

Small Arms and Development

Small arms undermine development because:

- **Fragile economies are damaged by small arms that fuel conflict and crime**
- **Development projects are hindered or deterred by small arms-related violence**
- **The threat of small arms violence diverts scarce resources to security**

Unsafe and insecure environments make sustainable development impossible. Interstate conflict and internal insurgencies—fueled by the spread of small arms—destroy the physical and human resources needed for an economy to grow. Armed groups systematically block or damage transit routes, disrupt natural resource development or divert it for their own use, and attack key national industries as part of their combat strategy. To address public disorder, many governments are compelled to expand security services. The extra expenses for security reduce the amount of funds available for promoting agriculture, education, health care, and other activities critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank estimates that violence costs Latin American countries approximately 14 percent of annual regional GDP.

Widespread availability of deadly weaponry creates a climate of fear that prevents public and private foreign investors from proceeding with essential projects. Foreign investors and corporations are often reluctant to become involved in high risk environments where their investment capital or staff is under constant threat. Projects supported by donor governments are particularly sensitive to incidents of violence. Promised international development aid to post-war Afghanistan has largely failed to materialize because of continued insecurity.

The unregulated availability and misuse of small arms severely impedes humanitarian efforts, limits access to beneficiaries, and occasionally results in the suspension of operations or projects. The pervasiveness of these weapons

often requires organizations to adjust their work plans. Many aid agencies are obligated to spend their resources on security procedures and military convoys, and are frequently required to reduce their travel because of small arms-fueled insecurity. In Darfur, for instance, the rapid security deterioration in the fall of 2005, as small arms-wielding forces terrorized and murdered the civilian population, led several organizations to withdraw many of the over 11,000 aid personnel who had been providing critical basic services to more than 2 million internally displaced people.

Development and small arms are inextricably linked. While economic development cannot successfully occur without addressing the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, solving the arms problem cannot be solved without addressing development. Fifty percent of countries emerging from war slip back into conflict partially due to inadequate post-conflict development and reintegration programs. In post-conflict societies, large numbers of former combatants flood the job market only to discover a lack of economic opportunities. Ex-soldiers, typically still armed, often turn to crime as the only means of survival. The lack of systematic demobilization programs in post-conflict countries, both for ex-combatants and the well-armed populace, can lead to high levels of crime and violence after a conflict ends. In El Salvador, for example, the number of gun-related deaths actually rose after the civil war ended, due to the widespread use of weapons for criminal activities.