

# **Developing a strategy to respond to the Government of Kenya's disarmament programme**

Nairobi  
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Report of a round-table meeting organised by  
Saferworld and The Great Lakes Parliamentary  
Forum on Peace – AMANI Forum



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# Introduction

This is a report of a half-day round-table meeting organised by Saferworld in collaboration with The Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum on Peace – AMANI Forum on 29 June 2006 in Nairobi to discuss the Government of Kenya's (GoK) disarmament programme in northern Kenya. The meeting initiated discussions among a range of stakeholders with a role to play in informing the GoK approach to the small arms issue, including Members of Parliament, civil society, church and NGO representatives from the affected regions, and international donors.

The overall aim of the meeting was to discuss the issues, opportunities and challenges associated with the GoK's approach to disarmament and to discuss options for developing a more sustainable solution to gun ownership and insecurity in northern Kenya. The specific objectives were:

- To share information about the GoK's disarmament programme in northern Kenya and efforts to respond to it
- To identify priority issues, challenges and opportunities for influencing the GoK's approach to disarmament
- To elaborate the respective roles of MPs, civil society, international actors and other stakeholders in a strategy to respond to the disarmament programme

The discussions will feed into the response strategy that Saferworld is developing with its partners to build consensus for a more sustainable solution to the small arms issue in northern Kenya. A Concept Paper outlining this strategy was circulated to all participants at the meeting. This will be developed into a more detailed project proposal through discussions with partners and other stakeholders over the next month.

This report summarises the key discussions at the meeting and reflects the opinions, perceptions, comments and suggestions debated and discussed by participants at the meeting. It highlights some areas where further research or consideration may be useful in the course of the project, but it is not intended to present the views of the organisers or to dictate the approach to be taken by the project.

# The disarmament programme

In May 2006, the GoK launched a large-scale military-led operation to disarm communities in the North Rift region, and subsequently announced its intention to expand the programme to the North East. The disarmament exercise is the largest in Kenya in recent times, covering at least seven districts, and comes at the same time as a Ugandan army-led disarmament campaign in the neighbouring Karamoja region.

Participants highlighted a number of concerns and issues about the way in which they felt the disarmament was being carried out and the impact it was having on communities where they lived or worked. Some of the key concerns raised by participants were that:

- Rather than targeting criminal elements, the military is indiscriminately harassing entire communities, contributing to the perception that the disarmament is a form of community punishment. This is a reflection of the lack of trust between communities and the security forces. Security forces lack the intelligence they need in order to find weapons and arrest criminals, while community members are not comfortable reporting crimes or identifying criminals due to their lack of confidence in security forces.
- The rounding-up of livestock (in order to identify rustled cattle) has provoked fear that livestock will be confiscated and put on the market, benefiting military personnel.
- Large numbers of people – particularly men – have fled to Uganda, leaving women, children and possessions behind. As a consequence of displacement, families have been broken apart, people have become ill, children have dropped out of school, livelihoods have been disrupted and livestock have died, as people have been forced to move from areas where there is good pasture and water.
- Communities have not been sensitised about the intentions and approach of the disarmament programme. The lack of official information and appropriate sensitisation has created space for information about the disarmament to be manipulated in a way that plays into local ethnic politics and conflict dynamics and exacerbates fears and tensions. For instance, some have promoted the idea that the disarmament is only targeting a particular ethnic group.
- Related to this, community members, local leaders, elders and the provincial administration have in many cases not been consulted or involved in planning the disarmament programme. As a result, the exercise lacks buy in and support from communities, has not taken into account community perceptions and needs related to safety and security, and has failed to understand or develop measures to address the underlying reasons for gun ownership.

The discussions highlighted the need to establish the 'facts' about the GoK disarmament programme and how it is actually being carried out in different parts of Kenya, and to gather information and perspectives from a broad range of people. This is challenging because the issue has been highly politicised and perceptions have been shaped by the high profile of the issue in the media. While abuses have been reported in some areas and captured in the media, it is not clear how

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widespread this has been. In some areas, there appears to have been a shift towards a more co-operative approach.

Official information on the disarmament has been relatively limited and the GoK has not articulated a coherent official policy. Some public statements by GoK officials on the issue appear contradictory (eg, a statement that the military is present to carry out development projects not to forcibly disarm communities), but may reflect a slow re-orienting of the GoK approach. There is a need to build consensus across the GoK about how it will approach the small arms issue in northern Kenya, and to link this to the framework provided by the National Action Plan on Arms Control and Management, which was launched on 19 July 2006, and which is already being implemented.

Some highlighted that MPs should play a role in oversight of the disarmament programme and should scrutinise and hold the GoK accountable for the resources spent on the disarmament, the approach taken, and the results achieved. However, participants also expressed the view that disunity among MPs has prevented them from taking effective action on the issue, and there is a need to build consensus for a collective approach.

# Alternative approaches to disarmament

Participants highlighted that there have been successful GoK disarmament programmes in the past, particularly in the North East, and that it is important to learn from these experiences. They identified a number of factors that they felt contributed to the success of past initiatives or that would characterise an alternative and more sustainable approach to disarmament. These factors include:

- An incremental and sequenced approach that focuses initially on preventing the misuse of small arms rather than on immediately removing small arms from communities (eg initially registering weapons, raising awareness of the misuse of small arms, establishing mobile police posts and strengthening border posts, initiating development projects, and later establishing a voluntary weapons collection campaign)
- A process that promotes recognition and 'ownership' of the small arms problem by community members and local leaders, that generates ideas about responses to the small arms problem from communities themselves, and that involves communities in the design of security interventions
- Co-operation between community and civic leaders, local and central government officials and security personnel to address the small arms problem, based on mutual trust achieved through confidence-building measures
- A multi-faceted approach that addresses the underlying reasons for gun ownership and the conditions that have caused people to arm themselves, such as inadequate security provision and cross-border conflict, and that provides people with something in exchange for weapons, such as start-up grants for small businesses and irrigation schemes.
- A national approach, involving parliamentarians, high level government officials and Ministers, that is based on consensus rather than competition and political games
- An approach that measures its success based on improvements in the safety and security of communities, rather than by the number of weapons collected or removed from society.

There is a need to gather more information about successful initiatives in Kenya, to draw out lessons learned and to further analyse what factors contributed to their success.

# Dimensions of the small arms issue

The discussions highlighted the need for a multi-faceted approach to the issue of gun ownership in northern Kenya, due to the multi-dimensional nature of the problem. Five key clusters of issues that needed to be addressed in relation to gun ownership in northern Kenya were identified: (1) economic and livelihood issues (2) security issues (3) regional and cross-border issues (4) conflict issues (5) trust between the government and the community. Key discussions in relation to each of these dimensions are outlined below.

Some participants recommended that a policy framework be developed to address the multi-dimensional security and development challenges of the marginalised areas that have become the focus of the disarmament exercise.

## **Economic and livelihood issues**

Participants recognised that the issue of gun ownership in the North Rift and North East is intimately linked with the pastoralist livelihood and with the severe marginalisation and under-development of the regions. They highlighted a number of key economic and livelihood issues:

- Pastoralism has often been treated as a backward lifestyle with no commercial value. Some felt that there is a need to change attitudes to pastoralism, to explore its economic potential, and to develop a policy to support pastoralism and develop it into a sustainable and economically viable system.
- At the same time, others highlighted the need to support the diversification of livelihood options for pastoralists, by supporting alternative livelihoods and economic opportunities in arid areas, such as aloe cultivation and bee-keeping.
- Competition over pasture and water is a major cause of conflict, and therefore better management of water and grazing land was identified as a priority for conflict prevention.
- Participants identified the need to develop a targeted education scheme that is suitable to pastoralist communities. The policy of free primary education is not reaching mobile pastoralist groups and uneducated young people are playing a central role in cattle-rustling and crime.
- From a development perspective the northern regions are extremely marginalised and suffer from poor or absent infrastructure and road networks and government service provision (schools, health, etc). As one participant put it, “the problem is these regions need everything”. While some feel that these problems can only be solved by a regional ‘Marshall Plan’ others felt that a more targeted approach to the problem would be more pragmatic. The marginalisation of the northern areas also raises the issue of how development resources are allocated to different regions.
- Given the role of MPs in a response strategy, Constituency Development Funds were identified as a window of opportunity, if they are well-managed.

## Security issues

The absence of effective security provision by the state was identified as a central reason for gun ownership in northern Kenya. Participants felt that an important reason why communities have armed themselves is for self-defence in a context of inter-communal conflict and widespread cattle rustling and absent or inadequate police presence and border posts. Participants discussed a number of issues related to security provision:

- Criminal elements have exploited the absence of law and order and the weakness of state security and justice provision in these areas. For instance, participants highlighted that the commercialisation of cattle rustling has been made possible by rustlers' belief that the justice system would never catch up with them, and inter-communal conflict had contributed to the climate of impunity.
- The issue of security provision by quasi-governmental security forces such as KPR and vigilantes was debated. Some expressed the view that these forces are the best option for security provision in the regions, but that they need to be trained, remunerated, and regulated if they are to be effective and accountable. Others felt that they are part of the problem and are often involved in crime. They felt that the GoK should not be relieved of its responsibility for providing security in these areas and should ultimately be held accountable for security provision.
- Community-based policing (CBP) was highlighted as a potential approach to security provision in the north. Participants highlighted the need for community involvement in the planning of security interventions (including the involvement of the Provincial Administration, community leaders and elders) and for building trust between the security forces and communities, which is central to the practice of CBP.
- Participants highlighted the need for the GoK to provide permanent security personnel in the regions, rather than a temporary crisis response. In order to achieve this, there is a need to change the perception within the police and security forces that the north is a hardship posting.

## Cross-border and regional issues

Participants highlighted the regional and cross-border dimensions of the small arms issue in Kenya. For instance, they highlighted that it would not be possible to disarm communities in Kenya without also addressing small arms possession among communities on the Ugandan side of the border. There is therefore a need for cross-border co-operation and regional approaches. Some cross-border and regional issues discussed included:

- Border insecurity was highlighted as a key issue relating to gun ownership. Some expressed the view that border communities should be allowed to legally possess arms in order to defend themselves from cross-border attacks. Others felt that arming border communities was an unacceptable way of managing border security and that there is a need to devise a practical approach to securing Kenya's borders that does not involve arming communities as a solution. The question of whether the GoK has the capacity to effectively police Kenya's borders was discussed. Participants felt that the existing border posts were too far apart and that the law enforcement agencies lacked the capacity to respond to the cross-border nature of conflict and cattle-raiding.
- The cross-border nature of conflicts (for instance between the Pokot and Karamojong) was also highlighted as an issue that required regional co-operation if it is to be effectively addressed.
- Participants highlighted the regional dimension of the small arms trade, and the role of neighbouring countries in the supply of small arms to Kenya.
- Participants raised the question of the role of the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA), particularly in relation to disarmament. They proposed a potential role for

RECSA in developing regional guidelines on disarmament and raising awareness of best practice.

- The question of the degree of co-ordination between Kenya and Uganda in the current disarmament was raised, as similar operations are being conducted on both sides of the border. Participants highlighted that a co-ordinated approach should not be limited to a joint military operation, but should entail broader co-operation between law enforcement agencies and communities living in border areas.

## **Conflict issues**

Inter-communal conflicts, both within Kenya and across Kenya's borders, were identified as a key factor fuelling insecurity and contributing to demand for small arms in northern Kenya. A number of particular issues were highlighted:

- Participants highlighted the role of the disarmament exercise in escalating ethnically-based tensions and conflicts, as a result of fear that disarmament would focus on a particular ethnic group, making members vulnerable to attack by neighbouring communities. There is a need to develop an approach to the small arms issue that is sensitive to conflict dynamics, and that works to promote peace.
- Disunity among the political and community leadership in areas affected by the disarmament was highlighted as an issue linked with ethnic affiliation and conflict dynamics. Some participants felt that many MPs and political leaders are elected or supported on the basis of ethnic affiliation and defend narrow community interests (in order to ensure political survival) at the expense of peace-building. This disunity has undermined an effective collective response from the affected regions, and there is a need to build consensus across ethnic lines in order to develop solutions that will benefit the region as a whole.
- Participants recognised the close link between economic and livelihoods issues and conflict (discussed above).
- The breakdown of traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution was highlighted as another factor contributing to conflict. There is a need to strengthen or develop new mechanisms for managing disputes, and that the state had a role to play in filling the gap. Participants felt that Peace Committees were not operating effectively and that they need to be revived and their membership reviewed in order to ensure that they are relevant and include those who have the power within communities to promote peace.
- Participants recommended cross-border peace-building activities.

## **Trust issues**

Participants identified the breakdown in trust between pastoralist communities and the government and security forces as a serious problem, which has been reinforced by the tactics used in the disarmament. Rebuilding trust is crucial to achieving the objective of collecting weapons and tackling cattle-rustling and crime, because it will create conditions in which the public are comfortable identifying criminals and reporting crimes to the police. Participants felt that rather than criminalising entire communities, the security forces should work together with communities to isolate those criminal elements that are responsible for cattle rustling and other crimes, and to tackle problems of insecurity.

Participants also felt that the breakdown in trust between the communities and the central government has also been caused by GoK failure to deliver on previous promises. They highlighted the need for dialogue and confidence-building measures in order to establish a constructive relationship between the government and communities. This could be reinforced by greater central government commitment to development and security provision in the regions.



# Appendix: Participants

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**The Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum on Peace - AMANI Forum is an initiative of parliamentarians in the Great Lakes region. It is a network of parliamentarians who are committed to peace and to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, both within their own countries and in the region as a whole.**

**Saferworld is an independent non-governmental organisation that works to prevent armed violence and create safer communities in which people can lead peaceful and rewarding lives.**

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