OCCASIONAL PAPER 15

SILENCING GUNS:
LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON SMALL ARMS AND ARMED VIOLENCE IN RURAL PACIFIC ISLANDS COMMUNITIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS x
ABOUT THE EDITORS AND RESEARCHERS xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xii
DEDICATION xiii
Map 1 Regional map xiv

SUMMARY xv

I. INTRODUCTION 1
A participatory methodology 4
The PRA toolkit 6

II. CASE STUDY 1: INTER-TRIBAL CONFLICT AND SMALL ARMS IN SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE, PNG 7
Map 2 Southern Highlands Province 7
Background 8
Types of guns and users 11
Perceptions of security 13
Women's perspectives 14
Development needs 15
Challenges encountered 15
Findings 16

III. CASE STUDY 2: SMALL ARMS AND POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY IN BOUGAINVILLE, PNG 19
Map 3 Bougainville 19
Background 20
Study sites 22
Gun availability 23
The return of traditional security—family and clan 25
Findings 26

IV. CASE STUDY 3: PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AFTER THE TPA AND RAMSI IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: 28
Map 4 The Solomon Islands 28
Background 29
Study sites 31
West Guadalcanal 32
Malaita 34
North Malaita 35
Violence and arms availability 36
Persisting militant elements 37
RAMSI's effectiveness—and limitations 37
Findings 38

V. CONCLUSION 40

ANNEXE 1: SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS EXERCISES 43
ANNEXE 2: CONFLICT-RELATED ARMED VIOLENCE IN TWO BOUGAINVILLE COMMUNITIES 46
ANNEXE 3: SOLOMON ISLANDS EXERCISES 47

ENDNOTES 49

BIBLIOGRAPHY 51

LIST OF BOXES AND FIGURES

Box 1 Shedding light on insecurity: previous participatory research on small arms 5
Box 2 Gun facts: Southern Highlands Province 8
Box 3 Gun facts: Bougainville 20
Box 4 The Bougainville weapons disposal plan 21
Box 5 Gun facts: Solomon Islands 29
Box 6 The weapons-free villages campaign 30

Figure 2.1 Villagers' map of the Mendi area 9
Figure 2.2 Unjamap weapons and users exercise 11
Figure 2.3 Wogia weapons and insecurity ranking exercise 12
Figure 3.1 Villagers' map of the Tohatsi area 23

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BETA	Bougainville Ex-combatants Trust Account
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Corrective Institutions Service
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
GMFI	grassroots micro-finance institution
GRA	Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (later IFM/IFF)
IFF	Isatabu Freedom Fighters
IFM	Isatabu Freedom Movement
IPMT	International Peace Monitoring Team
LMG	light machine gun
MEF	Malaita Eagle Force
MP	member of parliament
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PMC	Peace Monitoring Council
PMV	public motor vehicle
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands
RSIP	Royal Solomon Islands Police
SHP	Southern Highlands Province
SLR	self-loading rifle
SPCPC	South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
TPA	Townsville Peace Agreement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WFV	weapons-free villages

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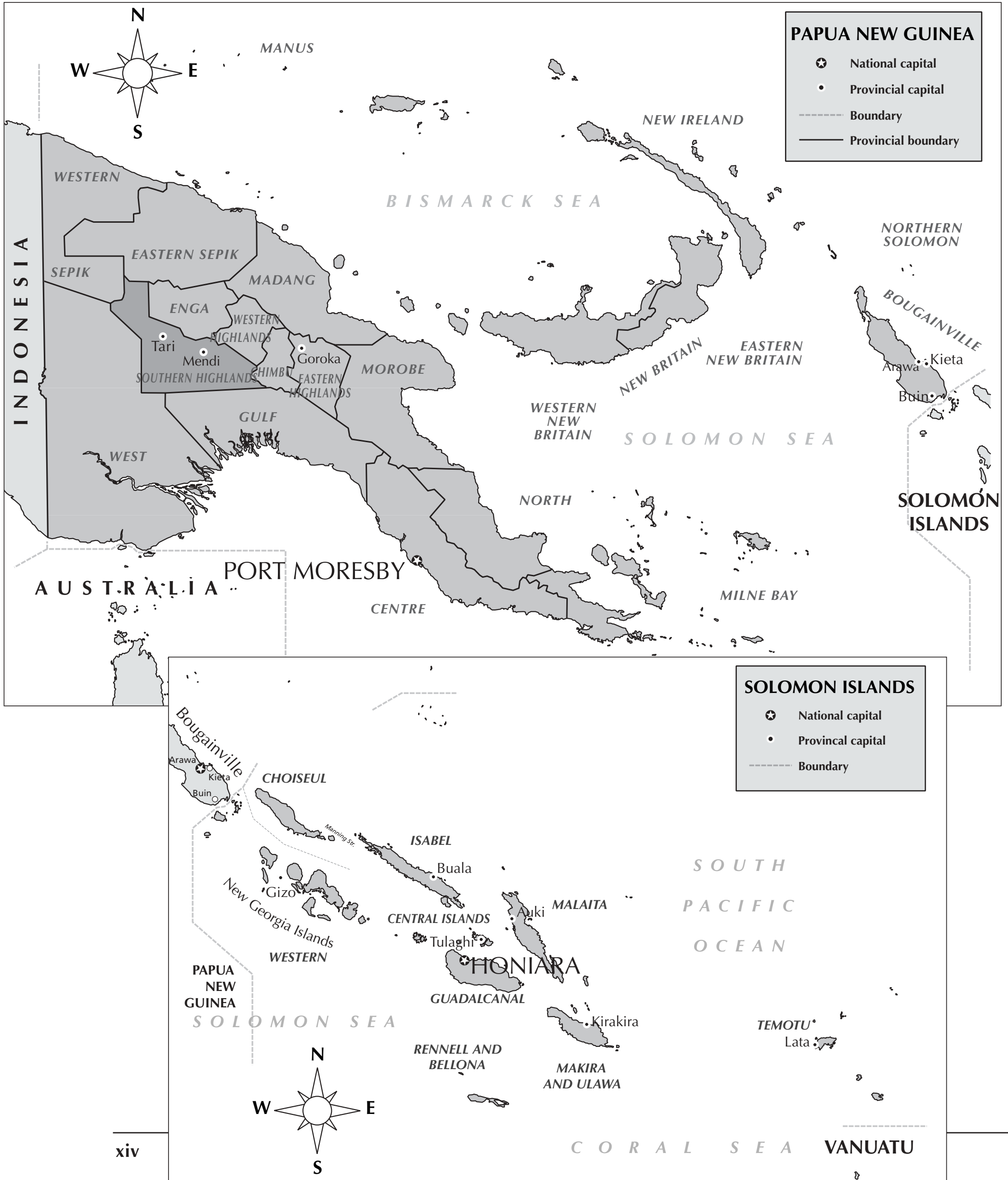
Philip Alpers stewarded the project from its early stages through to the completion of the research. Mallika Samanayake provided participatory research training and facilitation in Thailand and the Solomon Islands. Bill Standish provided helpful feedback on the draft report. We wish to thank the Governments of New Zealand and Australia for their financial support for this study.

DEDICATION

This publication is dedicated to the memory of George Lesi, a researcher and trainer who, through his commitment to open dialogue, advocated peaceful solutions to the Bougainville armed conflict. He passed away shortly after contributing to this project.

MAP 1 REGIONAL MAP



SUMMARY

At a time when the funding for weapons reduction and armed conflict prevention work is at an all-time high and still growing, the lack of accessible, standard evaluative tools is becoming more and more conspicuous. Though this partly stems from a debate within the disarmament community as to what the right set of measures should be, it is also a reaction to the practical difficulty—in some cases, outright impossibility—of collecting quantitative data on armed violence, especially in rural areas. Clearly, there is a great need for alternative means of assessing and reporting on the impacts of both small arms availability and misuse, and efforts to reduce those impacts.

The Pacific is a particularly extreme example of this situation. With more money per capita invested in armed violence reduction in the region than across all of Africa, there is a surprising absence of programme evaluation, despite persistent signs of ineffectiveness. Even more worrisome is that further long-term projects are being planned without the benefit of a firm evidence base.

The present pilot study offers a model for a high-value, low-cost alternative to the tradition of quantitative research on armed violence, by documenting the *perspectives of rural communities regarding the effects of small arms.* It generates critical and policy-relevant insights into how insecurity is actually perceived and experienced in three Pacific regions: the Southern Highlands of mainland Papua New Guinea (PNG), Bougainville PNG, and the Solomon Islands. The subjective experience of insecurity is examined here in the context of existing inter-tribal conflicts (in the Southern Highlands) and in relation to the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts (in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands). Though each context is manifestly different, small arms availability is nevertheless a cause for concern in all three regions.

In all three locations, researchers trained in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques sought to evaluate the effects of small arms availability and misuse on the perceptions of insecurity among rural residents, in particular the perceptions of women. They were also tasked with documenting local perspectives about the efficacy of weapons-collection efforts and (formal and customary) agreements designed to end hostilities and improve security. This report attempts to present

the experiences of various communities in their own words. As such, it aims to be broadly accessible, straightforward and accountable. The main conclusions drawn from this project are outlined below.

A few weapons can bring significant insecurity. Findings from all three sites convey the lesson that a small number of firearms in the wrong hands can generate tremendous insecurity when conflict breaks out, or even before. When guns are added to a culture of retributive justice, power differences are consolidated and reinforced and can lead to large-scale intentional violence.

Insecurity outlasts conflict. This insecurity lingers well after armed conflict comes to an end—affecting community cohesion, livelihood security and income generation, settlement of the displaced, and the safety of women and young children. All three areas are nevertheless slowly recovering with assistance from a combination of violence-reduction, reconciliation, and arms-collection initiatives.

The presence of guns exacerbates unresolved tensions in the Southern Highlands of PNG. A poorly conducted weapons collection programme did not absorb the weapons that are increasingly being used to commit retaliatory tribal violence. These weapons include M16s, self-loading rifles (SLRs), G-3s, AR15s, and AK-47s (all of which are assault rifles). Ongoing tensions and the stalling of protracted compensation negotiations in the absence of a visible state security presence combine to make the Southern Highlands a potentially explosive situation.

In Bougainville, ex-combatants still have access to a wide assortment of military-style firearms. Despite various disarmament interventions, ex-combatants still appear to have access to a range of firearms, including handguns, semi-automatic military-style weapons, and home-made arms. In one study site, the most common firearms available to ex-combatants were home-made guns and M16s borrowed from armed forces in other areas of Bougainville. It is widely believed—though unproven—that a source of many of the guns is the neighbouring Solomon Islands.

In the Solomon Islands, RAMSI still enjoys support. There is strong confidence in the presence and activities of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) among villagers in North Malaita and Guadalcanal. The increased and visible presence of security forces since RAMSI's arrival in August

2003 and the apprehension of law-breakers in its wake are two important elements of this renewed sense of security. However, the lingering presence of militants—and their guns—in Malaita is a cause of fear and suspicion for many villagers.

The pilot study also provides evidence for the utility of participatory research to provide high-value, low-cost baseline information as well as small arms intervention assessments, while at the same time suggesting the methodology's limitations. The main conclusions in this regard are listed below.

Participatory research can generate cost-effective baseline information where there previously was little. For a fraction of the cost of large-scale quantitative studies, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) can generate valuable insights into the subjective experience of local residents about armed violence and measures to contain it. Given that interventions aimed at reducing armed violence must assess and influence those subjective experiences to be most effective, participatory research should be considered as an instrumental component of monitoring and evaluation systems for violence and weapons reduction initiatives.

Trust is essential to effective participatory research. It is essential that PRA researchers be acclimated into the communities they are working in, to ensure that they gain a level of trust and acceptance by study participants. Similarly, donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should proceed with participatory research only where effective rapport has been established between outsiders and the beneficiaries.

The engagement of indigenous researchers is particularly important. To the extent possible, PRA research should be conducted by members of the community under study, that is, by persons with a strong sense of the cultural, religious, and linguistic norms of the community.

Participatory research is often less effective in areas where tensions are ongoing. The utility of PRA research techniques in areas of high tension is limited by the resistance of local leaders to participate themselves or to allow other community members to participate. In the Southern Highlands in particular, sensitivities to discussing small arms were often too strained for community members to engage openly with researchers. Considerable preparation and insight into affected communities are required before participatory research can be undertaken. Even so, participatory research can identify appropriate entry points for engaging in armed-violence-prevention and weapons-reduction interventions.

Traditional customary norms can inhibit participatory research. The subservient role of women in traditional societies presents challenges to researchers who wish to investigate the gender dimensions of small arms use and abuse. Restrictions on women's ability to freely cooperate hindered this study. Even so, where undertaken by experienced facilitators, participatory research can generate compelling insights from previously marginalised elements within a community.

section I

INTRODUCTION

This publication completes a series of three Small Arms Survey-sponsored studies on small arms and human insecurity that employed participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques. The first two studies were conducted in South Asia and South-East Asia, for which reports were disseminated widely in the region in multiple languages (Banerjee and Muggah, 2002; Muggah and Moser-Puangsuwan, 2003). A synthesis report is anticipated in order to reflect on the findings of all three studies and to draw general conclusions about the utility of PRA techniques for analyzing small-arms-related violence and insecurity in diverse contexts.

The Pacific Islands were a logical location for this third PRA-based study for a number of reasons. Firstly, conventional research on small-arms-related issues had proved to be very difficult to conduct. The absence of routine surveillance of firearm injuries in rural areas and the fact that many communities were unable to access emergency medical services affected the quality and quantity of mortality and morbidity data. Census statistics on social and economic conditions were similarly untrustworthy. Reliable statistical information on the importation, stockpiling, and misuse of small arms in the region is still extremely limited. For these reasons, even rudimentary baseline information is scarce.

Secondly, the region has recently been traumatised by an outbreak of armed violence. Though seen by many outsiders as tranquil, a number of Pacific countries have recently undergone the difficult growing pains associated with the loosening of colonial ties, including stark development challenges, ethnic and tribal conflict, and a growing militarization of society. In both the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, for example, the industrial and agricultural production base, such as it was, has been virtually destroyed, and public confidence in governing institutions is extremely low. In the Southern Highlands, there was very little

productive capacity to begin with, and what little good will there was toward the army and police has been severely compromised in recent years.

Thirdly, a number of innovative interventions to reduce arms availability have recently been introduced in the region. As such, the situation there presents the opportunity for an ideal natural experiment to test the effectiveness of these interventions through the use of participatory methods. The passage of the Bougainville and Solomon Islands peace accords, both of which included disarmament components—though they are dissimilar in important ways—presented an opportune moment to study the changes taking place in local communities. Measuring the extent to which these interventions have meaningfully reduced armed violence is an empirical question for which participatory research is especially well suited.

This study builds on a now rapidly accumulating body of research on small arms in the region. In addition to the work of the Australian National University (Dinnen and Thompson, 2004), the Small Arms Survey has undertaken fieldwork throughout the Pacific. For example, Alpers and Twyford (2003) and Capie (2003) have generated useful and wide-ranging insights into the dynamics of arms proliferation and misuse in the region. These and other publications have laid the groundwork for a broad understanding of the scale and distribution of the problems of small arms in the Pacific.

It is fair to say that our awareness of the scope of the problem has expanded enormously in the past five years, due to this recent research. For example, it is clear that the region has diverse experiences and a range of issues that are not equally shared. The levels of ownership and access to firearms vary greatly, as do the ways these firearms are put to use. It is also well known that a relatively small number of high-powered weapons can have a disproportionately large impact. Importantly, internal stockpile security is a more pressing challenge than the illegal smuggling of weapons. According to Alpers and Twyford (2003), in the Solomon Islands and PNG: 'groups bent on rebellion, intimidation, and profit have treated state-owned armouries as gun supermarkets, taking weapons when needed.'[1] Manufactured firearms that 'leak' from lawful owners to criminals are the most common instruments of gun-related crime and violence. It is also now recognized that the thoroughness and effectiveness of firearm legislation varies tremendously across the region and suffers from a lack of harmonization, though remedying this is partly the goal of the *Nadi Framework* (Alpers and Twyford, 2003).[2]

More recently, a variety of focused studies conducted by the Small Arms Survey on the quantities, sources, and types of weapons used by combatants and criminals in the Southern Highlands and the Solomon Islands—as well as the dominant motivations for acquiring them—have deepened our understandings. Alpers and Muggah (2004) have elaborated detailed insights into the distribution of automatic and semi-automatic weapons throughout the Southern Highlands and the frequency and distribution of injuries. Alpers (2005) has explored trade routes, state and non-state inventories, impacts on communities, and legal loopholes in PNG. Nelson and Muggah (2004) and Muggah (2004) have also undertaken detailed assessments of the demand factors—the preferences, real and relative prices, and resources—that influence small arms acquisition in both PNG and the Solomon Islands.

But missing from much of this research is the voice of those most affected. Conventional research remains ill-equipped to capture what it actually *feels like* for people in rural Pacific Islands communities who live with the violent insecurity associated with unregulated small arms availability. What kinds of situations and scenarios generate fear? How does fear translate into tangible impacts? What coping mechanisms are people drawing on to deal with their sense of insecurity? These are vital and under-studied questions when considering appropriate interventions to reduce armed violence. To generate answers to these and other questions that relate to the subjective experience of insecurity, it was clear that additional exploration was required.

As is the case in many parts of the world—particularly those affected by crisis or emerging from conflict—important information is lacking where it is most urgently required. Such information could play a pivotal role in setting priorities and for policymaking, programme monitoring and evaluation, and project planning and intervention. Given that all three Pacific Islands locations were experiencing various types of peace processes—each with specific concerns to minimise the availability and impact of small arms—it was an opportune moment to take stock. People's perceptions matter, particularly when it comes to responding to armed violence (McIlwaine and Moser, 2001). Though challenges and obstacles to data collection were nevertheless considerable, we believe that this report goes some way toward filling this critical information gap.

A participatory methodology

A novel and radical addition to the disarmament researcher's toolkit, participatory rural appraisal is a research methodology with deep roots in the development sector (Chambers, 1994b). It is a mainstay of anthropological-, sociological-, and agricultural-system research, and has a number of distinctive characteristics that make it especially useful for the study of the effects of small arms proliferation on human security. Because it is practical, transparent, graphic, and flexible, it has a number of advantages over more traditional approaches to arms-control research.

PRA provides a cost-effective means to measure subjective perceptions and experiences—such as fear, insecurity, and responses to them—that are otherwise difficult to capture using traditional qualitative techniques. Since these effects are as real and as serious to the people experiencing them as injuries and violence, it is essential to report them in a comprehensible way. What is more, the importance of these perceptions cannot be overestimated when designing interventions that seek to limit weapons, reduce demand, and increase security.

Participatory research privileges the attitudes of local individuals and groups in guiding the research questions, objectives, and criteria, largely independent of outside biases. A core assumption is that local people ('insiders') understand their own risks and livelihoods better than 'outsiders', whatever the latter's expertise. PRA therefore provides for the transparent and credible reporting of people's experience. It also ensures that information is shared—thus injecting a level of accountability into the research field.

In terms of methodology, PRA emphasizes dialogue and visualization techniques, empowers local communities to engage with a wide range of issues in creative ways, and opens new avenues for resolving their own problems. It presents a non-threatening and non-discriminatory approach to gathering information.

Participatory research advances a flexible approach that can adapt to and evolve according to local situations and circumstances. Different tools can be used to answer different questions. As such, it moves away from a blueprint model to one that is more holistic and open-ended.

Finally, PRA research does not set out to displace quantitative research efforts; rather, it is complementary to them. Quantitative data, such as it is in the Pacific, is

welcome and serves a critical function in highlighting general spatial and temporal trends, patterns, and the like. But in many cases, data is simply not available, or otherwise crucially limited. Further, such data often does not answer many of the questions that ultimately matter, such as what it is like to live in a place where there are so many guns, and what the qualitative impacts of a peace accord are on human security.

Box 1 Shedding light on insecurity: previous participatory research on small arms

The Small Arms Survey pioneered the use of participatory research techniques to study the impact of small arms availability on human insecurity with two previous studies in regions where quantitative data was scarce—South Asia and South-East Asia.

Small Arms and Human Insecurity: Reviewing Participatory Research in South Asia (Banerjee and Muggah, 2002) was produced jointly with the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies in Sri Lanka. The Small Arms Survey brought together and trained local researchers from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan in participatory techniques. The results of their research provided some of the first documentation in those countries of the role of armed violence in generating fear, contributing to displacement, and furthering existing polarizations within communities.

Whose Security Counts? Research on Armed Violence and Human Insecurity in Southeast Asia (Muggah and Moser-Puangsuwan, 2003) collected commissioned participatory research in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Cambodia. It revealed common patterns of small arms misuse that undermine human security, including by security sector actors and by forces employed in the pursuit of development activities. The report was produced in collaboration with Nonviolence International.

A synthesis report of the two previous studies and the present one will soon be produced to distil broad conclusions about PRA's contributions to small arms research and its limitations.

The PRA toolkit

There are numerous specific tools at the disposal of PRA researchers. For the purposes of this comparative study, a core set of tested methodologies was utilised, including those discussed below.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are informally guided conversation in which only the topics are pre-determined. When used in combination with other activities such as list making and diagrams, interviews often lead to new questions and insights.

Mapping and modelling. Maps are graphic representations, while models have more than two dimensions. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Maps seek to document a range of issues—from the social and physical infrastructure of communities to illnesses affecting the human body. They are not intended to capture or depict absolute and precise dimensions, but are intentionally relative. Varieties of mapping include social mapping, physical mapping, historical mapping, body mapping, anxiety mapping, and mobility mapping. In modelling exercises, participants utilize whatever objects may be handy—stones, branches, naturally occurring ground formations—to represent spatial relationships in community environments and particular features relevant to the research.

Matrices. Matrices are used to compare variables, options, and parameters. They are drawn along x- and y-axes, and criteria compare positive statements with positives, and negative statements with negatives. In order to prepare a matrix, one must always brainstorm and list appropriate criteria. Brainstorming and listing together make up a group process requiring the preparation of a set of identified criteria during a focus group discussion.

Diagrams. Diagrams can be effective in assessing livelihood patterns (e.g. income and expenditure), particularly across time and space. Diagramming tools allow for the proportional representation of livelihoods with an approximate degree of precision. There is a vast array of possible diagramming tools, from histograms and bar charts to wheel diagrams, pie charts, and Venn diagrams.

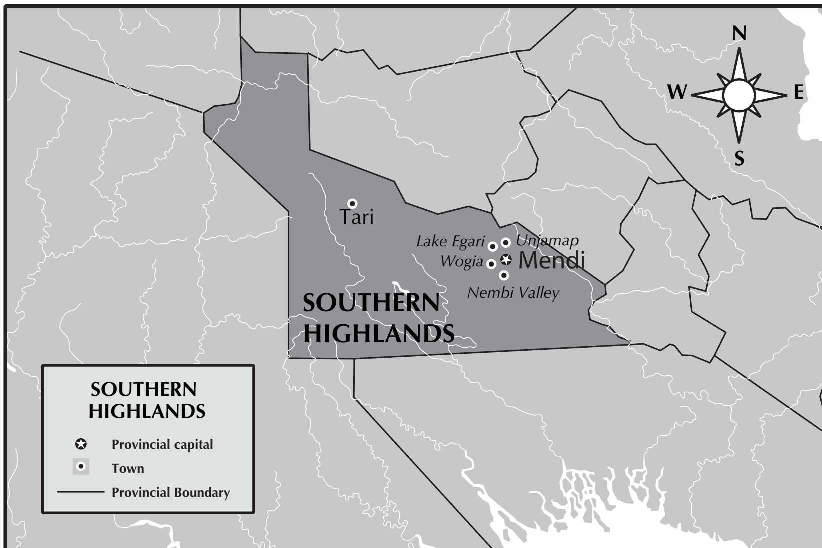
Institutional analysis. Institutional analysis combines ranking and matrices with an assessment of local agencies and associations. It is especially relevant in appraising the operations of governmental and non-governmental organizations by listing criteria of ‘successful’ or ‘efficient’ institutions in relation to different entities.

section II

CASE STUDY 1:
INTER-TRIBAL CONFLICT AND SMALL ARMS IN SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE, PNG

Research by Sarah Garap and Jerry Kai

MAP 2 SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE



Box 2 Gun facts: Southern Highlands Province

- A previous study estimated that there were 200 tribal conflict deaths per year in the early and mid 1990s in the five Highlands provinces (Enga, Southern Highlands, Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, and Simbu).
- There are more than 250 reported licensed firearms in the Southern Highlands (compared to some 27,000 licensed nationally).
- There are thought to be less than 2,000 illegal commercially manufactured weapons circulating in the province, plus another 500 or so hand-made (craft) guns.
- The practice of loaning guns between allied clans is common. However, ammunition is comparatively difficult to find.
- The police and PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) are widely regarded as the source of up to 80 per cent of the high-powered long guns in civilian hands (such as SLRs and M16s).
- A recent survey of injury admissions treated at Mendi Hospital found that 3.5 per cent were due to gunshot wounds.

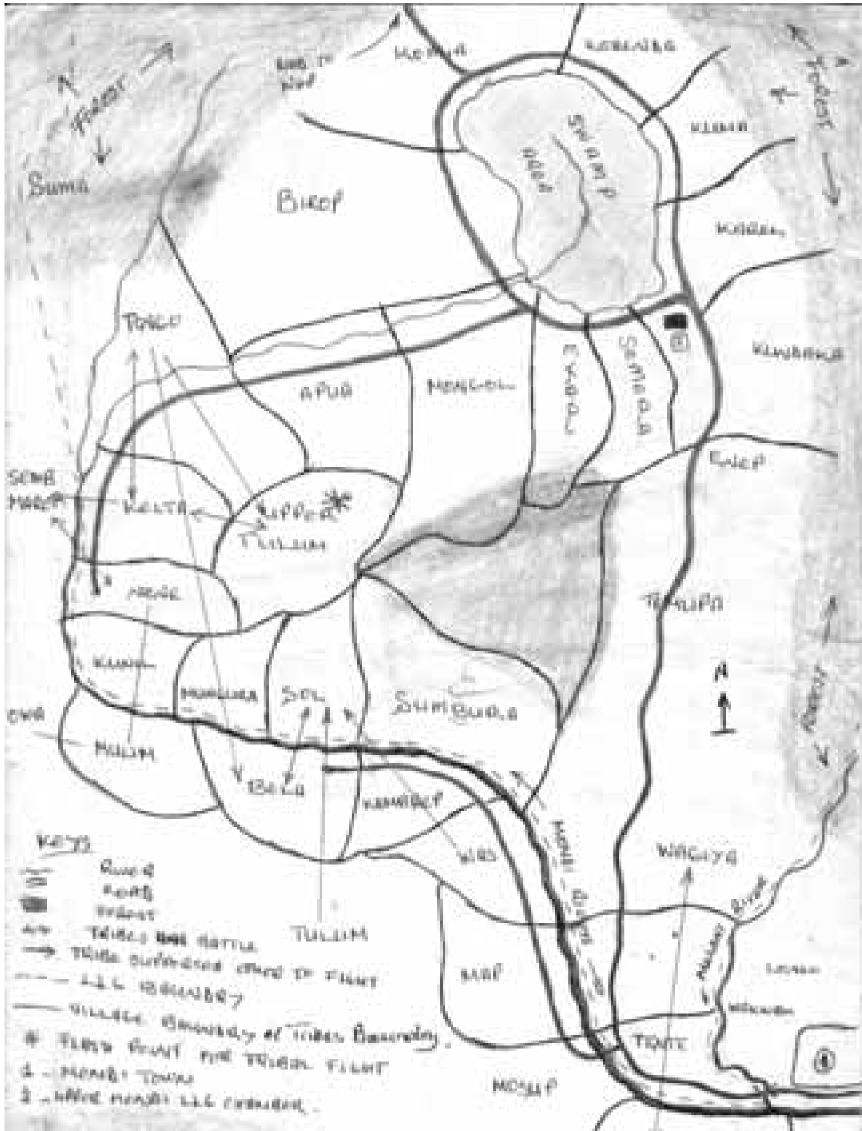
Source: Alpers and Muggah (2004); Young, (1997)

Background

The centrally located Southern Highlands Province (SHP) of mainland PNG is home to approximately half a million people (about 11 per cent of the country's population), dispersed into hundreds of small, somewhat isolated communities, many of which are inaccessible to vehicles. Inter-tribal fighting is the source of much of the violence that claims about 200 deaths annually in the Highlands, though only a comparatively small portion of intentional and unintentional deaths are thought to be recorded (Young, 1997). A recent study found that from 1998 to 2004, 3.5 per cent of all admissions to Mendi Hospital were gun-related. There are only 250 registered firearms in the province, but when the illegal ones are added, the real number of available weapons is thought to be many times this figure (Alpers and Muggah, 2004).

The four communities visited for this study included Unjamap village, Wogia village, the Lake Egari area, and Nembi valley, all situated in Mendi District, in the

Figure 2.1 Villagers' map of the Mendi area



Villagers' map of the Mendi area, including the four study communities
Source: Garap and Kai (2004)

central and western parts of the SHP.[3] Governance of the area is extremely weak, with tribal loyalties providing the primary sense of belonging. Services are minimal and unreliable and the presence of police and other security forces is virtually non-existent. The deterioration of law and order has led to the closure of the provincial hospital, several roads, and many schools and other government services, as public servants leave the province to seek employment elsewhere. According to one civil society leader, there is a real sense in which the region is one step from being completely ungoverned—a 'failed province'.[4]

Between 1999 and 2002, open conflict raged between Unjamap and Wogia tribesmen on the outskirts of Mendi town. Prior to the conflict, the two tribes lived together in relative peace, but a single unexplained death sparked the first skirmishes. The warring parties believed that the police did not investigate the circumstances of this untimely death in a thorough way. Doubts about the cause of death festered into a climate of frustration and suspicion between the two tribes, which eventually led to open conflict. By the time the fighting died down, more than 100 people had lost their lives (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier Online*, 2002).

On 13 March 2002, the two tribes signed a peace agreement in which they acknowledged mutual wrongdoing; admitted that they had both suffered enormously through the loss of lives and properties; and agreed to lay down their arms, respect land boundaries, and work toward building peace. The tribes agreed with the recommendation of the Mendi Peace Committee that 'ways be found to bring about a total ban in the province on firearms of all types' (Mendi Peace Committee, 2002).

Following the agreement, the government instituted a gun turn-in in June 2003. Due to a lack of funds, however, it decided not to buy back the weapons. Villagers were asked to voluntarily hand in their guns as a genuine expression of their intention to build peace and bring the villages back to a sense of normalcy. The agreement did not include the payment of compensation to the fighting parties, some of whom had been recruited through alliances and who lost lives and suffered property damage.

Types of guns and users

This conflict was known locally as 'second to Bougainville', because of the high-powered guns used in the fighting. Yet not much more than ten years earlier, firearms were a novelty in the province. Participants from Lake Egari described the first time they had heard about a new kind of weapon used in a tribal fight in the Tambul area of the Western Highlands in 1998. They recalled reacting with a mixed sense of fear and curiosity.

The total numbers of guns used in tribal fighting between Wogia and Unjamap groups has been estimated at 480–550, including military-style weapons. Prior to this research, however, the full range of weapons and their users was not known. A ranking exercise in the Unjamap village revealed the most common kinds of weapons there, and their most common users.

Figure 2.2 Unjamap weapons and users exercise

Source: Garap and Kai (2004)
Key: HM = home-made, PA = pump-action, P = pistol, MG = machine gun (50–100 rounds), SR = seer (home-made) rifle, HG = hand grenade, GG = gas gun (i.e. grenade launcher), BA = bows and arrows

Figure 2.3 Wogia weapons and insecurity ranking exercise

Source: Garap and Kai (2004)
Key: BA = bows and arrows, K&A = knife & axe, HM = home-made, SS = single-shot rifle, PA = pump-action shotgun, P = pistol, SR = seer rifle, HG = hand grenade

Findings from participatory exercises indicate that M16s, pump-action shotguns, SLRs, pistols, and M6s are the most prominent firearms in the area. The most likely holders of firearms are perceived to be tribal combatants and criminals, as well as politicians, businessmen, and the Corrective Institutions Service (CIS). In the Wogia village, a similar exercise identified tribal fighters, defence and army personnel, politicians, police, and criminals as the most-armed individuals, and M16s, SLRs, AR15s, AK-47s, and pump-action shotguns the most common weapons. Wogia residents indicated that the most destructive guns were, from most to least destructive: M-60 machine guns, SLRs, AK-47s, SKSs, and M16A1s.

Perceptions of security

Participants indicated that the lack of compensation on claims in the peace agreement is a source of simmering anger. They reported that, although tribal fights have ended, there is an ongoing frustration and a near universal fear that fighting will erupt once more. In fact, it is anticipated that if fighting breaks out again, it is likely to be wider in scope, with clan groups fragmenting and joining forces with former enemies to fight their own clanspeople.

The other cause for dissatisfaction is the uneven dividends received in the aftermath of the armed violence. For example, tribesmen in Wogia felt that the government was favouring the Unjamap people by re-opening the hospital and high school in their village, whereas government services such as the health-aid post and community school in Wogia remained destroyed from the conflict. To show that their genuine intention is to build peace, the Wogia have independently started to build two classrooms with bush materials. But, as one villager said, 'It's been two years now since we signed the peace agreement. We are tolerant, but we cannot wait any longer.'

Concern about ongoing inter-tribal tension produced two suggested solutions from Wogia participants: the provision of basic government services and adherence to the community leaders' agreement to discontinue the conflict. Participants were generally frustrated that while they were bound by the Peace Agreement, the government had not honoured its commitment to provide promised services.

Notably, Lake Egari is one of the few places in Mendi District where there is relative peace, because the community leaders exert a strong influence and attend to disputes quickly in order to stop trouble from escalating. Nevertheless, a fear of guns persists. The residence of a local MP was considered a possible flash point partly because it was thought to be the location of a number of guns.

This perception was brought out in an exercise that showed increases in gun deaths due to tribal fighting (see Annexe 1). Before 1965, there was a low level of violence and tribal fights, then from 1965 to 1975, there were some tribal fights in which a few people were killed. From 1985 onwards, there was a gradual increase in the number of tribal fights linked to election violence and the presence of guns, with more and more people being killed. For example, residents expressed the fear that legitimately contesting elections would bring armed reprisals.

One participant, a church pastor, suggested that Southern Highlands residents should surrender their weapons in exchange for development programme assistance, which could be delivered by and through local NGOs. He also recommended that the national government strengthen the local government, since the latter more closely deals with residents' issues. At the time this study was conducted, the pastor was in the process of converting his church into a health-service post, where those in need of medical care can wait for the arrival of health personnel.

Women's perspectives

> *[During the fighting], there wasn't enough time to think of the loved ones being shot, chopped, and drowned—there were plenty of dead bodies lying around. It looked as though there was a big pig feast with pigs being killed and lined up. We had to bury two in one hole. We had no time to pick up our property, like beddings, cooking utensils, clothes. We didn't know where our family members were: husbands, children, mothers with infants, and the old. Many permanent houses got burnt, cars got burnt, and the village became a desert.*
>
> Unjamap woman

The impact of armed fighting on women is a topic most residents in the Southern Highlands found hard to address. Even when there is no clan warfare, however, violence against women is an endemic problem in the region (Dinnen and Thompson, 2004). Many women are not aware of their basic human or legal rights, unless there are active civil society groups in the area. Even then, gender education is limited, both in official education systems and from NGOs.[5]

Nevertheless, participants did indicate that, during the tribal conflict, the ability of women and young children to access food and shelter was reduced. Reportedly, two women who were left to fend for themselves were shot and dismembered after they were found to be taking food to their husbands in the tribal-conflict zone. As was made clear during the researchers' visit, women are not free to discuss these matters openly (see below).

It was Nembi women, however, who reported that the last major conflict was due to election violence, in which the supporters of sitting MP Philomen Embel used guns to threaten and kill defenceless locals. They also reported ongoing

deaths of women in childbirth, due to the lack of medical services, and drowning in a nearby river that remained without a footbridge.

Development needs

Though this research focused on violence and weapons use, participants repeatedly signalled increasing deficits in government services, especially health care and education. Ongoing (and protracted) displacement due to fighting was also highlighted. Premature deaths, especially among women, occur from lack of medical attention.

Researchers found much to confirm these perceptions of a poor quality of life. The children showed signs of malnutrition; women were overly thin; and the poor harvest of garden vegetables was noted, as was the emotional turmoil of mourning and loss of properties in tribal fights. These dire problems appeared to be compounded by the belief that the villagers of the Southern Highlands were not sharing in the economic benefits experienced in the south-west and north-west of the province, where mining concessions are located.

Challenges encountered

The Southern Highlands proved to be an extremely challenging place to conduct participatory research. In the absence of a strong security presence, there was a palpable sense of tension in the Mendi district. Outsiders are not particularly welcome and are viewed with suspicion. Guides engaged by researchers could not cross boundaries of other tribes without incurring hostility—particularly where their tribal affiliation was perceived to be threatening. Researchers were also repeatedly queried about the final disposition of their research, apparently out of fear that it could be used against those participating.

Participants were highly resistant to discussing guns, and instead they used the attention of outside researchers as an opportunity to enumerate their grievances concerning the government. Though frustrating for the researchers to hear repeatedly, these grievances were not so removed from the issues of insecurity and guns, as villagers made it clear that it was primarily the lack of basic services that kept residents angry and predisposed to engage in armed violence. In some cases, participants collaborated only on the assumption that they would be compensated. When it became clear that participation was voluntary, some absconded with

research materials. Ongoing tribal conflict involving losing candidates of a local by-election also hindered researchers' ability to engage with local participants in an area where it was hoped hospital data might also be obtained to supplement participatory exercises.

Perhaps most frustrating, the traditionally subservient role of women in PNG society and the sensitivities around discussion of arms meant that researchers were unable to interact freely and separately with women, a key intended constituency of this project. Furthermore, as the two researchers were themselves women, barriers to open dialogue between the genders limited the extent to which men wished to discuss issues that they perceived to be concerns for men alone. Given this hostile environment, researchers did not have the chance to spend the time required to put participants at ease, get to know the community, and quell villagers' apprehensions.

Findings

The tension in the Southern Highlands is far from resolved, and many of the essential processes for bringing closure to the conflict appear to be stalling, with no clear resolution in sight. Recent reports of violent stand-offs confirm that the ongoing availability of guns adds a dangerous element to this volatile situation. Specifically, this research indicated the following.

Small arms, though a very recent phenomenon, are now common. High-powered firearms—including M16s, SLRs, AR15s, and AK-47s—are now common weapons used in inter-tribal conflicts in SHP, despite the fact that their arrival can be traced to the late 1980s. Though elders recall tribal fights that extended back to the 1930s—most of them perpetrated with traditional weaponry—Highlands warfare has grown in virulence and destructiveness with the use of small arms.

Revenge killing is deeply entrenched. Separately from the question of arms, the traditional practice of retaliatory violence has strong lasting power in the Southern Highlands. It is unlikely that violence can be effectively reduced without addressing this phenomenon.

Compensation processes are incomplete and are the cause of simmering discontent. The entanglements of alliances and compensation arising from the tribal fighting that supposedly ended in 2002 are still being slowly untangled.

Compensation payments to the relatives and members of clan alliances involved in the fighting have still not been resolved. Although much money has changed hands, more livestock and money have yet to be transferred, and suspicion will persist until this takes place. If past history is a guide, some of these claims could linger for years, even decades.

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Pigs collected and offered in compensation for the killing of a tribesman three decades ago in SHP, 2004

Top-down security measures are regarded as ineffective. Confidence in public security forces is extremely low. On their own, current state security efforts to curb armed violence and contain communal conflict in the Southern Highlands are unlikely to be successful in the long term.

Guns are a taboo topic. Though the evidence is strong that guns are acquired and used routinely to commit murder and revenge killings and engage in criminal activity, there is a high level of resistance to addressing guns separately from issues of compensation and state security. Participants were not prepared to discuss guns at length.

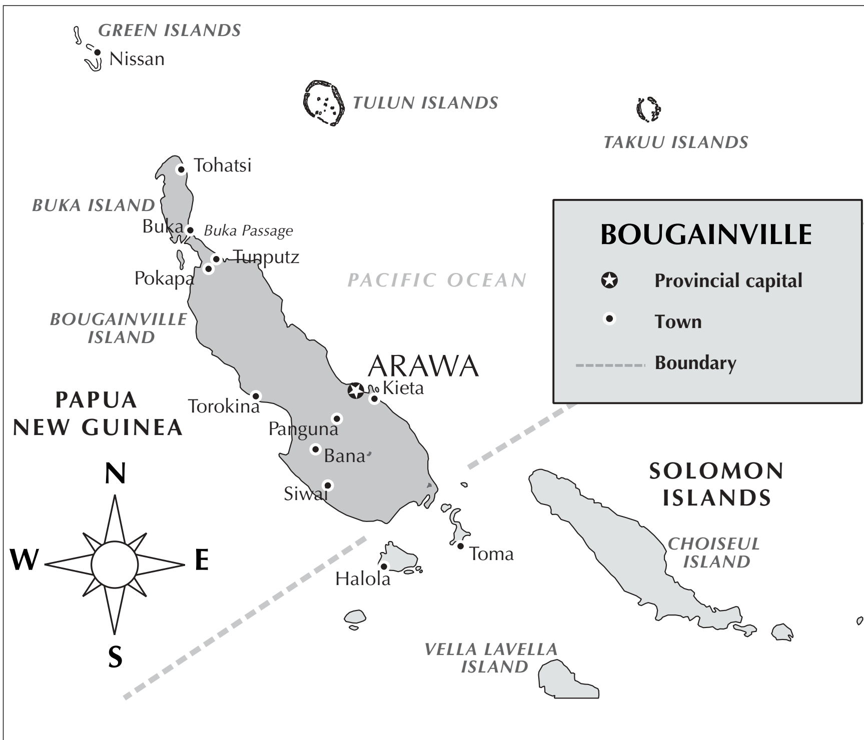
Armed violence will likely flare up unless service delivery improves. Though customary peace agreements and gun turn-ins have mitigated some tribal conflicts in the Southern Highlands, rural participants believe that violence will continue to escalate unless promised public services are delivered. Armed violence appears to have recurred in a number of study sites since the completion of the participatory field research.

section III

CASE STUDY 2: SMALL ARMS AND POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY IN BOUGAINVILLE, PNG

Research by George Lesi

MAP 3 BOUGAINVILLE



Box 3 Gun facts: Bougainville

- During the armed conflict of 1989–98, an estimated 12,000 Bougainvilleans are said to have died, though no methodology has yet confirmed this.
- Deaths occurred not only from armed combat, but from illness due to a four-year blockade imposed by the PNG government on the island.
- Human-rights violations featured in fighting on all sides.
- At the peak of the fighting, more than 64,000 Bougainvilleans were displaced and living in care centres.
- As of September 2004, more than 1,840 arms had been collected.

Source: Alpers and Twyford (2003)

Background

> *The chief had no authority or power. The power and authority was in the hands of people who had access to guns.*
>
> Chief Philip Bruce, Pokapa

Separated geographically and culturally from mainland PNG, Bougainville, Buka Island, and other nearby smaller islands together form the North Solomons Province of PNG. The devastating civil conflict in Bougainville between 1989 and 1998 led directly or indirectly to the deaths of up to 10 per cent of the population. The conflict plunged the country's economy into almost total collapse. To this day, the island's infrastructure remains severely crippled.

Rooted in colonial history, the dispute that sparked off the conflict concerned control over a copper-mine concession located in the centre of the island, as well as compensation claims by local villagers for the environmental damage that the concession caused. The mine was essential to the economic health of all of PNG, providing 40 per cent of the country's exports and up to one-fifth of all government revenue. In the background of the dispute over the mine was a resentment of immigrants from the mainland and a desire on the part of many Bougainvilleans for political independence from PNG.

Armed conflict began when PNG refused to meet Bougainville landowners' demands for greater control of the mine and more compensation, to which a small

band of locals responded with violence. Over the next nine years, the conflict devolved further into complex struggles on many fronts, between PNG and Bougainvilleans and among Bougainvilleans themselves. Human rights violations were committed by all sides, and a government blockade on the island brought economic activity to a standstill. Desperate to crush resistance, the PNG government eventually sought the assistance of mercenaries from South Africa and the UK. International condemnation of this move led, in fact, to the first peace talks after elements of the PNG Defence Force expelled the mercenaries in March 1997 (Alpers and Twyford, 2003).

A series of interim truces and agreements, including Australian and UN peace-monitoring oversight, led to the August 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement, and subsequent legislation passed by the PNG Parliament that extends the possibility of establishing independence for the island through referendums. This possibility was tied explicitly to a three-stage weapons disposal plan.

Box 4 The Bougainville weapons disposal plan

As part of their post-conflict recovery plans, both Bougainville and Solomon Islands undertook weapons collection and disposal efforts. Though the end goals were similar—a significant reduction in the firepower available to former combatants—key features of the plans differed, affecting their success and the prospects for lasting peace. The lessons learned are important, especially for areas where even a small number of guns can be destabilizing and threaten hard-won security gains.

In Bougainville, the weapons disposal plan, negotiated at length with representatives of all relevant parties, was made a prerequisite for something deeply desirable and motivating to the initial combatants—the possibility of political independence from PNG. Furthermore, the plan was carefully constructed in three stages, with mechanisms built for external actors, such as the UN, to certify the completion of one stage before moving on to the next. The entire operation was conducted with transparency as a guiding principle. As a result, in June 2003, the UN Observer Mission certified the completion of stage II of the weapons-disposal plan, which led to the establishment of the Bougainville Constituent Assembly. In November 2003, stage

III of the peace process was reached when the parties to the conflict agreed to destroy the weapons collected.

By September 2004, the UN Observer Mission reported to the UN Security Council that more than 92 per cent of the weapons in containers in Bougainville (1,841 weapons) had been destroyed and that seven out of ten Bougainville districts had completed the weapons disposal programme. In September 2004, the Bougainville Constituent Assembly deliberated for two weeks and provided comments on the third draft constitution to the PNG government. A date for elections, expected by the end of 2004, was pushed back, but they are expected to take place in 2005.

The Solomon Islands weapons-free villages campaign is described in the following case study.

Source: Lesi (2004); Alpers and Twyford (2003)

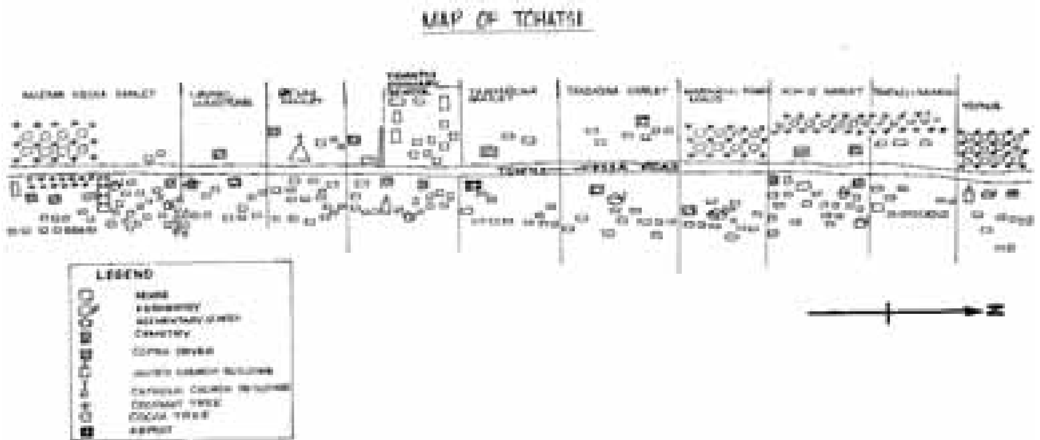
Study sites

To help ensure a variety of responses and experiences, participatory research was conducted in two disparate communities—Pokapa in the Tunputz district of mainland Bougainville, and Tohatsi on Buka Island.

Pokapa is a 1,500-strong community of four hamlets (Posuer, Toropanos, Nemahoa, and Koekavut).[6] Traditional village leadership is provided by elders. Core organizations in the village include Catholic, United Church, and Seventh-Day Adventist groups. Each church group has women's and youth groups that are active and influential. Women leaders also hold meetings with villagers. Levels of education appear to be comparatively high, as there is a 70 per cent self-reported literacy rate in the community. Livelihoods are dependent on agriculture. The primary source of income is cocoa, copra, and market produce such as vegetables and poultry.[7]

Located in the north of Buka Island and situated 100 m above sea level, Tohatsi is composed of nine hamlets of 148 households with a total population of approximately 2,000 people.[8] Tohatsi has a relatively diversified livelihood base—though remains dependent on agriculture. Villagers live on subsistence gardening of taro, sweet potato, and banana. Many local farmers grow cash crops such as copra and cocoa, and some are now starting to plant vanilla. The sale of garden produce (as

Figure 3.1 Villagers' map of the Tohatsi area



Source: Lesi (2004)

well as fish, poultry, and baked goods) at the market is also widely viewed as an important source of income.[9] Tohatsi also registers a high number of residents in the public sector: some 21 people (12 male and nine female) are employed in public-sector jobs, while seven men are employed in the private sector. Five youths received assistance from the Bougainville Ex-combatants Trust Account (BETA) for small income-generating projects in Tohatsi.[10]

Though public services are to some extent available, they are variable in access and quality. Tohatsi has access to some basic services, but the long walking distance to the centres providing these services, such as the hospital, is a hindrance.[11] Tohatsi villagers have a small aid post that provides some basic medical services. However, like most aid posts, it regularly runs out of basic medical supplies. Access to potable water and sanitation services is variable.[12]

Gun availability

> *There is still fear within the community as a result of the presence of arms and other offensive weapons such as knives and axes.*
>
> Roland Ruhita, member, Leitana Council of Elders, Buka

Both communities suffered gun deaths and injuries during the fighting. In Pokapa, villagers indicated that 51 people had been killed and ten others injured. In Tohatsi, ten died and three were wounded. Deaths peaked in 1992 in Pokapa and in 1990 in Tohatsi (see Annexe 2). During the fighting, community members from both villages evacuated to bush shelters.

Despite weapons collection and destruction efforts, there is evidence that small arms and ammunition still proliferate in the area. The presence of these weapons threatens the fragile peace process, and contributes in some cases to persistent insecurity, especially among women and young people. Participants in both communities indicated that they live in fear while guns remain, since they are still being used to threaten people and aid in robberies. In their opinion, it would be many years before people experience full freedom of movement.

Exercises conducted in Pokapa indicated that that ex-combatants had access to the following small arms and light weapons: home-made guns, M16s, SLRs, submachine guns, .303s, pistols, hand grenades, and AR15s. M16s and home-made guns were highlighted as the most common arms. In many cases, villagers claimed that these weapons were borrowed from combatants in other areas of Bougainville. Participants generally denied that they were the owners of the weapons. They often argued that the presence of the weapons contradicts the support that most villagers expressed for the weapons disposal plan. Residents of both communities indicated they would prefer to see the guns stored in the containers immediately destroyed after the third stage of the plan.

In Tohatsi, the situation was qualitatively different. Fewer high-powered weapons were reported—and only .22s, home-made weapons, M16s, and pump-action shotguns were used during the armed conflict. It was not immediately clear from the participatory researcher whether these guns still remained in the area—though concerns about weapons availability nevertheless persist. Also, the use of home-brewed alcohol remains a threat, particularly when combined with weapons possession. Women are especially vulnerable, despite the fact that alcohol production and retail remains a business dominated by women. In an exercise, villagers ranked small arms over physical violence, arson, and breaking and entering as the biggest threat to women.

Even so, the continued availability of weapons does not appear to present a major threat to core livelihood activities in Tohatsi. Residents are caring for their

cash crops, including cocoa and copra, and yields are growing. Mobility does not appear to be constrained and daily activities continue unhindered.

The researcher noted the correlation between the number of deaths reported in the villages and the kinds of small arms still said to be available to residents. In Pokapa, where mortality was high, military-style weapons predominated. In Tohatsi, where mortality was just one-fifth of the number of deaths in Pokapa, hand-made guns were mentioned more often than military-style weapons.

The return of traditional security—family and clan

Participants were able to quickly identify many of the causes and examples of the insecurity they felt both during the conflict and afterwards, and in so doing highlighted the effects of the breakdown of traditional security structures, i.e. family and clan hierarchies.

© George Lesi

Bougainville men taking part in a participatory mapping exercise

For example, parents reported their inability to prevent their sons from being recruited into the various armed forces. In the case of families of mixed background—such as Bougainvillean wives with non-Bougainvillean husbands—war

often meant separation, as non-Bougainvilleans were forced from the island at gunpoint. The PNG government's intentional disruption of communication between the islands made this separation particularly painful.

Similarly, the authority of the chiefs declined during the fighting, and was supplanted by that of those with access to guns. This led in turn to confusion and frustration within the leadership structure of the clans. Despite the diminishment of their power, chiefs were sometimes the target of violence because of their traditional roles. Dispute negotiation and reconciliation—standard functions of the chief—deteriorated in the wake of these developments. The credibility and influence of traditional community-based security structures, lost during the fighting, is only now returning to some of the areas, and with it the traditional comfort provided by such structures.

Findings

Four years after the end of open hostilities, Bougainvilleans are slowly moving towards weapons-free communities and political independence. But tensions remain, and the presence of guns among ex-combatants is a source of fear for many villagers that remains a fact of daily life. Specifically, the research found the following.

Ex-combatants still possess a wide assortment of military-style firearms. Despite disarmament interventions, rural ex-combatants still appear to have access to a range of firearms, including handguns, semi-automatic military-style weapons, and home-made arms. In one study site, the most common firearms owned by ex-combatants were home-made guns, and M16s borrowed from armed forces in other areas of Bougainville. The practice of borrowing weapons means that one gun can turn up in geographically distant villages.

Small arms were widely used in armed violence and have a lasting legacy. The direct and indirect effects of the armed conflict—though receding—are not forgotten. The vacuum in the lives of the communities created by deaths and unexplained disappearances, assaults, thefts, displacement, family separations, and the breakdown of clan structures is still felt today. Even so, it should be emphasised that the situation is qualitatively more secure now than during the armed conflict.

Weapons destruction is locally supported. Residents in the two rural communities support the destruction of guns currently stored in the containers after stage III of the disarmament plan. Because weapons continue to generate fear and anxiety—particularly among women and young people—there is growing support for the permanent removal of arms.

The post-conflict period has witnessed considerable gains. While there is still room for improvement, tangible improvements in the quality of life and standard of living have been reported in the two study sites since the end of fighting. Access to clean water and the re-establishment of education, health services, and some economic activity have all been noted in the communities. Villagers report that their standard of living has improved greatly since the end of fighting.

The lives of women have improved. Participatory research revealed a growth in and diversification of livelihoods, particularly among women. As residents build permanent houses and earn cash income from cocoa and copra crops, they are meeting their basic needs. Women report that they measure improvements in their quality of life in terms of reduced physical labour, proper education and health services, home ownership, and access to clean water.

Some basic services are still lacking. Despite measurable gains, the post-conflict recovery still registers a number of shortcomings. For example, health and sanitation services are still weak in Pokapa. Health care is provided through a single aid post that often runs out of medical supplies. As a result, people must walk two hours for medical attention at a church-run health centre.

section IV

CASE STUDY 3:
PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AFTER THE TPA AND RAMSI IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Research by Roselyn Wale and Audrey Baeanisia

MAP 4 THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Box 5 Gun facts: Solomon Islands

- Guns are thought to have been used to kill 150–200 and injure 430–460 others during the 'tensions'.
- The conflict led to the displacement of more than 35,000 Solomon Islanders throughout Guadalcanal and Malaita.
- In 2003, there were estimated to be more 3,500 weapons in circulation—including both home-made guns and high-powered weapons stolen from police armouries.
- By August 2003, 90–95 per cent of the arms in civilian hands had been turned in through a RAMSI-sponsored amnesty (previous turn-ins had been less fruitful).

Source: Muggah (2004)

Background

The armed conflict that engulfed the Solomon Islands on and off from 1998 to 2002 exposed deep social unrest and stark development concerns. The country is still in the early stages of a post-conflict recovery that will continue for years to come. Fighting was initially set off by land disputes between the peoples of two of the main islands: Guadalcanal (where the capital, Honiara, is located) and Malaita. For several decades, Malaitans had been settling on Guadalcanal, which was not necessarily welcomed by locals. This was exacerbated by periodic acts of violence against indigenous Guadalcanal peoples by Malaitans.

This led eventually to large-scale retaliation by groups of armed Gualese under the banner of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA—later renamed the Isatabu Freedom Fighters or IFF, also known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement or IFM) against Malaitans in and around Honiara. The weapons they used had been stockpiled over many years; many were former Second World War arms. The fighting set off a mass exodus of Guadalcanal residents from Honiara—both Gualese and Malaitans. Malaitans, in turn, formed a militant group called the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), arming themselves with weapons raided from police armouries, and carried out counter-attacks against the IFF (Alpers and Twyford, 2003).

Box 6 The weapons-free villages campaign

The Weapons-free villages (WFV) campaign, an initiative of the PMC, was established in May 2002 after the second of two amnesties in the wake of the TPA. The programme was created in the knowledge that despite the amnesties, guns were still prevalent in communities. The campaign aimed to publicly recognize villages on Guadalcanal and Malaita that had given up arms.

Once the PMC was satisfied that a village no longer contained weapons, a ceremony was held where village leaders signed a 'weapons-free declaration': a solemn pledge that they would work to keep the village free of all weapons in the future. The village was then presented with a certificate and a 'weapons-free' sign proclaiming its status. The sign asks others to respect the wishes of the villagers not to bring guns back into their community.

A recent assessment of the WFV campaign by the Small Arms Survey found that it was an effective mechanism for rebuilding communities; however, on its own, it appears to have had little impact as a disarmament mechanism. In the early days, the campaign was run in conjunction with the IPMT, a team of international monitors. Without this international influence, it is unlikely that the PMC would have achieved much success in weapons surrender.

The mere fact that over 3,700 weapons and over 300,000 rounds of ammunition remained in communities between the end of the second amnesty and the start of the most recent one indicates that the WFV campaign was not an effective mechanism for disarmament. However, the assessment found that the programme was a significant confidence booster and that in conjunction with a strong deterring influence—such as appears to be provided by RAMSI—the programme can achieve its goals of helping to make villages gun free.

Source: Nelson and Muggah (2004)

In June 2000, the MEF escalated the conflict by taking over key government facilities in Honiara and forcing the prime minister to resign. They were assisted in this by elements of the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP). Open warfare between the MEF and IFF continued until a ceasefire was instituted in August 2000. In October, the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) was signed, which established an International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) and a local Peace Monitoring Council (PMC), and also outlined a weapons-collection programme.

Between January 1999 and October 2000, several hundred people were believed to have been killed by both IFF and MEF militia, as well as the police and its security apparatus. The Red Cross does not have injury figures for January 1999 to July 2003, but they are estimated to be in the hundreds. Many more were believed to have died due to limited access to basic health services. Remote clinics were especially vulnerable, as supply routes were disrupted by the conflict. Between 1999 and 2000, 20,000–30,000 people were internally displaced. In 2001, total internal displacement had risen to more than 35,000—primarily in Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Honiara itself.

Armed violence continues to be a problem in the aftermath of the conflict, both in terms of reprisal killings and criminal violence. In 2003, more than 30 fatal gun injuries were recorded. In addition, armed supporters of the IFF are believed to have killed between 15 and 50 people since May 2003 alone, though this is difficult to verify. The TPA has brought a significant reduction in the fighting, but periodic killings still take place. In short, the wounds of the conflict are still fresh. Without significant attention and care, they could easily be opened again (Alpers and Twyford, 2003).

Study sites

Research was conducted in two villages on West Guadalcanal (Kauvare and Tamalupo), two villages of Malaita (Ailau and Lilisiana), and three villages in North Malaita (Lathalu, Loina, and Malu'u Station). Because each area was researched in detail, study results are reported separately for each of the three areas below.

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Graffiti, Guadalcanal

West Guadalcanal

The village of Kauvare still shows the signs of conflict. Literally 'ground zero' for battles between the MEF and IFF, both sides set up bunkers within a kilometre of the village. During the fighting, Kauvare was completely burnt to the ground. Today, many of the burned structures remain. All the residents evacuated the village for fear of being caught in the crossfire. The MEF also set up roadblocks to keep Guadalcanal people away and there were incidents of harassment and torture against Guadalcanal civilians. As a result, many civilians fled inland for safety.[13]

The Tamalupo community borders Kauvare. Many of the residents of each community have family in the other. The residents are primarily indigenous Guadalcanal people, and are predominantly Roman Catholic. However, a minority belong to the Moro movement, an indigenous religion whose doctrines are rooted in the traditional culture of Guadalcanal. Members of this movement were identified by villagers as the primary instigators of ethnic violence. There is anecdotal evidence to support this, with reports of Guadalcanal militant groups dressed in '*kabilato*' and wearing traditional shell necklaces strongly associated with the Moro movement.[14]

Both Kauvare and Tamalupo are linear settlements along the main road that runs through the villages into Honiara.

© Robert Muggah

Solomon Islanders taking part in a mapping exercise

The TPA and the activities of RAMSI received mixed reviews from participants. For example, the TPA is viewed as generating neither an adequate police presence nor an effective gun amnesty (because villagers simply hid weapons). But significant improvements in perceptions of security are associated with RAMSI. The increased visibility of security forces, the apprehension of law-breakers, and additional (and visible) weapons collection have inspired feelings of safety. These findings are summarised in Annexe 3.

The improved security situation has had positive effects on the restoration of and confidence in services. Indicators include the reopening of schools and the access of children to education. Other criteria of improved safety relate to mobility and the capacity of villagers to travel to clinics and the National Referral Hospital in Honiara.

Participants also defined improved livelihoods and access to markets as criteria of improved security. Villagers have better access to markets to buy and sell their

produce in order to earn a living. Other people returned to their jobs in Honiara, which they had deserted during the violence. However, the majority of people still find life very difficult, as destroyed infrastructure is still not functional. The growing of copra and cocoa and other agricultural activities were not significantly restarted at the time of this survey.

Despite the improvements mentioned above, participants reported a wide range of violence—with and without weapons—in the two Guadalcanal communities. Incidents included arson; harassment; kidnapping; property theft; armed threats; sabotage of public infrastructure such as water pipes, electricity power lines, and bridges; rape; murder; domestic violence; and disruption of basic services such as transportation, schools, and health services.

Participants also indicated that a variety of firearms were readily available. According to community members, these included SLRs, light machine guns (LMGs), 'short guns', home-made guns, .22s, pistols, spears, and bows and arrows. They also described the kinds of violence inflicted on men, women, youth, and young children (see Annexe 3).

Malaita

The people of Ailau are coastal dwellers whose main livelihood is subsistence farming and fishing. Prior to the conflict, this village had a small population of about 50 people. In 1999, when Malaitans were chased out of Guadalcanal, some of those displaced went to settle in Ailau, increasing the population to more than 200 people. During the height of the tension, from 1999 to 2003, before the arrival of RAMSI, nearby Auki was the centre for militants and there were often unlawful, violent activities taking place in the township. One of the most violent murders that occurred in Auki was the shooting of a peace councillor, the late Sir Fredrick Soaki, by a militant.

Lilisiana is home to about 900 people, 300 of whom were displaced from Guadalcanal. At the time of this survey, the displaced settlers were still resented by the original inhabitants. The sudden increase in population resulted in overcrowding and a shortage of fertile farm land to make gardens. As many as four families lived under the same roof. This affected the health conditions, particularly of children.

Using the tools of brainstorming and listing, the displaced Malaitans put their flight down to the arms in the hands of militants. They spoke of being threatened and harassed, and properties burned or looted by militants carrying small arms. One respondent said, 'Some of the militants were boys I knew very well. During that time they came wearing masks and pointed at me and my family with guns and demanded compensation of hundreds of dollars to be paid to them for no reason.'

Through an impact assessment, community members revealed that the widely known presence of guns in other nearby communities restricted their safe movement in those areas, creating a 'zone of fear' for them. This fear had practical ramifications, since women could not take advantage of markets in such areas to sell products. Access to schools, clinics, and shops was also limited as a result.

During the survey, the two communities claimed that they had remained neutral during the fighting, supporting neither the MEF nor the opposing militants. If true, this makes them unusual in comparison with other regions of Malaita. Villagers reported being accused by the MEF of organizing a subversive militant organization (a 'Seagull Force') under the leadership of elected parliamentarian Bartholomew Ulufalu (the deposed former prime minister). The communities denied the existence of a Seagull Force in the area, and this survey did not find any evidence to suggest that such a force was present there.

North Malaita

Lathalu is an inland community of 250 people that relies on farming for both subsistence and income. The women often go down to Auki market—about four hours' drive by truck—to sell their produce. Like other communities on Malaita, Lathalu experienced overcrowding problems with the return of the displaced. Family feuds broke out as a result of land disputes.

Loina is home of one of the warlords of the MEF, and is feared by other villages because it has a reputation for violence. Not surprisingly, then, the atmosphere in Loina was one of suspicion and hostility towards outsiders.

In Malu'u Station during the tension, a comparatively small number of armed militants controlled the entire village. During various participatory exercises, villagers listed rape, torture, harassment, and even murder and destruction of properties as common occurrences during 'the Tension.' Three men were reportedly

brutally murdered here. According to respondents, vehicles and other stolen materials were transported from Guadalcanal through this village before being taken to militant-run villages.

Violence and arms availability

When asked about the types of arms they were aware of in their communities, participants listed the following in order of most-commonly used: SLRs, '*Kaliba*',[15] shotguns, M16s, home-made guns, pistols, and .22s. MEF members were identified as the main possessors of these guns.

An assessment of armed violence in Lilisiana village revealed a wide range of impacts such as the general breakdown of law and order leading to displacement, land disputes, loss of employment, harassment, hunger, and theft. Lilisiana and Lathalu villagers claimed that they were 'innocent victims' of the armed conflict. Like their counterparts in Ailau, the reluctance of Lilisiana people to be involved with the MEF was a cause for suspicion elsewhere in Malaita.

Guns are thought to persist in Lathalu as well, and a sense of fear attaches to this perception.[16] This North Malaita village is one of the few places where RAMSI has had little influence or cooperation. Lathalu community members explained this with reference to their loyalty to the '*wantok*' system—the network of clan-based commitments that places family above the law.[17]

As in the Southern Highlands of PNG, participants were reluctant to speak about small arms, warning the researchers (women) that it could cause them trouble. Here the explanation was that the area was still under the purview of MEF militants, and people were not free to talk about guns.[18] Nevertheless, Lathalu was declared 'weapon free' by the National Peace Council.

A number of violent incidents were reported in the area, including the torture of three civilian men by militants, as well as gang rapes. In the year before this research was conducted, a provincial police post near Malu'u Station was burnt down because of a disagreement between villagers and former militants of the MEF.[19] The militants formed rival gangs and organized against each other.

Even so, some weapons have been collected. In the Malu'u Station and Loina communities, 108 guns were collected during the May 2003 amnesty. Villagers suspect there are many more still available to militants.

Persisting militant elements

MEF militants still exert a strong influence in the area. The palpable tension researchers felt in Loina, for example—where villagers refused to discuss guns or the activities of militants—was due to a fear of reprisals. Loina's reputation as a violent place under militant influence could explain its non-involvement with RAMSI and disengagement from local police.

Indeed, a number of men wanted by the police are still on the run in these areas. A woman who did not want her name disclosed claimed that: 'They [the community] had a warning from the militants that although RAMSI is here they should not do anything silly in reporting them, because... they will deal with those people seriously after RAMSI leaves.' The same participant reported having been told by the militants about a number of villages in the area that had weapon-free zone signs in them, but were by no means weapons free.

Other participants believed that the militants use young children as spies or informants to report on disloyal or critical elements. One shop owner confessed that she was approached by militants to give them goods and money from the shop. When she hesitated, the militants pointed guns at her and told her that if she reported the matter to the police, she would be shot.

Another Loina participant echoed this, claiming that villagers were being caught in the middle between RAMSI and militants. What he called RAMSI's principle of 'set a thief to catch a thief' (i.e. using former militants to catch other militants) was not working, and was in fact generating conflict between the existing clan power structure and the militants who had gained their power through guns. A Loina chief expressed concern that RAMSI's reliance on information from militants was counter-productive, as it was being fed false leads. Little recognition was given to the old structures, thus undermining the power of the rightful community leaders.[20]

RAMSI's effectiveness—and limitations

Despite these problems, a degree of security appears to have taken hold in the aftermath of the tensions. An anxiety map composed by villagers revealed that 'fear' registered quite high in the years between 1999 to 2003, prior to the arrival of RAMSI. The reasons were quite clear: the breakdown of law and order that

sparked off other problems mentioned above. People reported being generally happy and leading normal lives again after the arrival of RAMSI in 2003.

In the opinion of participants, RAMSI is associated with improved law and order in Malu'u Station, Loina, and Lathalu. The presence of armed RAMSI military and police personnel reportedly contributed to a reduction in violence and an improved freedom of movement, especially for women and girls.

But participants were conscious that RAMSI is by definition a temporary solution. Some noted that the 'payback' systems is very much alive in Malaita and that 'the mentality is that RAMSI is here temporarily, whereas the former militiamen are our kinsmen who we have to live with for the rest of our lives, so if we do anything to them now, they might retaliate after RAMSI leaves, so we choose to keep our peace with our kinsmen.'

To this chilling thought can be added two others: a strong belief that guns are still hidden in surrounding villages, and the conviction that former militants employ spies to report on individuals and groups who act against them or report them to RAMSI or the local police. No wonder, then, that even speaking of guns or militant activities is regarded as dangerous.

Findings

In the Solomon Islands, the vast majority of—but not all—guns have been collected. The sensitivities around discussing guns and militant activity are a clear sign that these are associated with high levels of fear and anxiety. Specifically, this study found the following.

RAMSI still enjoys support. There is strong confidence in the presence and activities of RAMSI among villagers in North Malaita and Guadalcanal. The increased and visible presence of security forces since RAMSI's arrival in August 2003 and the apprehension of law-breakers in the wake of RAMSI are two important elements of this renewed sense of security.

A strong deterrent can have positive multiplier effects on development. The improvements in law and order ushered in by RAMSI have generated a ripple effect in the restoration of services, including the reopening of schools and improved access to health care. However, in Malaita, the freedom of children to return to school has led to overcrowding and deterioration in the educational services.

Despite various arms-reduction interventions, firearms are still available. Although feelings are generally very positive about RAMSI, and weapons-collection efforts have shown some promising results, a wide range of firearms are still believed to be in circulation in both Malaita and Guadalcanal, including commercial handguns, rifles, military-style guns, and home-made firearms.

Small arms continue to be used to intimidate. Threatened with reprisals, some villagers are intimidated into not reporting militant activities to RAMSI or the local police. The fact that some militant leaders—particularly those from the MEF—are still at large exacerbates this situation. Even so, homicides and criminality perpetrated with firearms are virtually unheard of.

Some reservations about the limitations of RAMSI are acknowledged. Although criminal activity declined after the TPA went into effect in 2000, participants expressed disappointment in the accord because it did not lead to a stronger security presence on the ground.

The Weapons Free Villages Campaign appears to have also contributed to the confidence in the dividends of peace. Though comparatively few weapons have actually been collected through the weapons-free scheme administered by the National Peace Council (initiated in 2002), there appears to be strong grassroots support for the concept.

section V

CONCLUSION

The participatory research reports from the Southern Highlands, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands reveal a number of broad commonalties about the presence and use of small arms in the communities studied. These findings add much-needed first-person contributions from the communities affected and provide additional evidence that participatory research can be a valuable tool for understanding and describing the impacts of small arms on insecurity—and the effectiveness of measures to contain those impacts.

There is a wide variety of types of small arms in the region. This is surprising, especially in places where guns were relatively unknown even recently. Indeed, the knowledge of types, calibres, and small arms functions is high among local rural actors. In addition, the majority of weapons in the Southern Highlands, Bougainville, and Solomon Islands were looted from armouries and not illegally smuggled across borders.

Crucially, a small number of firearms in the wrong hands can generate tremendous insecurity when conflict breaks out. Power asymmetries are consolidated and reinforced, and when coupled with a culture of retributive justice, can lead to large-scale intentional violence. Guns have been quickly absorbed into existing social dynamics of conflict, with disastrous effects. Whether in tribal conflict, land disputes, or conflicts over natural resources, the ease of use and lethality of guns have made them highly desirable among combatants.

This insecurity lingers well after 'armed conflict' comes to an end—affecting community cohesion, livelihood security and income generation, settlement of the displaced, and the safety of women and young children. All three areas are nevertheless slowly recovering, with assistance from a combination of violence-reduction, reconciliation, and arms-collection initiatives.

It is clear that the use of guns in these rural communities cannot be divorced from their uses in ongoing social behaviours. Focusing on the guns is essential, but efforts will eventually fail if they do not understand and address the motivations that cause groups and individuals to take up arms in the first place—and participatory research is particularly suited for bringing those motivations out into the open and, to a certain extent, quantifying them.

The inadequate collection of weapons, coupled with socio-economic disparities and limited reconciliation, threatens to trigger renewed violence in the region. Lessons from the past must be learned. Similarly, disarmament must coincide with efforts that address long-term, sustainable development, which is often at the core of rural armed conflict in the region. Government services and development needs are undisputedly at the root of much of the conflict in the areas surveyed. Those efforts that are 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' will have a better chance of success.

With this third PRA pilot study, the value of participatory methodologies in measuring perceptions of security in relation to small arms has been demonstrated. From a research perspective, this study has provided qualitative insights where data was scarce. From the development side, this project has invested in and empowered local actors to bring stories to light that outside researchers could not have easily uncovered. For researchers and donors struggling to find inexpensive and accurate baseline information on human insecurity and armed violence, this news should be particularly welcome.

The findings from the three reports also confirm that PRA is a valuable monitoring and evaluation tool in assessing violence reduction and weapons collection programmes, and that it can help identify appropriate criteria to measure success, as well as inject accountability into initiatives. Accordingly, locals skilled and experienced in participatory methodologies should work with donors and NGOs to introduce effective participatory surveillance systems to measure the impacts of interventions—particularly their effects on safety and security, as well as technical aspects such as the types of weapons returned.

Finally, although its value is by now clear, we should not ignore the limitations of participatory research in certain contexts. Particularly where tensions are simmering or extremely fresh, this methodology can be limited by fears and the

reluctance of parties to open up and share their experiences and attitudes. Deep-seated social norms that limit the ability of particular groups—such as women and young people, who may be particularly affected—to participate effectively in the research also remain factors in PRA's effectiveness.

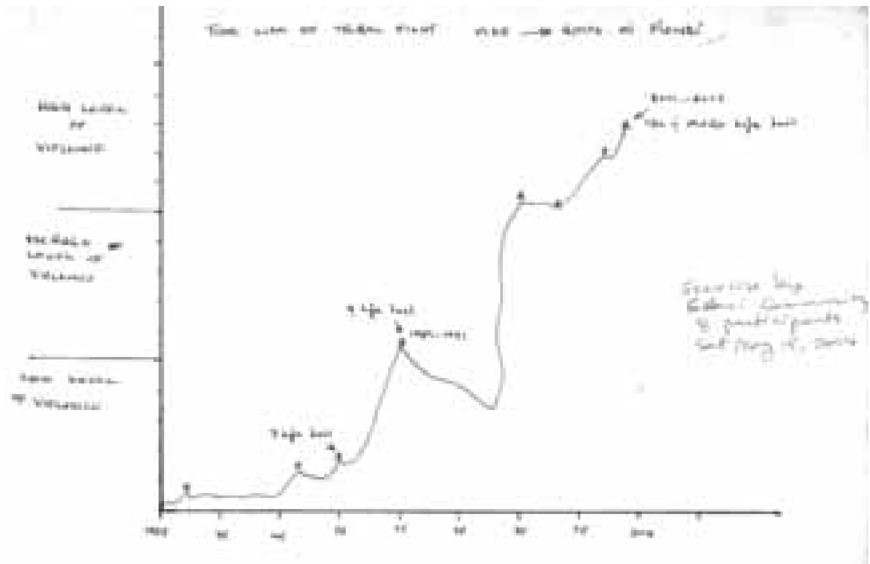
But by now, after pilot projects in three regions with very different challenges, participatory research has proven itself to be a methodology that has much to offer analysts, and by extension the institutions, donors, and policymakers concerned with effectively reducing human insecurity at the hands of armed violence.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS EXERCISES

Guns and users exercise (men), Wogia

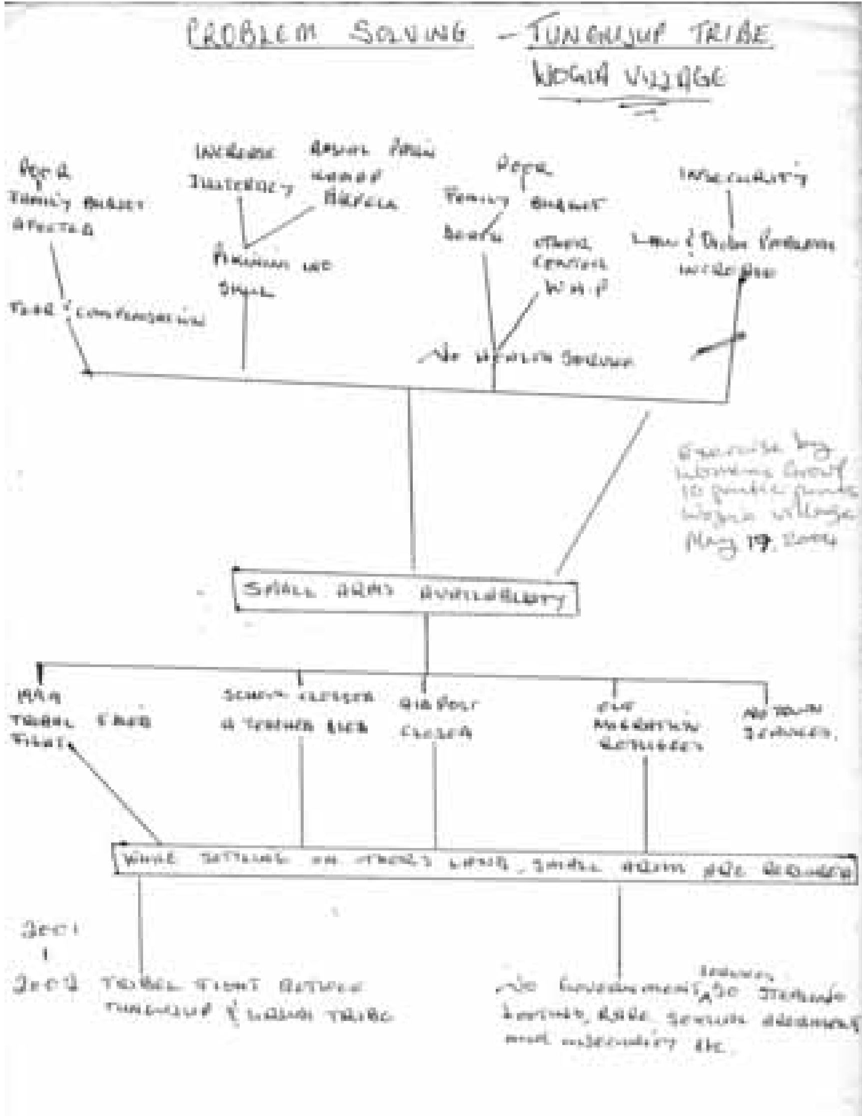
Source: Garap and Kai (2004)

Guns and users exercise (men), Wogia



Source: Garap and Kai (2004)

Small arms problem-solving tree (women), Wogia



Source: Garap and Kai (2004)

annexe II

CONFLICT-RELATED ARMED VIOLENCE IN TWO BOUGAINVILLE COMMUNITIES

The following tables give the number of firearm-related deaths and injuries during the Bougainville conflict, as reported by villagers in Pokapa and Tohatsi.

Pokapa		
Year	**Deaths**	**Injuries**
1989	0	0
1990	13	1
1991	13	0
1992	18	5
1993	5	4
1994	2	0
Total	**51**	**10**

Tohatsi		
Year	**Deaths**	**Injuries**
1989	0	0
1990	9	2
1991	1	1
1992	0	0
1993	0	0
1994	0	0
Total	**10**	**3**

Source for both tables: Lesi (2004)

annexe III

SOLOMON ISLANDS EXERCISES

Local perceptions of the impact of guns on Guadalcanal villagers			
Women	**Children**	**Youths**	**Men**
Disrupted the day-to-day roles such as gardening, shopping Anxiety; stress Loss of focus; disorientation of lifestyle Loss of control over family Suffer domestic violence Loss of means of income	Loss of proper care and attention (evidenced in diets) Loss of education Loss of access to medical care Loss of play activities such as games Suffered child abuse, hunger, malnutrition	Loss of education Experience discipline problems Loss of social, physical, spiritual activities Involvement in anti-social activities such as militancy, drugs, rape, stealing Disorientation and loss of focus Loss of a sense of purpose in life Stress	Neglect of family and community responsibilities Disruption of role as head of family Perpetrators of domestic violence No proper rest day and night Involvement in militancy Loss of income Stress and disorientation Loss of self-confidence as head of family

Source: Wale and Baeanisia (2004)

Guadalcanal villagers' perceptions of the TPA and RAMSI	
TPA	**RAMSI**
• Some guns turned in • Ongoing criminal activities • People still being threatened with guns • Still no proper homes • Still no police support • Still no public confidence in police • People still feel insecure • Villagers still living in temporary hiding places • Only some returned to Kauvare and Tamalupo • Some children returned to school	• Police post, schools, and clinics built • Children returned to school • Significant gun turn-in achieved; guns destroyed • People move around freely • Revival of transportation, health services • Police presence increased • Concerted effort by families to rebuild houses and start life anew • Significant resettlement of indigenous Guadalcanal people to Kauvare and Tamalupo • Land returned to original owners • Stress levels still high; efforts made to provide counselling by NGOs such as World Vision and Red Cross, but still not enough support provided in these areas

Source: Wale and Baeanisia (2004)

Endnotes

1 Nevertheless, some illicit trade is known to continue. Sources of gun-running to PNG include South-East Asia and the PNG/West Papua border (Alpers and Twyford, 2003, p. xvi).

2 For the Nadi Framework, see SPCPC and OCO (2000).

3 Site visits took place in all four villages in May 2004.

4 Since this study was completed, there have been worrying signs of unrest. Some building contractors who had not been paid padlocked and blockaded the Agiru Centre, demanding their money. There has also been some political unrest related to disputed election results. The court recently handed down its decision in the Tari-Pori case, hearings for which had to be moved from Mendi to Enga for security reasons. A decision in the Koroba-Kopiago case is still pending. There is also talk of a national government intervention (personal communication with Nicole Haley, Australian National University, December 2004).

5 Literacy among women in PNG is about 58 per cent, compared to about 71 per cent for men (CIA, 2004).

6 Pokapa hamlet residents associate themselves primarily with their clans, which include Naboen, Nakarip, Natasi, Amara, Namae, Moutaha, and Posuer. Because the hamlets are scattered geographically, research was primarily conducted in Posuer.

7 Traditional activities include hunting and gardening. Men are active in both hunting and house building, while gardening and selling produce are predominantly women's activities. Women also sew, make handcrafts, and bake.

8 Tohatsi hamlets include Haleana Kesa, Mapiri Karitung, Pelau, Tabtabuna, Tokoruna, Makalu Kosu Malis, Kikis, Yarku Mumun, and Yoping.

9 Most people are also involved in fishing, hunting, and gardening.

10 The Tohatsi village community has formed small grassroots micro-finance institutions (GMFI). The purpose of these schemes is for people to save with the GMFI and borrow money to meet their basic needs. The money saved stays in the community for development purposes. Four GMFI schemes have been formed in Tohatsi, one of which is solely managed by women in the area.

11 In these cases, people must travel 30 minutes to the nearest health centre at Kiopan. For serious cases, it is a one-hour drive to Buka Town Hospital.

12 Having access to clean drinking-water tanks is a real concern. There are no creeks and rivers in the area. People rely heavily on catching rainwater. The public transport system is similarly unreliable. Tohatsi residents have access to the main Buka–Kessa road, which is used to transport their produce to the market. The road needs to be regularly maintained. Transportation service (by public motor vehicle or PMV) is variable and not reliable. The nearest post office, police station, health service, government office, schools, and market are at least an hour away by vehicle.

13 Prior to the conflict, most of Kauvare's 555 residents included ethnic Malaitans who had acquired land in Kauvare. At the time of this study, long after the exodus of Malaitans from Guadalcanal, the population of Kauvare was estimated to be 177. The current population consists of indigenous Guadalcanal people who returned to settle after the arrival of RAMSI forces in the Solomon Islands. Malaitan people who had legitimately acquired land in this area did not return to the villages. The settlement of land-ownership disputes is a primary cause of the tension and conflict in the area.

14 Moro militants believe that when they dress in *kabilato* and wear necklaces, bullets cannot harm them. Though it was admitted that some fighters were shot and killed even while adopting this dress code, this was attributed to a failure to adhere to certain guidelines, such as abstinence from sexual relationships before fighting.

15 Possibly a home-made (craft) weapon associated with *kabilato* attire.

16 Women participants in Loina reported that there are guns in this community, but it was not possible to obtain any further information from them.

17 'The term "wantok" (one talk) in Melanesian Pidgin literally means someone who speaks the same language. In popular usage it refers to the relations of obligation binding relatives, members of the same clan or tribe, as well as looser forms of association' (Dinnen, 1997, p. 13).

18 Researchers were told that some of the militant leaders wanted by the police are still hiding in these villages.

19 The remains of the burnt-down police post could still be seen, as well as vehicles that were taken from Guadalcanal, most of them not in working order at the time of the survey.

20 He cited an example of how former militants refused to give the whereabouts of their colleagues wanted by RAMSI. The militants were able to use to their advantage the knowledge they gained of RAMSI's plans to capture criminals. The chiefs were not happy with the way RAMSI operated in the area, but felt themselves powerless to intervene.

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