamics and points of sale for these weapons. It in fact identifies specific markets along the Kotido-Sudan border where these arms are traded, indicating a robust and organized arms trafficking network that influences local security and conflict dynamics.

In related interviews, multiple informants pointed out that gun markets have thrived in the Namalu, Matany, Nabilatuk, Amudat, and Loro districts of Moroto and Nakapiripirit. The survey additionally confirmed that firearms and munitions are smuggled into the regions of Karamoja and Kapchorwa via the local markets in the counties of Dodoth, Matheniko, Katikekile, and Pokot. Market points are subject to relocation based on the convenience of both the seller and the buyer. Trading sites in Moroto District, for example, are located in remote areas such as thickets and riverbanks.

Further, the government of Milton Obote made the strategic decision to arm and enlist tribal militias in the neighbouring districts of Karamoja, with the purpose of containing and controlling the Karamoja region. A retired schoolteacher and respected community leader asserted that,

The ouster of Obote's rule in 1986 marked the demise of these forces. However, prior to his downfall in 1986, large numbers of Karimojong individuals joined the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) in support of the state. After the NRA emerged victorious against the UNLA in 1986, the demobilized troops from the Karimojong tribe escaped to the region of

Karamoja, taking all of their weapons with them (KI06, Karamoja, 8th November 2023)

The statement describes the involvement of Karimojong people in the UNLA before the fall of Obote's regime and how, following the defeat by the NRA, these soldiers returned to Karamoja with their weapons, thereby increasing the armament in the region and influencing its security dynamics. It indeed describes a significant historical event related to the Karimojong people and their involvement in military activities during a period of political upheaval in Uganda.

The above findings seem to be complemented by data from several secondary sources. For instance, according to Mkutu (2003), other ways of amassing weapons have been seizing weaponry from enemy military forces and confiscating them from competing militias. Another instance occurred in 2002 when a conflict arose between the UPDF and the pastoralist Pokot along the border of Kenya and Uganda. During this altercation, the UPDF suffered a loss of 28 individuals. An FGD with the elders in Naupong, Alale, a border settlement between Kenya and Uganda, disclosed that they have seized a significant number of guns. Due to the lack of efficient governance and security in Karamoja, government troops have also engaged in the illicit trade of weapons with the Karimojong. The acquisition and spread of weapons have also occurred through the exchange of cattle or during acts of cow raiding. A senior elder from Matheniko opined,

During the operation, lives are lost, resulting in a decrease in the number of firearms in the area. However, in the jurisdiction where the raid occurred, the number of weapons has risen, thereby leading to an increase in the flow of armaments (KI04, Matheniko, November 5 2023).

This shows how the proliferation of weapons in Karamoja has been a protracted phenomenon, commencing during the colonial era and persisting

due to conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, as well as ineffective governance and the Uganda government's failure to ensure sufficient security for the Karimojong people. In related literature, Powell (2010) opines that the proliferation of arms in Karamoja can be attributed to regional instability, civil strife, poor welfare conditions, and lack of discipline within the army. Additionally, the inadequately prepared and equipped soldiers of the Uganda Peoples Defence Force, along with desertion from the army by local defence units, contribute to this issue. The rearming of communities by the Uganda government and the affordability of weapons also play a role. The presence of weapons in the Karamoja region is closely connected to other factors in the area, and it is also influenced by the actions of the state.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings on types of SALWs is that the weapons are widespread in the region due to several key factors. For instance, mentioned rifles and machine guns are known for their robustness and ability to withstand harsh conditions. In conflict-prone areas with limited access to maintenance and repair services, durable weapons are highly valued. At the same time, the weapons are noted for their simplicity in operation, making them accessible to a wide range of users, including irregular fighters and non-professional soldiers. Besides, the information highlights the widespread availability of these weapons in East Africa. This availability stems from various sources, including illicit arms trafficking networks and porous borders.

Sources of Arms in Northwestern Kenya

The northwestern part of Kenya is occupied by Turkana and West Pokot counties which directly border with the North Eastern part of Uganda (Karimojong region). Turkana County is inhabited by the Turkana, Samburu, Rendile and Pokot, and

bordered by Marsabit County, Samburu County and Baringo County; all inhabited by pastoralist communities. West Pokot County is occupied by the Pokot, Marakwet, Teso and Tugen and is bordered by Baringo County, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Trans Nzoia County. Communities in Turkana and West Pokot counties (area of study) are predominantly nomadic pastoralists and continuously compete for grazing lands and water points, especially during dry seasons. According to Amasava (2023), West Pokot and Turkana counties lack infrastructure and security and are adjacent to the porous 933 km international border with Uganda.

The current research (from Table 6) demonstrates that a significant quantity of small firearms is being transported across the shared border, originating from Turkana, Uganda, and even as far as southern Sudan. The proliferation of SALWs including AK-47s, G3 rifles, machine guns and some types of handguns, in North Western Kenya, particularly in the regions of Turkana, West Pokot, and parts of Samburu and Baringo, is a complex and multifaceted problem. The communities in the region have used the weapons for cattle rustling, inter-communal conflicts banditry and other criminal activities. The result has been loss of life and property, displacement of populations and stagnation of socio-economic development.

From the field, it was established that the most prevalent types of SALWs found in East Africa were Assault Rifles AK-47 and G3 rifles and machine guns, especially PKM. Of those interviewed, when asked to order the popularity and possession of the weapons among the locals, it emerged that 58% said AK-47 was the most popular, followed by G3 rifle at 35%, 6 percent said identified machine gun, while a paltry 1 percent mentioned others. The respondents noted that these were popular due to their durability, ease of use, and availability. This was as presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Popularity of Weapons

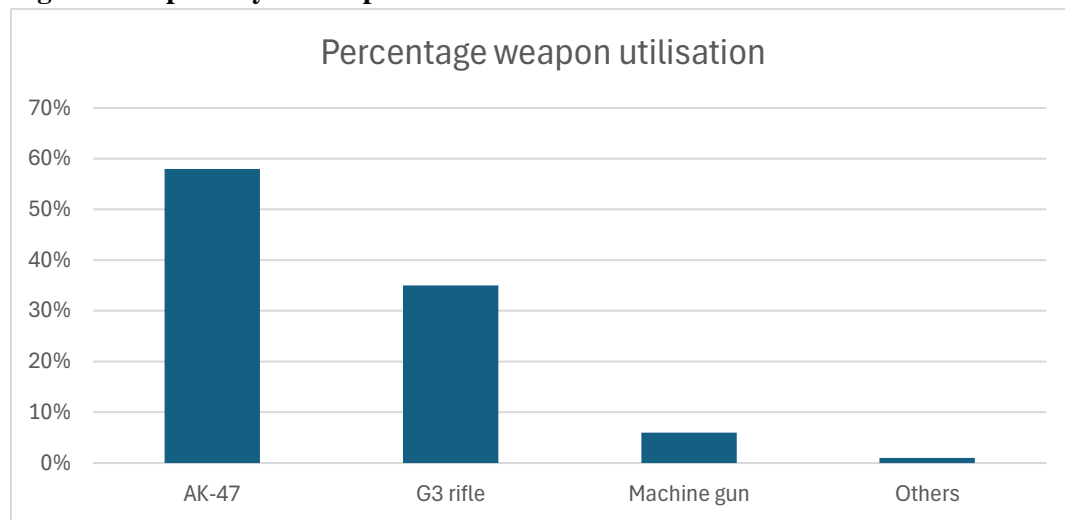
Type	Percentage
AK-47	58%
G3 rifle	35%
Machine gun	6%
Others	1%

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The high percentage indicates that AK-47 and G3 rifles are widely available and likely more accessible in the region. The findings are indicative of the proliferation of these specific types of weapons, possibly due to their durability, reliability, and relatively low cost. Of significance to note is that the prevalence of these rifles, which are highly lethal and effective in both offensive and defensive

operations, has the impact of contributing significantly to the intensity and duration of conflicts in the area. Besides, the widespread availability the firearms poses significant challenges for local law enforcement officers, impacting their ability to maintain order and ensure public safety. The findings on weapons utilisation are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Popularity of Weapons



Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Through interviews and FGDs findings, it was revealed that the Pokot people did not always have weapons. However, due to continuous attacks by the Turkana on the Pokot, as well as on the Karimojong who eventually obtained weapons and assaulted the Turkana and Pokot, the Pokot people were compelled to also seek weapons for their own defence (KI05, Sigor, 5th November 2023). Like other pastoralists, the Pokot had only basic weapons like spears, bows and arrows. The incorporation of tiny firearms amongst them is a very recent

occurrence (Participant, FGD 02, 6th November 2023).

The proliferation of modern firearms in Pokot increased rapidly following the ouster of Amin. The Karimojong utilized the acquired weapons to conduct raids and appropriate the belongings of the Pokot and Sebei tribes, while also engaging in arms trade with them. A key informant opined;

There are two categories of firearms being distributed in West Pokot: those allocated by

the government to Police Reservists for the purpose of safeguarding cattle. A Kenya police reservist is subordinate to the police officer in command of police districts. Although a few individuals have switched allegiances, they have subsequently been apprehended and their firearms seized. Secondly, are firearms bought in neighbouring countries like Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda due to a community arms race... (KI05, Sigor, 5th November 2023).

The statement shows two main sources of firearms in West Pokot: those issued by the government to Police Reservists for livestock protection and those bought illegally from neighbouring countries due to a regional arms race. The situation is complicated by some Police Reservists defecting and the widespread availability of illegal arms, which poses significant challenges to law enforcement and community safety.

The findings relate to the report by Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. (2021) that the government has provided firearms to Kenya Police Reservists, often known as houseguards, and some individuals have acquired firearms through private means. Occasionally, they engage in the illegal activity of cattle theft, and on multiple occasions, firearms have been found and subsequently linked to Police Reservists. A prominent local leader in the Pokot community during the FGD session commented;

The existence of political instability in Uganda significantly contributed to the spread of weapons into the West Pokot region. The Pokot region spans across the border between Kenya and Uganda, and due to the political unrest in Uganda, a significant number of Upe Pokot individuals sought safety in Kenya, bringing their weapons along (FGD 03, Karapokot, 7 November 2023).

The study established that the West Pokot pastoralists from Kenya seized the chance to participate in the arms race in order to enlarge their

pasturelands, steal additional cattle to make up for the cows they had lost while acquiring firearms, and seek retribution for previous attacks carried out by the Turkana and Karimojong tribes. A discussant in FGD posited;

Pokot acquired a significant number of weaponry as a result of ties formed with Karamoja. Their plan involves forming an alliance with either Matheniko or Dodoth in the northern region. They will acquire firearms and subsequently engage in combat against the Pian, who are a shared adversary. Alternatively, they may choose to confront the Bokora. Their intention is to form an alliance with Sebei and engage in combat against the Pian. Meanwhile, the Turkana want to join forces with a specific faction of Karamoja in order to confront another faction within Karamoja... (Participant, FGD 02, 6th November 2023).

The statement describes the strategic alliances formed by the Pokot and other groups in the region to acquire firearms and engage in conflicts against common enemies. It further indicates that the alliances are complex, often shifting, and contribute to the ongoing instability and violence in the region.

The study also established that during attacks in West Pokot, the warriors would eliminate their adversaries and confiscate their firearms. An interview with a senior county security officer revealed that there were several instances where Pokot bandits would attack security officers and sneak away with their firearms. He noted;

We lost eight officers in the Kainuk area in Turkana County on 22 September 2022 to Pokot bandits who waylaid them and took away their G3s and AK 47 firearms. They were making follow-up of cattle stolen from the Turkana community... (KI07, Kainuk, 9th November 2023).

The foregoing details a tragic incident where eight officers were killed by Pokot bandits in Turkana County while pursuing stolen cattle. The bandits stole the officers' firearms, exacerbating the region's instability and highlighting the severe challenges faced in maintaining security and order.

It was evident from the response that Pokot bandits sourced their firearms from police officers who had been ambushed and killed while on duty and thus the people killed also served as sources of guns. It was evident that the majority of the SALWs that the communities in the two counties possessed and used were sourced from the neighbouring countries. This was primarily due to their nomadic pastoral lifestyle, which involved cross-border movement in quest of water and pasture. During an interview with a Key Informant, it was observed;

Illegally possessed firearms in these counties, particularly Turkana and Pokot, are often imported from neighbouring nations experiencing wars. We are exerting maximum effort to apprehend all the individuals involved in trafficking with the aim of enhancing security in the region (KI01, (Male Aged, 52 years), Turkana, November 2, 2023).

According to the feedback received during the FGD, it was observed that the majority of SALWs inside the Pokot and Turkana Communities were primarily obtained through illegal means from neighbouring countries that are now facing conflicts, such as South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda. This discovery confirms research conducted by Katsina, Mashi and Katsina et al (2021) which claims that the increase in the number of SALWs in the Horn of Africa is caused by civil wars and the presence of porous borders, allowing residents to freely cross states boundaries with little restrictions.

Secondary data from the Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (2020) confirmed that communities in the West Pokot and Turkana counties participated in intercommunity gun trade as a means of generating cash. The study found that

the Oromo Community, a transnational community residing in Kenya and southern Ethiopia, is capable of procuring weapons from the conflict-ridden southern region of Ethiopia (specifically from the Oromo Liberation Front) and clandestinely smuggling them for sale in Kenya. Additional questioning of county security officers revealed that conflicts in neighbouring states have led to the proliferation of SALWs in certain cross-border communities in Kenya. Specifically, the communities of Pokot and Turkana along the Kenya-Uganda border, Turkana and Oromo along the Kenya-Ethiopia border, and Somalia along the Kenya-Somalia border have become hubs for the sourcing and sale of these weapons. The weapons are obtained at low cost and then sold to communities in the northern part of Kenya where there is demand for such weapons.

During the FGD with community elders, it was revealed that certain weapons are acquired and utilized through inheritance, being passed down from one generation to the next within the family lineage. An elder admitted to inheriting a firearm from his deceased father but subsequently relinquished it after the government declared amnesty for anyone in possession of illegal firearms. He quipped;

When elderly individuals who possess a limited number of animals such as cows, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys are on their deathbed, they often bestow a firearm upon one of their sons as a symbolic gesture of good fortune, with the hope that the gun will eventually lead to the acquisition of additional livestock. I was among those who relinquished it to the authorities when amnesty was granted ... (FGD 04; Male Participant, Aged, 68 years, Turkana, 11th November 2023)

This statement illustrates a traditional practice where dying elders gift guns to their sons with the hope of securing future wealth through livestock acquisition. The speaker, who received such a gift, chose to surrender the gun during a government

amnesty, highlighting a personal and possibly community-wide shift towards reducing firearm possession and promoting peace.

Evident from the FGDs was the observation that these weapons passed down from older generations, are inherited within the family lineage with the belief that they will bestow "a blessing" of increased livestock during raids. It has been observed that such statements often precede the act of stealing cattle in order to obtain the supposed "blessing" associated with the gun. These firearms are usually safeguarded or hidden and are not relinquished even during a mandatory disarmament conducted by government authorities. This may elucidate the persistent use of firearms even subsequent to the conclusion of a disarmament endeavour.

Furthermore, the current research findings were corroborated by existing literature that the Turkana population has access to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) whenever they engage in raids against neighbouring communities like the Pokot, Samburu, and Rendille. According to Schilling, et.al (2012), the majority of pastoralist groups arm themselves as a means of deterring potential threats. During specific seasons when the community desires to replenish its livestock through cattle rustling, it has been seen that traditional elders bestow their blessings and charms to conquer the perceived adversaries. Community raiders frequently seize firearms from the houses of defeated communities and their fighters after successful raids. This particular element of acquiring SALWs mirrors the events of the 2012 Baragoi Police Massacre. During this incident, a group of up to 42 police officers, who were tasked with retrieving stolen livestock from the Pokot bandits, were unexpectedly attacked and slain in Suguta Valley. Additionally, their firearms were taken by the assailants (Katsina, Mashi & Katsina et al, 2021).

An interview with a key informant from the county security agency revealed that "firearms prevalent among communities in Turkana and West Pokot

counties mainly included; The G3 (Gewehr 3), Avtomat Kalashnikova (AK-47), several types of handguns, and various types of ammunition" (KI08, Jie, Kotido, 11th November 2023). The proliferation of these weapons, as seen by Ndawana and Ghuliku (2018), can be due to their widespread availability, low cost, lightweight nature, ease of use, durability, great portability, and ability to be quickly disguised while being very dangerous.

The cost of small firearms is a reliable indicator of their accessibility. Prices also serve as an indicator of the prevalence of certain weapons in a certain location. It is said that the prices of firearms and ammunition in the Karamoja region of Uganda have decreased, which is believed to be due to the abundant availability and easy accessibility of these items. During the interview, a key informant from a local NGO mentioned that there used to be multiple unregulated firearms markets in Karamoja. It was possible for anyone to easily access these markets and purchase guns without any restrictions. In addition, the LRA and the SPLA resorted to selling their weapons at reduced prices in order to obtain food. The prices of firearms in Karamoja, Uganda, have significantly decreased since the late 1990s as a result of an increased supply and reduced demand. There are claims that the price of a firearm might range from 70 to 150 cows.

According to credible secondary data reports, the price of a rifle decreased to approximately 20-30 cows during the early 2000s and further declined to 5-10 cows by 2005. In Karamoja, the authentic Russian AK47 had a value equivalent to three bulls. Interviews conducted with the elders and former raiders in Kotido parish have indicated that the price of a firearm has decreased to a range of 100,000 to 150,000 Uganda shillings per gun, or alternatively, the exchange of two bulls for an AK47. The SAR, a firearm manufactured in China, is more affordable, with a price range of 1-2. The cost of the firearm is contingent upon the quantity of ammunition it can accommodate. The Chinese variant of the AK47 rifle has a magazine capacity of 10 rounds, although

the original Russian AK47 can hold 30 rounds. The G3 rifle, on the other hand, has a magazine capacity of 20 rounds. Nevertheless, the G3 remains costly due to its scarcity, which can be attributed to the Kenya government, as it serves as its primary supplier. A Jie interview noted, “*We are delighted to get the firearm in exchange for two cows, as it simplifies gun ownership....*” (KI08, Jie, Kotido, 11th November 2023).

On the contrary, the cost of arms and ammunition on the Kenya-Uganda border encompassing the Pokot region, is relatively expensive. This is attributed to the longer distance from the source of arms and ammunition. Speaking on the costs of ammunition, one administrator observed that, “*Presently, the price for a single round of live ammunition is 50 Kenya shillings, although they are not easily accessible...*” (KI09, local administrator, Kotido, 15th November 2023).

From the field reports, it was noted that the prices of ammunition have fluctuated with the intensity of cattle raids although accessibility has become a problem. It is rare and hence somewhat costly, whereas the price of guns is significantly decreasing. Upon further investigation, the main informant disclosed that in 1990, the cost of ammunition was as low as 3 Kenyan shillings. However, as of 2020, the price had increased to 50 shillings. In Kenya, the price of bullets is over double compared to Uganda. This increase in cost has been linked to the depletion of the ammunition that was originally stolen by the Karimojong from the Moroto barracks (KI11, senior police officer, Kotido, 18th November 2023).

The disarmament in Uganda has significantly contributed to the rise in costs along the border between Kenya and Uganda (KI11). Interviews with Kenya police reservists also indicated a lack of available ammo. Consequently, they were requesting additional live ammunition from the Kenyan authorities. Despite price fluctuations caused by regional conflicts, the cost of ammunition has shown an overall upward trend over the past

decade, rising by almost 80 percent. The price hikes observed in Uganda between 2005 and 2010 can be attributed to the limited availability of ammunition. During this period, the Dodoth tribe would transport munitions to the Kaabong area, resulting in a significant increase in price by about 500 percent once reaching Matheniko. In Pian, the source of ammunition was Kaabong. As a result of the disarmament exercises, the price of ammunition rose to almost 1000 Ugandan shillings each round.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings presented in this article underscore the complex and multifaceted context of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) proliferation in East Africa, highlighting sources and types as well as the implications. The data indicates that in contexts that entail armed robberies, cattle rustling, and conflicts between communities and in urban areas like Nairobi, illegal firearms can be purchased relatively cheaply. The expansion provides a structured analysis of how the findings contribute to the existing scholarly understanding of arms trafficking, emphasizing the nuanced, context-specific insights revealed by the research. Similarly, SALWs are used by various non-state actors, including rebel groups and criminal gangs, which exacerbates instability and hampers peace efforts. This context forms a critical need for comprehensive strategies that address the SALW proliferation, enhance regional collaboration, and improve public awareness to effectively mitigate the associated security threats.

The study recommends that the governments of Kenya and Uganda should enhance the recruitment, training, and deployment of sufficient security troops to the Northeast of Uganda and the Northwestern region of Kenya. This is necessary to restore essential security and to safeguard vulnerable borders from the illegal movement of people and weapons. National security agencies should build inter-state cooperation to create a cohesive framework for directing and coordinating actions to monitor routes of arms trafficking,

regulate the use of arms, and decrease the spread of SALWs.

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