

Armed violence and the links to human security in Papua New Guinea

Introduction

There has been a shift in discussions about security, away from national security and towards greater emphasis on human security. This shift requires governments to recognise the importance of placing human beings and not states, at the centre of security concerns. In recent years the links between development, human security and armed violence have been explored actively by national and international agencies, non government organisations and the United Nations. The interest has been driven, on the one hand, by the need to ensure sustainable development programmes in areas threatened by armed violence, and, on the other hand, by the realisation that effective control of armed violence depends, in part, on supportive development programming.

Armed violence has a deleterious effect on development and is a core source of instability and human security. Where gun violence is a daily reality, policymakers, bureaucrats and analysts often fail to understand precisely how men, women and children are differently affected, the multiplier effects of insecurity on the wider community and how individuals develop local solutions to their problems. Many countries are already saturated with weapons and ammunition, and controlling new transfers of weapons is not enough. Arms work should be concerned not only with the weapons themselves, but with structural factors, such as the socio-economic root causes of armed violence and the need for non-violent alternatives to gun-based livelihoods.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the debate on human security, armed violence and development. It lays out approaches to understanding human security and development in Papua New Guinea and outlines how a human security framework can support armed violence reduction strategies and broader improvements in human rights.

The problems of insecurity and small arms in Papua New Guinea

Forty per cent of the population of Papua New Guinea is found in the five provinces of the Highlands region. Parts of the region are marked by serious outbreaks of inter-group conflict. Increased lawlessness and conflict are associated with rapidly emerging larger patterns of development, a burgeoning youth population and unequal wealth distribution. Deteriorating government services and infrastructure contribute to inequity and inequality.

We report the matter to the police when we are attacked but they don't do anything. The police don't take any action. If this is how the police are going to operate, we told ourselves that this is not good enough. It has been going on like this for a long time so it's not worth going to the police at all.

Adult man, Southern Highlands Province

There is a popular perception of a widening gap between 'law' and 'justice'. The police and judiciary have limited capacity and motivation to solve criminal and civil disputes and the justice sector's credibility to address issues of human security has been severely damaged. Violence against women in the home is facilitated by these structures that refuse to treat the violence as a criminal act.

The weak law and order situation is conducive for the illegal possession, transfer and use of small arms in Papua New Guinea. The demand for guns stems from persistent security risks, where people feel they can no longer rely on the appropriate traditional and formal authorities to guarantee their safety. Firearms (both craft-made and factory-made) are playing a significant role in exacerbating Papua New Guinea's law and order problems and have contributed to the rise of less common forms of violence including maiming, abduction and kidnapping for ransom. The costs both in human and material terms are substantial.¹ A small number of weapons can result in large scale violence, and insecurity continues well after armed violence comes to an end, affecting community cohesion, income generation, settlement of the displaced and the safety and psychosocial health of men, women and children.

Although the Government of Papua New Guinea receives substantial amounts of development assistance from the international community, these conventional forms of support (directed at 'good governance' for example) are ill-adapted to address the manifestations and socio-economic root causes of armed violence. While supporting legislative approaches to gun control, the major donors of Papua New Guinea are doing little to reduce the demand for guns.² More specifically,

¹ Haley, N. and Muggah, R. (2006). *Jumping the gun: Armed violence in Papua New Guinea. In Small Arms Survey 2006. Unfinished Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² Caritas Australia (2004). *Small arms and poverty. Policy Brief*.

despite their popularity amongst donors and policymakers, arms reduction initiatives in the form of gun amnesties and weapons buybacks tend to yield only craft-made weapons, often target the wrong people and can do more harm than good if they do not take proper account of the local context.³

For example, an Oxfam study on interpersonal violence in the Southern Highlands shows that in 80 per cent of injuries, a weapon is used, and most commonly (50 per cent) this weapon is a bush knife, or machete. Two thirds of all people attending for treatment for violent injuries are women, and married women are the most commonly presenting group. There is also a trend for females to be more likely to know their assailant, compared to males. The implication of this is that a reduction in firearm numbers may well have little impact on violence against women, as women are more likely to be injured with a bladed injury as opposed to a gunshot injury.^{4,5}

Top-down security measures that do not take account of the human security dimension and the diverse types of violence affecting people's lives will be ineffective. Substantial aid funding must be dedicated to such work.

Incorporating a human security approach to armed violence in Papua New Guinea

Oxfam International PNG is taking an integrated approach to promote peaceful development and reduce armed violence in the Highlands. The peacebuilding agenda is much broader than simply preventing or ending conflict. Oxfam is working

We are scared of drunkards. We are scared they may harass us or rape us when we are on our way to school. There are no police to stop them.

Young woman, Southern Highlands Province

to address the key structural causes of armed violence and insecurity, in different law and order environments, and the relationship to other types of violence. A multidimensional strategy underlies this approach: capacity building with local non-government organisations working to reduce violence; livelihoods activities in support of the identified

needs of partners; research and advocacy; and creating a knowledge base for modelling appropriate Highlands-based approaches to security and violence reduction.

The development of a solid evidence base is an integral component of the Oxfam Highlands programme. Oxfam's Security and Community Initiatives Research (SACIR) in the Southern Highlands Province is taking a human-centred approach to security which looks at freedom from pervasive

³ *ibid*

⁴ Oxfam International PNG, (2008). Study shows high domestic violence in PNG. *The National*, 11 April.

⁵ Haley, N. and Muggah, R. (2006). *Jumping the gun: Armed violence in Papua New Guinea. In Small Arms Survey 2006. Unfinished Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

threats to people's safety, rights and lives. This means understanding people's perceptions of their own security, the impact of insecurity and violence on daily lives and strengthening local solutions and strategies developed in response. This approach enables people to develop their own criteria of risks and their own ideas about what appropriate interventions look like.

Findings show that security is broadly understood and encompasses social, cultural, economic, political and psychosocial factors, which impact differently on men and women. These include the ineffective law and justice sector, frustration associated with poor social service provision, inequitable distribution of resources, political bias and instability, corrosion of social cohesion and leadership structures, polygamy and violence against women, lack of social and economic opportunities, drug and alcohol abuse, and ingrained support (payback) for violence.

It is clear that the nature, causes, and effects of insecurity vary widely, and there is a corresponding variation in the most effective means by which insecurity is being addressed by local non-government organisations, such as Oxfam partners Kup Women for Peace (KWP), Community Based Health Care (CBHC) and Community Development Agency (CDA). Much can be learned from the approaches of these local NGOs that are working in remote, under-served areas of the Highlands and that have developed in response to years of large-scale conflict and growing levels of crime. They are using an approach that is designed and developed locally, they meaningfully engage marginalised groups, specifically women and youth, and attempt to address the underlying triggers of conflict through a process of empowerment and transformation. These organisations, briefly outlined below, have become the best resources in their communities for building and sustaining peace.

Kup Women for Peace is a women's led organisation that developed in response to over two decades of conflict in the

I have received conflict mediation training from KWP and now I don't want to fight. My son died in a game of rugby and usually that would result in a big fight. Instead I wanted it to be solved with mediation. No fight erupted and I was seen as an example to the community.

Adult man, Kup district

Kup district. The objective of the organisation is to prevent conflict and violence through improving community justice and mediation structures, creating non-violent alternatives to gun-based livelihoods, HIV care and counselling, and human rights training and awareness. Integral to KWP's approach is a focus on gender justice, to increase women's role in peacebuilding and to reduce violence against women, reflecting United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The organisation has developed an approach that

is based on collaboration with traditional leadership and engagement with local government structures.⁶ Community Based Health Care engages with communities using a holistic model of community health. The approach relies on community mobilisation in order to improve village living conditions and the local environment. A key precondition for working with CBHC is that communities must make a commitment to peace, stability and development. The programme, which is based on a strong training and community empowerment component, is showing a strong correlation between improved livelihoods, in terms of health and agriculture, and a reduction in armed conflict.

Community Development Agency is engaging youth as agents of change in local communities. Recognising disempowered youth as a major impediment to development, CDA target and involve marginalised youth, particularly those involved in criminal activities, gun violence and drugs and alcohol, in a process of empowerment and community justice training and alternative, non-violent livelihoods. The CDA approach, which is based on the concept of transformation and self-reliance, is showing success in providing opportunities for youth to become key community facilitators for development and justice in their communities.

What are the benefits of a human security approach to armed violence?

The approaches of civil society show that a range of steps and innovative methodologies are required to address the links between armed violence and development in different degrees. Entry points into communities can be wide ranging – to strengthen the rule of law, build an effective security sector, reduce gender inequality and health inequities and improve governance – and as a starting point, approaches to armed violence reduction can be broadened to encompass this.

Many international case studies, particularly from Latin America, shed further light on the ways field-based solutions, which are tailored to local needs and go beyond the weapons themselves, are overcoming the impact of armed violence by investing in development.⁷

Oxfam's multidimensional approach to security, and subsequent learning, enables Oxfam as a civil society organisation, to be well positioned to contribute an informed

⁶ Hinton, R. et al, (2008). The Kup Women for Peace approach to peacebuilding: taking the lead in the Papua New Guinea national elections. *Gender and Development*, 16:3,523-533.

⁷ Comunidad Segura, (2008). Inspiring actions, merging agendas. *Good practices magazine*. 1: May.

perspective to discussions on human insecurity in Papua New Guinea. This discussion is most urgently required. Such perspectives can play a pivotal role in setting priorities and for policymaking, programme monitoring and evaluation, and project planning and intervention.⁸ This approach is also in support of Papua New Guinea's commitment to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development which advocates the mainstreaming of small arms work in development programmes through the development of practical programmes on the ground. To achieve this result, both state and civil society involvement is crucial.

Conclusion and recommendations

Current state security efforts in Papua New Guinea to curb armed violence and contain conflict in the Highlands do not address the human security dimension and as a result, will be ineffective and unlikely to be successful in the long term. Although disarmament exercises are becoming more common at the end of armed conflicts, these need to be part of a broader process that works to create the conditions of peace and reduce vulnerabilities to insecurity.

Policy and programme development must be informed by local intervention strategies that are already successfully working to address a community's identified security needs and in a way that is more appropriate than straight out weapons collection and buy backs.

Civil society approaches have wider applicability for the design of interventions to address the structural causes of violence and in their contribution to policy development on human rights and security in PNG and the Pacific.

Ultimately, a comprehensive approach to preventing and reducing violence requires a commitment to evidence-based interventions, entails adapting attitudes and professional approaches, and learning from good practice. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations have been made:

1 As a matter of urgency the Papua New Guinean government and major development donors should directly support community-based efforts to reduce armed violence in Papua New Guinea.

This will require a change in the aid programming focus and engagement with civil society.

⁸ LeBrun, E. & Muggah, R. (2005). *Silencing Guns: Local Perspectives on Small Arms and Armed Violence in Rural Pacific Islands Communities*. Occasional Paper 15, Small Arms Survey, Geneva. Available at: www.smallarmssurvey.org

2 Policy makers and programme developers (whether governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental) should ensure that policy and interventions aimed at reducing armed violence are based on a sound understanding and analysis of the nature, causes and effects of insecurity.

The nature, causes, and effects of insecurity in Papua New Guinea vary widely, and there is a corresponding variation in the most effective means by which insecurity can be addressed.

3 Related to the above, policy and programme developers must ensure a comprehensive approach to armed violence reduction issues, recognising the different situations, needs and resources of men and women, boys and girls, as reflected in the provisions of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325.

A clear understanding of the particular experiences of men and women – as perpetrators, victims and survivors of small arms violence – is needed to inform policy and action.

4 In order to achieve 1 and 2, national and international non-governmental organisations should collaboratively conduct research on: the nature, causes and effects of insecurity; the effectiveness and appropriateness of the national and regional responses to armed violence and development issues; and community based responses to armed violence.

There has been limited examination in Papua New Guinea of local solutions developed in response to conflict and no formal recognition of the impacts of insecurity and conflict on people's lives.

5 Policy makers and programme developers must learn from local approaches to conflict reduction and peacebuilding and identify appropriate entry points to engage with communities on security.

Providing a voice to groups vulnerable to violence will draw attention to appropriate intervention strategies and alternative peacebuilding models. This approach can offer alternatives and fresh perspectives to addressing the security needs of women, marginalised groups and local populations.

6 Programme developers must prioritise long-term engagement over short-term solutions.

The complex array and interplay of independent variables that contribute to insecurity must be integral to the design of interventions. Top-down approaches to insecurity are by

themselves inadequate without parallel nationwide peace work at ground level.

7 National and international non-government organisations must increase advocacy on the implementation of international agreements ratified and commitments made, such as the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.

Key issues of concern and recommendations for action must be covered for use in advocacy with regional governments and international organisations.

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