



**COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SMALL ARMS IN SOMALILAND  
ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

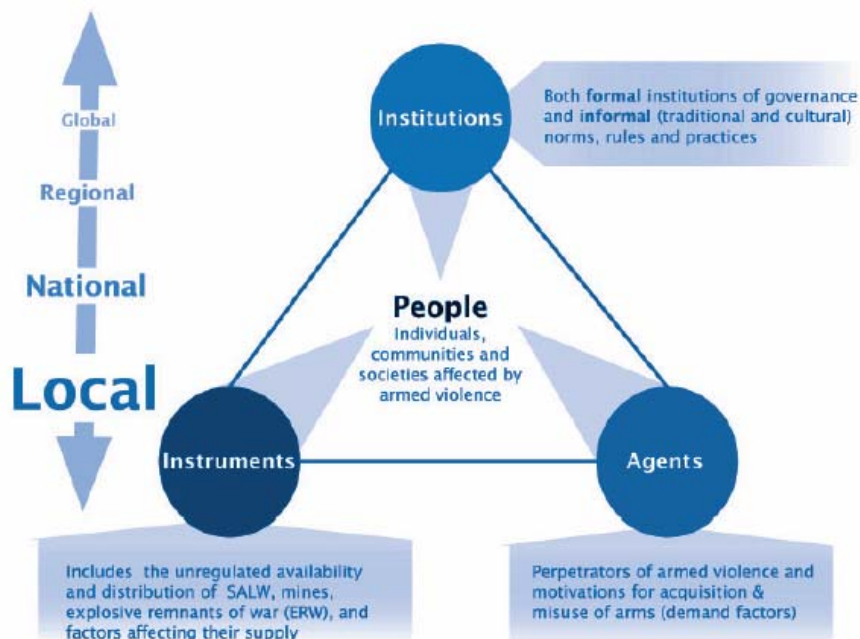
## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to interpret the findings from the Danish Demining Group (DDG) & the Small Arms Survey (SAS) (2009): *“Community Safety & Small Arms in Somaliland”* and to recommend interventions to address the problems identified.<sup>1</sup> Since DDG has indications that the findings are largely true for Puntland and South Central Somalia as well, the recommendations are believed to also be applicable for these areas.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. ANALYSING COMMUNITY SAFETY

This paper explores community safety in Somaliland by analysing the institutions handling safety and security, the instruments used for violence and the agents causing violence. The analysis builds on the Armed Violence lens suggested by the OECD DAC<sup>3</sup> which captures the elements that shape armed violence patterns:

Figure 1: The OECD Armed Violence Lens



### A. Institutions: A vulnerable state and under-capacitated security providers

#### *A vulnerable state*

Somaliland has since 1997 succeeded in maintaining the peace in a highly volatile environment which is a considerable achievement, especially given that the region had suffered some of the worst violence in the last years of the Siad Barre regime. However, the peace remains fragile as illustrated by the recent tensions following the deferral of the presidential elections initially scheduled for May 2009 as well as the ongoing border dispute with neighbouring Puntland.

Furthermore, the security crisis in South Central Somalia has increasing negative spill-over effects on Somaliland. Most notably this manifested in the bombing of UNDP premises, the Ethiopian embassy and the Presidential Palace in Hargeisa in October 2008, but since then there appear to be an incipient trend of insecurity with several seizures by the Somaliland government of weapons, anti tank mines, explosives and explosive initiation devices.

<sup>1</sup> The publication which is available on DDG's website [www.danishdemininggroup.dk](http://www.danishdemininggroup.dk) is based on data collected from 157 communities in 32 districts, including 2846 household questionnaires and 281 focus group and key informant interviews.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that for reasons of simplicity and brevity, this paper refers to Somaliland as a state and the rest of Somalia as Puntland and South Central Somalia; it does not imply any recognition or denial of Somaliland's declaration of independence

<sup>3</sup> OECD DAC (2009): *“Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development”*, OECD

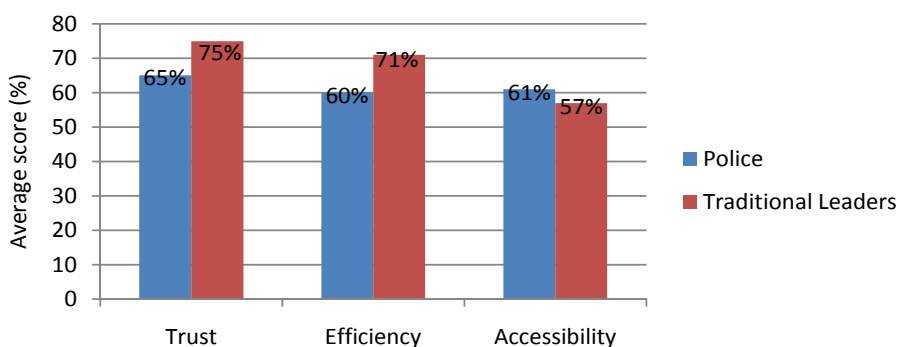
Trans-border crime, arms trafficking, population movements and increasing extremism among certain groups in South Central Somalia along with what appears to be a growing priority of extremist groups to target Somaliland, threatens to undermine the stability of Somaliland. Somaliland, being an emerging, unrecognised and weak state with limited state capacities, and therefore porous borders, is thus vulnerable to negative external pressures. There is therefore an urgent need to strengthen community and local authorities' capacity to resist pressures and overcome violence. Establishment of strong and solid community safety in Somaliland can potentially even have a positive spill over effect on the rest of the Horn of Africa.

### ***Under-capacitated security providers***

In the ideal world, the population of Somaliland thinks that the police should be the primary security provider.<sup>4</sup> However, the formal system of security provision in Somaliland remains underdeveloped with the outreach of police to a large extent limited to urban areas. Thus, the rural population's accessibility rating for police is 25% lower than that of the urban population and generally the police is considered the primary security provider for a significantly smaller proportion of the rural population than of the urban.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, whilst the police may be accepted as the primary security provider in the ideal world, it does not mean that people accept the police's performance on dealing with crime and disputes as being as good as the one of more informal authorities. Thus, traditional leaders are generally trusted more by the people than the police and are also considered to be more accessible and efficient when it comes to dealing with crime and disputes.<sup>6</sup> Figure 2 illustrates this:

**Figure 2: Population's satisfaction levels with police and traditional leaders**



This difference in satisfaction levels may in part be attributed to a certain under-resourcing of the police (i.e. poor salaries, limited number of police officers, lack of vehicles, lack of money for fuel etc.) combined with poor roads and distance hindering police work in especially rural areas. Additionally, the Somaliland police seem to somewhat exhibit the characteristics of military police more than those of civilian police. Although the military and police are technically separated with the police being under the command of the Ministry of Interior and the military under the Ministry of Defence, most police officers are demobilised soldiers, using the same weapons as they did during the war. Furthermore, Somalilanders generally refer to police officers as soldiers (*“askaris”*) indicating a common perception of the police as a military unit rather than a civilian unit. This perception might also negatively affect trust levels among at least some communities.

DDG and SAS have found that accessibility and efficiency have a significant positive influence on levels of trust in security providers; improving accessibility and efficiency of the police will increase the level of trust the population has in them. More resources are therefore needed to enhance police capacity and extend their geographical outreach combined with the wider use of community-based policing committees to

<sup>4</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 32

<sup>5</sup> Note that the urban population's accessibility rating for police is 79,2% while it is 54,5% for the rural population. Also note that 96,4% of urban populations versus 58,1% of rural populations say they would inform the police if they experienced or witnessed a crime and that 86,6% of urban versus 57% rural populations would go to the police for solution to a dispute (DDG & SAS 2009, page 27-39)

<sup>6</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 33

facilitate cooperation between communities and police and enhance the civilian aspect of the police force. Such committees can also pass information more effectively between the police and rural settlements, thus helping to extend the outreach. Such interventions will help increase public trust in and engagement with the work of the police and will go a long way towards improving community safety.

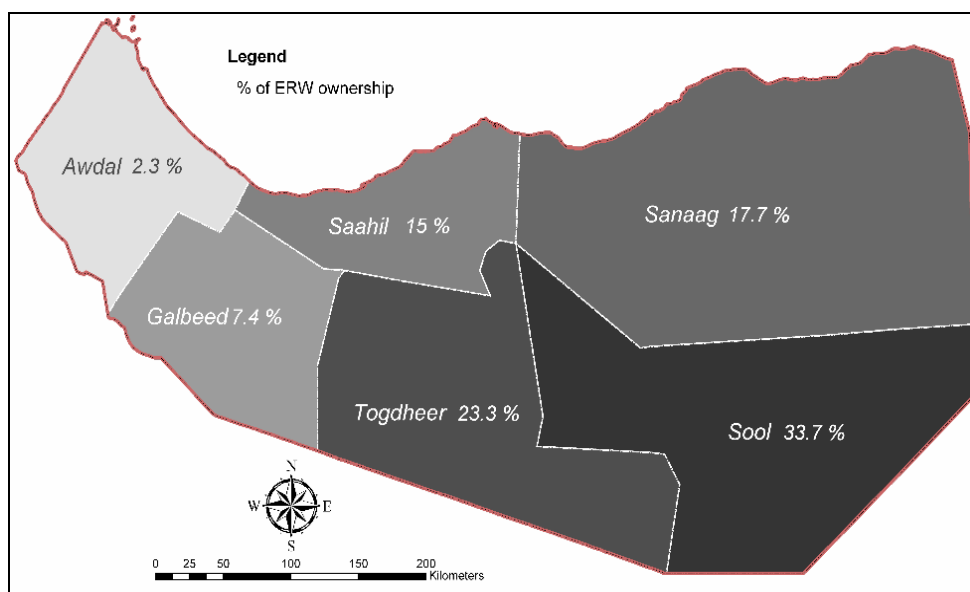
Another type of intervention that could help improve community safety is to foster a spirit of cooperation and clarify the roles and strengths of formal and informal authorities in security provision. It seems that a division of labour have developed with traditional leaders dealing more with disputes and police more with crime while religious leaders acts as security *enablers* who can provide educated and impartial religious council. Furthermore, traditional leaders also seem to fill the gap of formal security provision in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Rather than working through separate programmes, implementing actors should work more closely with all groups and attempt to develop a more comprehensive framework to define areas of competence and create a more integrated strategy for future conflict management interventions that avoids duplication of effort.

## B. Instruments: High presence of and easy access to explosive remnants of war and small arms

### *High presence and easy access to explosive remnants of war (ERW)*

Somaliland has been contaminated by ERW since the early 70's. Although the majority of minefields and battle areas have been cleared, a significant problem remains in the shape of private ownership of ERW. Thus, at least 12% of households in Somaliland - equating to approximately 70,000 households nationwide - have stocks of ERW.<sup>8</sup> Ownership levels are significantly higher in some regions as shown in map 1.

**Map 1: ERW Ownership in Somaliland (household level)**



In addition to posing an immediate threat to life and limbs (i.e. risk of accidents<sup>9</sup>) these privately owned ERW also pose a risk to the fragile peace and stability in the region, with 52% of the owners claiming to keep their ERW with some sort of future violence in mind, whether it is (primarily) for protection of their community, clan, family or property - or for potential future offensive use.<sup>10</sup>

The threat represented by privately held ERW must be mitigated through consensual interventions stressing awareness raising, advocacy and risk education with the aim of installing a regime of safe behaviour in the population and destroying the private stockpiles.

<sup>7</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 32 & 38-39

<sup>8</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 49. Note that the extrapolated no. of 70,000 households and all other extrapolated no. in this paper are based on the Somaliland government's population figure of 3.5 million & UNDP's average household size figure of 5.79.

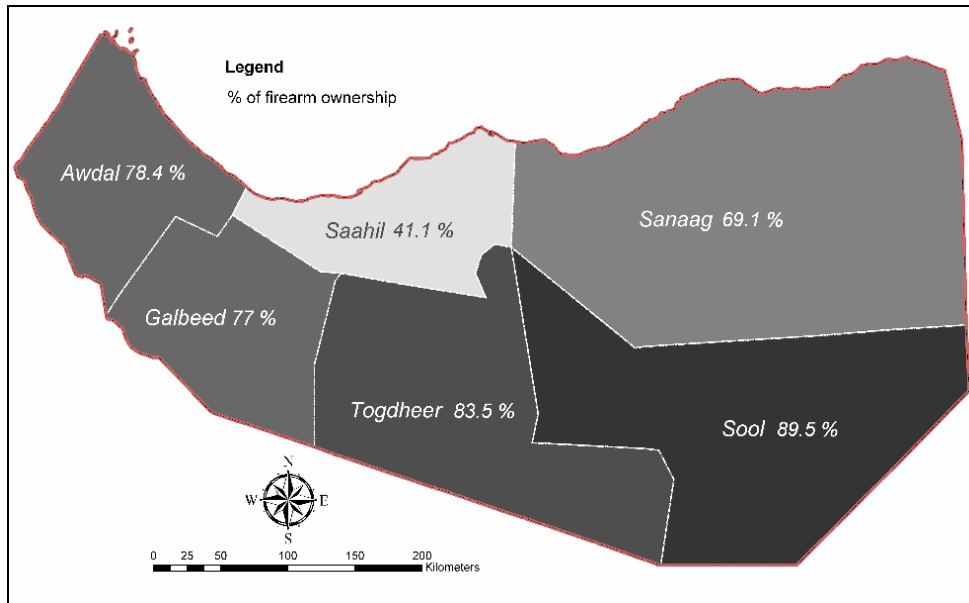
<sup>9</sup> The majority of the ERW related accidents in Somaliland are caused by people tampering with or harvesting ERW (at least 19 out of 24 accidents in the period July 2008-July 2009), indicating a lack of awareness and/or need for behavioural change.

<sup>10</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 51

### ***High presence of and easy access to small arms***

Somaliland suffers from an excess of uncontrolled small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition with an estimated 74% of all households owning firearms and an average of 1.27 small arms per owning household. This totals to more than 550,000 small arms in private ownership throughout Somaliland and additional firearms can easily be acquired according to 1/3 of the population.<sup>11</sup> The majority of these weapons are unregulated, unregistered and stored in an unsafe manner. Map 2 shows ownership levels according to region:

**Map 2: SALW Ownership in Somaliland (household level)**



Personal firearms in Somaliland are currently only regulated under an old 1963 Public Order Law until a new and more extensive firearm registration bill – which has been under debate in the Parliament for several years now - becomes law. However, since 2005 the Somaliland Government with support from the UNDP has registered more than 14,000 small arms through a voluntary license and registration programme based on the terms of the currently debated bill. But registration of all 550,000 small arms remains a long way off and although the draft bill regulates privately owned weapons in more details than the old law it still leaves certain questions unanswered.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the government currently does not have the resources to fully enforce the bill when passed.

In addition to thus being unregulated and unregistered, the vast majority of the small arms in private ownership are also stored in the home in an unsafe manner with only 35% in any way concealed or tied up and an even lower number of weapons actually secured properly (i.e. locked up).<sup>13</sup> Thus, another negative impact of the many small arms in private ownership is the insecurity they cause in homes as lack of safe storage and irresponsible behaviour often results in accidents. DDG estimates that there might be up to 7,500 small arms related accidents a year across Somaliland which in itself constitutes a great threat to human security.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the lack of safe storage leaves the weapons vulnerable to theft and as such 16% of firearms owners claim to have experienced theft of their small arms during a one year period, effectively potentially arming more than 90,000 criminals with weapons and facilitating armed violence.<sup>15</sup>

The threat represented by the widespread accessibility of SALW must be addressed. However, disarmament does not seem to be the right answer in the Somaliland context where the formal system of security provision is still underdeveloped and the perceived need for and right to self-protection is deeply

<sup>11</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 53 & 62

<sup>12</sup> For example lack of clarity on the definition of SALW and storage requirements and an unrealistically short period for registration under the new act (i.e. 12 months)

<sup>13</sup> DDG (October 2007): "A baseline survey of Community attitudes towards Small Arms & Light Weapons (SALW) in North West Somalia (Somaliland)"

<sup>14</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 64

<sup>15</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 63

engrained in the culture – i.e. protection relates to 70% of the stated reasons for owning firearms<sup>16</sup> as illustrated in figure 3:

**Figure 3: Reasons for small arms ownership**

Reason for SALW ownership	% total reasons combined
Protection from clans	10.7
Protection from gangs/criminals	12.7
Protection from wildlife	15.1
Protection of property	14.4
Protection of community	16.8
Fear of future conflict	5.8
Work (soldiers, police)	2.5
Work (businessmen)	4.1
Hunting	1.0
Left over from war	2.6
Valued family possession	11.5
Tradition	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Is disarmament the appropriate answer?

Ultimately, a culture of arms is a set of behavioural and social norms; it does not have to be negative and can change with time. SALW programming therefore need not be designed to reduce the number of small arms in (legal or illegal) circulation. In the Somaliland context emphasis should instead be placed on contributing to safer and more responsible behaviour in relation to small arms. Furthermore, interventions should be made to build the capacity of communities to solve private and community-level disputes in a non-violent manner, thus linking to a reduction in armed violence without a necessary reduction in arms.

### C. Agents: Misuse of small arms and high level of normalised violence

#### *Misuse of small arms*

The widespread availability of small arms in Somaliland helps to sustain a culture in which weapons ownership and use is seen as normal and legitimate. It may often result in the use of excessive force by one individual or group against another and thus exacerbate the risk of even minor disputes escalating into wider more complex conflicts.

Somalilanders have long had a culture which sees the bearing of arms as normal and a right of passage for men, particularly among pastoralist communities. But whereas during the colonial era Somalilanders were permitted to own only bolt-action rifles - more than sufficient for guarding of livestock - now the weapon of choice is widely known as an AK47 automatic rifle capable of firing thirty rounds in a matter of seconds.<sup>17</sup> While this may be as equal a deterrent against livestock theft or threatening wildlife it is also clearly a weapon that has the capacity to increase the probability, intensity and lethality of armed violence and conflict far quicker and is hence potentially a far greater threat to human security. Thus, specific small arms related incident statistics include the following: 45 deaths caused by small arms in 12 months and possibly more than 14,000 incidents of threats made by someone with a small arm across Somaliland per year.<sup>18</sup>

#### *High levels of normalised violence*

Almost 97% of people in Somaliland say that they consider their communities to be safe (rather than unsafe or neither safe nor unsafe), but at the same time 79% of the population recognises that disputes<sup>19</sup> oftentimes occur in their communities while 30% say they fear that they or a member of their household will become victim of a violent crime. Furthermore 66% claim that they have safety and security concerns, the most prominent of which being crime and street violence.<sup>20</sup> This contradiction indicates that there has been

<sup>16</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 56

<sup>17</sup> I.e. the AK47 accounts for more than 72% of the weapons in private hands (DDG & SAS 2009, page 56)

<sup>18</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 23

<sup>19</sup> Note that dispute refers to any quarrel about ownership or usage of various resources, criminal activity, amount and payment of compensation etc. between individuals, groups or clans

<sup>20</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 12, 14 & 18

a certain normalisation of violence in the Somaliland society; that violence has become part of everyday life in such a way that the population no longer draws into question how it affects their overall safety situation.

Precise incident data is hard to come about in a Somali context, but data collected by DDG suggests that there may be as many as 11,000 victims of violent crime within a 12 month period in Somaliland with armed robbery, armed assault and homicide accounting for more than 40% these incidents.<sup>21</sup>

As it is widely acknowledged, individuals exposed to violence from their youngest age are more inclined to use violence themselves, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle. Therefore the high level of (normalised) violence in Somaliland must be addressed to avoid the risk that Somaliland once again falls into larger scale communal violence. Awareness raising and capacity building of communities for safety enhancement, conflict management and peace building is necessary in this regard.

### **3. RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Somaliland is a post-conflict society suffering from psychological trauma, high proliferation of weapons and high levels of normalised violence while also being susceptible to war recurrence and negative spill-over effects from the escalating security crisis in the rest of Somalia.

DDG has designed a *Community Safety Programme* to address these issues by creating increased community safety and building a foundation for sustainable peace.

#### ***What does DDG's Community Safety Programme address?***

Building on the Armed Violence Lens the programme addresses the following three dimensions on a local level in order to achieve maximum impact:

- A. Institutions: The wider formal and informal institutional/cultural environment that enables and/or protects against violence
- B. Instruments: The instruments of violence – i.e. the unregulated availability of SALW and ERW
- C. Agents: The agents of violence and their motivations for acquisition and misuse of arms

All of these three dimensions are addressed with a firm focus on the people affected by armed violence.

#### ***What does DDG's Community Safety Programme consist of?***

More specifically the programme consists of interventions in the following three areas:

- A. Institutions:
  - Strengthening local institutions and enhancing local capacity for addressing safety needs
  - Strengthening relationships between security providers and communities
- B. Instruments:
  - Facilitating safe small arms storage and management
  - Collecting and destroying ERW, and if possible small arms
- C. Agents:
  - Building local capacity for conflict management and peace
  - Strengthening safety procedures for firearms owners

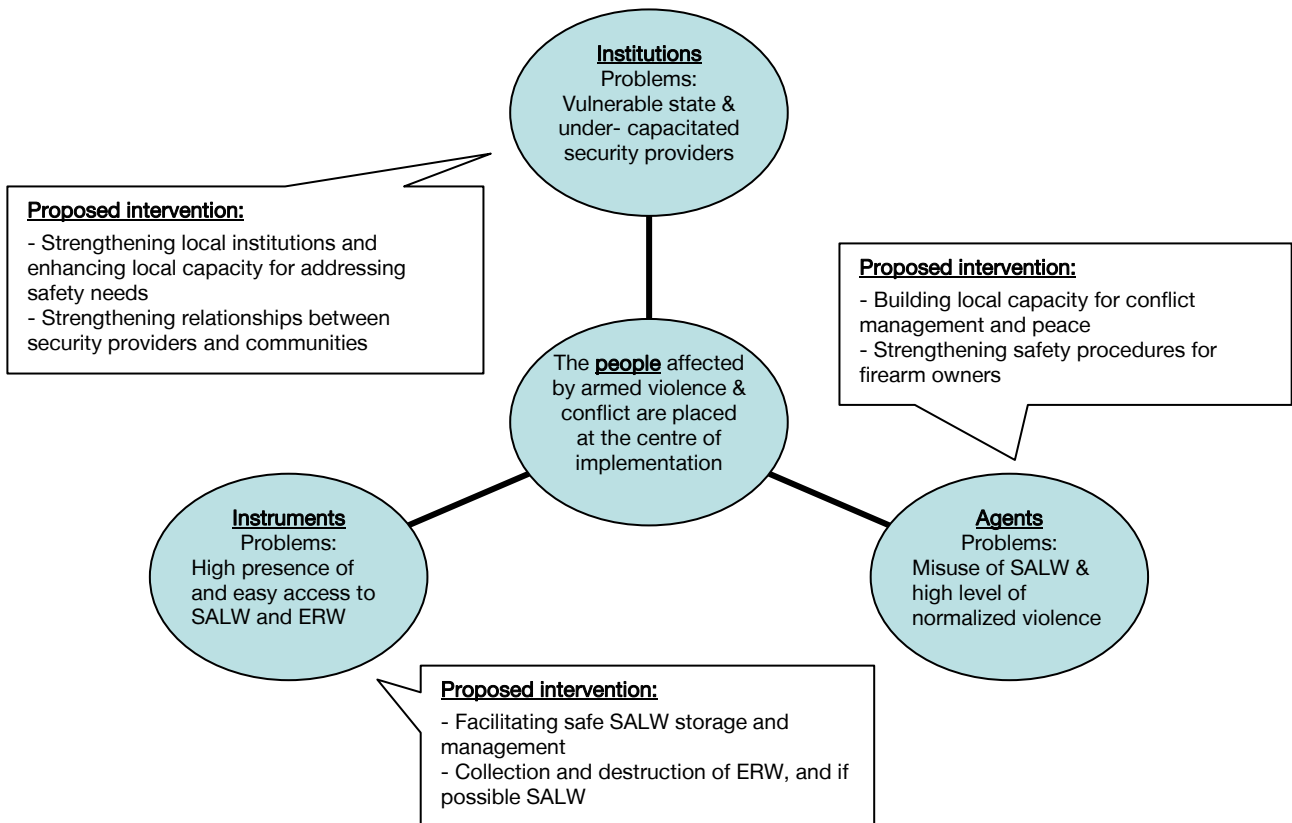
Within all three areas DDG implements a mix of long term & quick impact interventions.

The problems and suggested interventions are illustrated in figure 4 based on the Armed Violence Lens.

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<sup>21</sup> DDG & SAS 2009, page 23

Figure 4: Problems and Proposed Interventions



#### 4. EXPECTED IMPACT

The expected impact of the interventions is a decrease in (armed) violence in target communities as well as stronger communities more resistant towards pressure and capable of preventing and resolving behaviour which contribute to violent conflict. Additionally it is hoped that the improved community safety in target areas will have a positive spill-over effects on neighbouring areas.

More specific results are:

- Increased activity from community members to counteract safety problems
- Improved conflict management capacity and decrease in conflicts (solved before escalating)
- Prevention of spontaneous killings and assaults
- Prevention of ERW and firearm related accidents
- Protection from firearm theft by criminal elements
- Enhanced trust and cooperation between police and communities on prevention and resolution of violence and crime

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