

## *Chapter 2*

# **Armed Violence Trends and Programming Gaps**

This chapter addresses:

- Global factors influencing armed violence trends
- Development policy and programming gaps

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation in the range and complexity of armed violence. Examples include:

- *The incidence of armed violence in many non-conflict countries exceeding that of certain countries affected by war.* The risk of dying violently in parts of Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad or Guatemala is higher than in many countries afflicted by war.
- *The linkages in certain countries and cities between socio-political conflict and crime.* In conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, armed groups often fragment and seek to control illicit markets. In many cases these groups are not just locally connected; rather, they are aligned with transnational criminal networks and global supply chains.
- *Higher than expected rates of armed violence in societies emerging from conflict are prone to.* Many post-conflict countries are susceptible to war recurrence or experience high rates of homicidal and criminal violence.
- *The escalation of armed violence in rapidly urbanising cities and towns.* Contexts of rapid urban growth, inner cities and slums can exhibit above-average rates of armed violence and a proliferation of youth gangs and militia groups, as is the case in Rio de Janeiro, Guatemala, San'a, Nairobi, Port-au-Prince and Port Moresby.
- *The emergence and expansion of under-governed spaces, particularly in fragile contexts and collapsed states.*<sup>1</sup> These areas tend to be controlled not by public authorities, civic entities and their security forces, but by non-state actors who are often well armed.
- *The collusion of state actors with non-state criminal groups and enterprises.* These networks of patronage and clientelism have lasting negative impacts on the rule of law, the state's ability to deliver basic welfare services and provide public security, and the resilience of state-society relations.

Such trends are symptomatic of deeper global processes that are interacting to transform basic security conditions around the world. They also reveal a number of development policy and programming gaps. The remainder of this section considers first the underlying factors, and then the gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, note 2 for an explanation of the term 'under-governed spaces'.

## 2.1 Global factors influencing armed violence trends

*The weakening of national and local institutional capacities* – A range of economic forces is challenging the reach and capacity of public institutions to resolve local economic problems, ensure the security of their populations, and control their own territories and jurisdictions. National capacities can be further hollowed out when routine corruption intersects with criminal enterprises, feeding a growth of illicit power structures (UN-Habitat, 2007).

*Empowerment of non-state actors and networks, including militant and criminal networks* – The growth and influence of these groups is due in part to lowered barriers to trade, finance and communication. This has enabled them to undertake illicit transactions in a way that escapes easy detection by state authorities and traditional national control and regulation systems.

*Reduced opportunities for formal employment, and the rise of informal economies and illicit markets* – The rapid mobility of capital, labour and technology has resulted in the progressive deindustrialisation of certain areas and relocation of employment opportunities to other regions. Globalised trade structures and structural adjustment have also undermined agricultural productivity in certain lesser-developed economies (Bello, 2008). A growing number of young people are therefore entering informal markets,<sup>2</sup> working longer hours for less pay and with fewer security guarantees. They are at risk of selecting better-paying alternative livelihoods such as gang membership and organised or petty crime.

*Unregulated urbanisation and the growth of slums and urban violence* – The majority of the world's population now lives in urban centres, and this trend is continuing (UN-Habitat, 2007; DFAIT and CCHS, 2007; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008). As economic transformations accelerate rural-to-urban migration, the rural poor are being converted into an urban poor who populate vast, densely packed and unplanned mega-slums on the periphery of major urban centres. This is especially true in the developing world, home to 90% of the world's slum population.<sup>3</sup> Slums lack basic public infrastructure and services and the presence of civil authorities. They also concentrate horizontal inequalities and social exclusion. Governance voids are often filled from the street, in the form of armed criminal syndicates, gangs, vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch associations. As alternative governance systems become entrenched within slums, so too do their illicit economies, welfare and protection systems.

<sup>2</sup> By some estimates the informal economy accounts for 100% of all new jobs in Latin America, 90% in Africa and 60% in Asia. See IRIN, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> By 2050, the slum population will reach 3 billion persons. According to UN-Habitat (2007) some 72% of urban sub-Saharan Africans and 80% of Nicaraguans and Haitians currently live in slums. See also DFAIT and CCHS, 2007.

*Growth in the proportion of excluded and marginalised youth* – The largest-ever generation of young people is now entering adulthood. Almost half of the world's population is under the age of 24, and the vast majority of 10- to 24-year-olds live in less developed countries. Crime and violence are strongly associated with the growth and proportion of youthful populations, especially young males. This association constitutes a *potential risk factor* for the onset of armed violence, and is not a direct cause (UN-Habitat, 2007). Although at risk, it is important to ensure that youth are not inadvertently criminalised and stigmatised, by recognising the other factors at play (Box 2.1). The current challenge is clear: 200 million youth live on less than USD 1 a day, 130 million are illiterate, and 74 million are unemployed.<sup>4</sup> The ILO estimates that some 400 million new and better jobs are needed just to absorb today's youth. The challenge will only increase in the future, as the continued globalisation of employment markets accelerates job insecurity in vulnerable communities.

*Expansion of transnational organised crime* – A range of factors, including the growth of an international supply chain in illegal commodities, has facilitated the spread and entrenchment of transnational criminal networks. Illicit cross-border financial flows are estimated at USD 1-1.6 trillion annually – a figure eight to ten times higher than ODA. Through their creation and protection of parallel illegal markets, criminal networks enable the global illicit trade in arms. They provide a channel for non-state actors and groups to source weapons, which are a critical risk factor for armed violence.<sup>5</sup> Organised crime can supplant failing state institutions, fuel corruption in central government as well as in the police and public security services, and compete with state authority, legitimacy and service provision. It often replaces or transforms non-violent market and dispute resolution arrangements with coercive and at times violent ones. The UNODC considers crime to be a significant enabler of conflict-related violence. In some cases, development assessment studies have tagged organised crime as a key security threat.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank estimates, cited in UN-Habitat, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Government corruption provides an entry point for organised crime. Local conditions of exclusion, systemic lack of opportunities and underdevelopment provide others.

<sup>6</sup> For example, a recent strategic assessment for a post-conflict African country considered the primary security threat to be the possibility of a closer link between organised crime and the political elite. The review noted that current need for international aid outweighed the elites' need to seek patronage alliances with organised crime. However, even a small shift in this direction would likely further alienate the international community leading to withdrawal of support and crisis. See Vaux *et al.* 2006.

*Climate change and increasing environmental degradation* – These processes contribute to resource-based conflicts over land, minerals and other natural resources, and water. Resource scarcity is also fuelling internal and cross-border displacement and migration that is undermining otherwise sustainable agro-pastoral practices and adding to the growth of urban slums.

### Box 2.1. Young guns and the demographic risks of armed violence

From the alleyways of Nairobi's Kibera slum to the cocaine-processing enclaves of Colombia's highlands and militia encampments in Darfur, the age of violence entrepreneurs is strikingly similar. The overwhelming majority of those wielding arms are male and less than 30 years old. In developed countries males are responsible for four out of every five violent crimes.

For several decades there has been growing awareness that those countries with a large proportion of young adults have an elevated risk of experiencing the emergence of new civil conflict, political violence, and domestic terrorism.

However, a youthful society constitutes a potential risk, rather than a cause, of the onset of collective armed violence. Other factors are critical, including: limited livelihood prospects; under-employment; social exclusion; rising expectations and thwarted socio-economic mobility; compromised masculinity; rapid urbanisation and social dislocation; past exposure to violence, including in the family home; and, human rights violations, including denial of political rights. In some cases, as in West and Central Africa, youth are rapidly recruited (voluntarily and forcibly) from urban slums into more structured political institutions such as militia or even rebel groups.

Public health research has identified additional important predictors for youth at risk of violence, including the presence of gangs in the neighbourhood, having an older sibling who is in a gang, feeling unsafe at school or in the neighbourhood, substance abuse, and school bullying.

Studies indicate that the risk of conflict associated with a large youth bulge is roughly comparable to risks associated with low levels of per capita income or high levels of infant mortality – around 2.3 times that of other factors. Some demographers argue that a large youth bulge facilitates political mobilisation and recruitment into state and non-state forces and criminal networks.

*Source:* Geneva Declaration, 2008.

## 2.2 Development policy and programming gaps

The emerging trends in armed violence reveal a number of development policy and programming gaps:

*Gap 1: Inadequate capacity to deal with the convergence of conflict and criminal violence* – Donor programming frameworks and procedures are seldom adequately equipped to address the linkages between conflict and criminal violence. Specifically, they struggle to develop programming options that can suitably target the (informal) relationships between state and non-state armed actors on the one hand, and transnational systems of organised crime, and their attendant political economies, on the other. While many practitioners recognise that the structural and proximate risk factors shaping armed violence should be analysed and addressed at multiple levels (e.g. local, national, regional, and global), they often lack the tools to do this.

*Gap 2: Ineffective or narrowly conceived programmes during post-conflict transition* – Development donors often face multiple and shifting risks of armed violence in the aftermath of war. Between 20% and 40% of the countries emerging from conflict relapse into conflict within five years.<sup>7</sup> Even when there is no war recurrence, many post-conflict contexts register rates of armed violence that are similar to, or higher than, wartime levels.<sup>8</sup> The specific geographic location of the violence may shift from previously defined war zones to under-governed urban slums (Box 2.2). Most post-war security promotion, however, focuses on a defined category of armed actors and the underlying issues that fed the political conflict.<sup>9</sup> There may be insufficient attention paid to the existing patterns of armed violence on the ground, to post-war political economies, and to identifying and addressing risk factors for future armed violence.

*Gap 3: Failure to correctly identify the risks and impacts of armed violence* – In conflict settings, high death rates result from both direct war violence and the indirect effects of war that limit access to food, clean water, and healthcare. In non-conflict settings, high levels of armed homicide and crime can be motivated by social exclusion and other factors of underdevelopment (in Jamaica, for example). Beyond this, many armed violence incidents go unreported, especially in developing contexts and by those afflicted by armed violence, where reporting systems are often weak. Addressing the causes and

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Collier *et al.*, 2003. See also Suhrke and Samset, 2007 for an examination of these trends.

<sup>8</sup> Research shows that societies emerging from conflict suffer from widespread psychological trauma and higher levels of *normalised* violence. See UNODC, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Muggah, 2008, for a critical review of post-war security promotion interventions.

consequences of armed violence through development programming requires a clear understanding of the specific local conditions, including the structural and proximate factors that fuel violence. This requires a broad approach to diagnostics, which leverages different data sources and methods such as conflict assessments, public health approaches, and crime prevention methods.

*Gap 4: Difficulties in programming above and below state level* – Armed violence can spill across borders. Alternatively, localised armed violence can be shaped by regional and global factors. Because development donors often focus on the “national” level, they may find it difficult to design appropriate interventions to address armed violence above and below that level. But recognition and investment in understanding these global-local and regional dynamics can facilitate the identification of entry points for more effective donor engagement (for example, area-based programming, community and municipal interventions, whole-of-government responses, and more co-ordinated global and regional action against illicit flows and organised crime).

### Box 2.2. Armed violence in post-conflict contexts

Research suggests at least five types of armed violence that continue, emerge or worsen in post-conflict contexts:

- Political violence such as assassinations, kidnappings, mass displacements, and bombings.
- Routine state violence involving unlawful or disproportionately violent law enforcement, elimination of political rivals and supporters, torture, and support to human-rights-abusing “civilian defence” militias.
- Economic and crime-related violence such as armed robbery, extortion, kidnapping, control over markets, human, drug and arms trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, youth gang-related violence.
- Community and informal justice and policing violence, such as lynching, vigilante action, mob justice, youth gang enforcement and turf battles and civilian defence organisation activities.
- Post-war displacements and disputes such as clashes over land and revenge killings.

These types of armed violence need to be addressed within a broader framework of recovery that seeks to reinforce or establish state legitimacy and national resilience. It should be noted that in certain contexts, incomplete disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security system reform (SSR) can unintentionally exacerbate insecurity.

*Source:* Chaudhary and Suhrke, 2008.

*Gap 5: Inexperience programming in urban areas* – Urban-based armed violence is significant, and there is growing recognition of the negative impacts of such violence on urban governance and socio-economic development. The World Bank, its sister agencies and UN-Habitat have developed some expertise on addressing various aspects of crime and insecurity in cities. Although urban-based AVR programming is becoming a priority focus for a good number of affected governments and multilateral donors, many development agencies lack the experience, institutional know-how and practical tools to undertake effective programming.

*Gap 6: Challenges of youth gangs and youth at risk of armed violence* – The problem of disaffected young males who embrace crime and violence as an alternative livelihood is considered by certain authorities as a major “security risk” (Jutersonke, Muggah and Rodgers, forthcoming; UN-Habitat, 2007). In some cases, crackdown interventions are launched as a pretext for avoiding more intractable issues relating to inequality or employment creation. But many donors have yet to adequately address the complex issues involved with youth gangs.<sup>10</sup> Evidence suggests that targeted preventive interventions focused on proximate and structural risk factors can generate a demonstrated positive effect (WHO, 2008; World Bank and UNODC, 2007).

*Gap 7: Insufficient investment in prevention* – Donor efforts to reduce armed violence and assist with post-conflict recovery are important means of preventing a return to violent conflict. While investment in conflict prevention is warranted, a persistent challenge is that the repertoire of evidence-based conflict prevention initiatives remains slim. It is difficult to convincingly *prove* that a specific programming initiative ended conflict or kept armed violence from breaking out.<sup>11</sup> Still, given the magnitude of post-conflict spending, modest investments in preventive action should be given more attention (Box 2.3). In the case of interpersonal violence and crime prevention, a growing evidence base is identifying entry points that warrant development investment, some of which may also be applicable to conflict situations.

*Gap 8: Insufficient understanding of the relationships between under-development and transnational organised crime* – Comparatively little is known about how different forms of development can enhance or diminish

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<sup>10</sup> Analysis of ODA websites and documents from 22 OECD-DAC members found programming on this issue to be mostly focused on legal and criminal justice reforms and efforts to address violence against children and women. See WHO, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> The OECD-DAC (2008c) has developed guidance on monitoring and evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and is piloting the standards in a range of contexts.



the capacity of organised crime agents to exploit financial, transportation and communication systems. For example, development interventions often advance national deregulation and integration with global markets. At the same time, however, there is insufficient investment in building the requisite capacities for monitoring cash flows, enhancing criminal justice, ensuring an independent judiciary and providing accountable security delivery (e.g. policing and border control). This risks exposing communities to extortion, corruption and penetration by organised crime. West Africa, which is currently infiltrated by Colombian narcotics cartels because of its open borders, weak policing and high rates of political corruption, offers an illustrative example.<sup>12</sup>

### Box 2.3. Conflict prevention under-funded in Haiti

In 2002, the Organisation of American States (OAS) mission in Haiti was supporting a broad range of preventive programming in security, human rights, justice, reintegration and good governance. It asked for USD 15 million for two years; it received just USD 5 million. When the country was crippled by a small insurrection in 2004 that led to the departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the UN mission that followed cost upwards of USD 400 million, with some USD 1 billion pledged for development programming by over a dozen donors. Would more energetic support of the OAS have made a difference? The answer is not known. But failing to deliver minimal backing meant preventive efforts never had the slightest chance of succeeding.

*Source:* Collings, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> See Cockayne 2007 and UNODC, 2008. For a recent UN statement on the role of organised crime and drug cartels in Guinea-Bissau see: <http://africa.reuters.com/top/news/usnJOE492012.html>.

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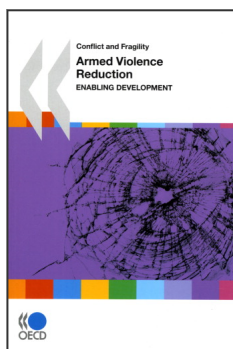
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