



Initiatives for the control of small arms and light weapons in East Africa and their outcomes

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons [SALWs] in the East African region has negatively impacted national and regional security. Porous and expansive borders, corruption and instability in the region, commercialisation of cattle rustling, weak governments and the presence of ungoverned spaces in the region have facilitated the proliferation of SALWs in the region. The purpose of this research was to explore the initiatives adopted by Kenya and Uganda, both individually and collaboratively, for the control of the proliferation of SALWs in East Africa. The study was guided by the regionalism theory of interstate cooperation and a descriptive survey design. The sampled respondents, totaling 55, were drawn from security agencies, civil society members, foreign relations offices, non-state actors, and religious leaders. Instrumentation encompassed questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews. The qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis and presented in its original form, while the quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented using tables and graphs. The study found that, by understanding the challenges and dynamics at play, stakeholders would certainly implement strategies that not only control the spread of the dangerous but also address the underlying causes of violence and insecurity in the study area. The article showed that various initiatives, including disarmament programmes and legislative and regulatory measures, were in place in the Kenya-Uganda border effort. Various outcomes of the control of proliferation merged, as the results show that 75% strongly agreed that, to a large extent, specific goals and objectives set for each initiative have been achieved. The study suggests strengthening human resource capacity, utilizing technology for surveillance, and enhancing the terms and conditions of security forces in the EA countries.

Keywords: Control, East Africa, Initiatives, Outcomes, SALWs

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) has become more prominent in the 21st century. Proliferation of SALWs constitutes a global security threat with a global estimate of over 975 million weapons under illegal possession, of which over 30 million of such weapons are in sub-Saharan Africa and held by unlicensed holders (Alley, 2019). According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2016), globally, there is a 59 percent proliferation of illegal SALWs with about 80 percent found in Europe. Estimates place the number of SALWs in public hands in Kenya at 750,000, Uganda at 331,000 and Tanzania at 427,000. It is known that over 650 million firearms are in public hands, preferably legally or illegally, posing a serious threat to public safety (Detzner, 2017). SALWs are frequently produced for use by law enforcement and military personnel. Yet in developing nations across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia, these weapons have consistently ended up in the possession of vigilantes, militia groups, rebels, war profiteers, and private individuals who align with either the state or private citizen ideologies. This ongoing situation continues to impede efforts to mediate conflicts in these regions (Jacqmin, 2017).

The proliferation of SALWs in the East African region has negatively impacted on national and regional security in the region. Porous and expansive borders, corruption, and instability in the region, commercialization of cattle rustling, weak governments and the presence of ungoverned spaces in the region, have facilitated the proliferation of SALWs in the region (Bankale & Uchegbu, 2021). Nevertheless, the failure of governments in the East African region to guarantee the security and protection of their residents and their belongings is a significant factor contributing to the widespread presence of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) disguised as security measures. While governments have carried out remarkable disarmament programs, there are concerns that the governments are unable to assure the people of their security. This has been witnessed through numerous violent conflicts in pastoral areas and increasing crime rates in urban centres committed using SALWs. Due to partial or

thereof lack of implementation of national regional and international legal frameworks, the proliferation of SALWs has continued to be an endemic problem that threatens the region's security, economic and political stability and prosperity.

This article presents the findings on the initiatives adopted by Kenya and Uganda, both individually and collaboratively for the control of the proliferation of SALWs in East Africa. The specific research questions included: What initiatives adopted by Kenya and Uganda at the domestic levels? What are Kenya-Uganda collaborative efforts against proliferation of SALWs? What is the Kenyan domestic initiative against proliferation of SALWs?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was based on Regionalism Theory.

2.1.1 Regionalism Theory

This theory was first propounded by the German American political scholar Ernst Haas in 1962. According to Regionalism theory, regional and sub-regional arrangements provide the basis for states to address common socio-economic and political issues for the overall common good of state parties involved. It alludes to the regionalization of a region or sub-region where a crucial factor like security can be examined. According to Bevan (2008), regionalism is viewed as a strategy for establishing a regional order, resolving local problems, and preventing further outbreaks of interstate and intrastate hostility. Since the end of the Cold War, regionalism has grown to be a significant component in many conflicts and situations. The Soviet Union and the United States supported rival groups in battles outside of their nations during the Cold War, engaging in proxy warfare. A shared interest in the stability of the region is created by such a projected relationship. In terms of international relations, regionalism is the manifestation of a commonality of purpose and identity together with the development and use of structures that represent an identifiable grouping and guide collective action within a geographical region. One of the three components of the international financial system is the concept of regionalism. This idea holds that regional and sub-regional organisations have a more significant role in preserving peace and security in their respective geographic areas or sub-regions. Proponents of regional agreements assert that regional economic and political integration are conflict-mitigating elements for both interstate and intrastate disputes, in addition to sub-regional organisations' involvement in conflicts.

Furthermore, they keep emphasising how regional mechanisms for resolving disputes could offer a systemic strategy for dealing with persistent disputes. Regional organisations may be described as official or informal procedures or methods developed by regional or sub-regional organisations to handle conflicts in their regional or sub-regional territories for this study. Regionalism is a thorough, diverse, and multidimensional dynamic that entails a specific region becoming more homogeneous. The international community also has a part to play in the effort to find a remedy for human misery, including the spread of SALWs. In the same spirit, other international players are better placed to handle the need for humanitarian assistance and financial support. Given their knowledge of the regional, domestic, and cultural dynamics, regional actors continue to play a decisive role. However, suffice it to say that due to cultural affinities. The foundation of this thesis is the fact that regional players are familiar with local circumstances. Additionally, past events have demonstrated that imported solutions rarely provide long-lasting fixes. Most crucially, as opposed to outsiders, mediators from the area typically have a personal connection to the issue.

In this study, Regionalism theory would help in understanding the changing dynamics and the need for interstate cooperation against the proliferation of SALWs. While faced with a common security challenge of the proliferation of SALWs, the theory helps to understand why governments of both states must partner together about the implementation of the 2004 Nairobi Protocol. It also helps to unearth the basis for bilateral cooperation initiatives, the operational aspects and, subsequently, why implementation of the Protocol is key in the fight against the proliferation of SALWs between the two countries. The regional theory, however, was not adequate in explaining the global dynamics and interconnectedness that shape the proliferation of SALWs. Additionally, the theory assumes that states are willing and able to overcome their national interests to pursue common regional objectives in terms of curbing the proliferation of SALWs. However, in reality, national interests often shape state behaviour, making it difficult to achieve meaningful regional cooperation in curbing SALWs.

2.2 Empirical Review

Breslauer (2019) investigates the reasons why the Soviet Union and the US have consistently provided differing responses to the topic of arms control. During the Cold War, when the US and the USSR were engaged in an arms race. Breslauer (2019) argues that superpowers have undergone some kind of arms control, whose sources and consequences are much different. He explores US policymakers in implementing mechanisms of arms control and how such frameworks play a significant role in influencing arms control in other parts of the globe. In arms control, Soviet arms control behaviour has changed since the cold war period. Russia's new policies are evidence of

fundamental reconceptualization of the relationship between nuclear power, weapons and security. Breslauer's (2019) studies distinguish between learning and adoption of arms control. It, therefore, provides tenacity of the cold war paradigm in shaping actions of the US-Soviet relationship. However, this study does not provide insight into arms control from the East Africa region. His studies, therefore, will be important in providing a historical analysis of arms control since the inception of the cold war.

Greene and Marsh (2012) examine the inter-relationship between arms and availability, private, on-state actors and militia groups and the dynamic of fragile states. Greene and Marsh use the Philippines as a case study and make references to wider international research and experience, the inter-state state relations between SALWs, armed groups, and non-state actors and the fragility of the state has been a concern for SALWs control in Asia. Additionally, (Greene & Marsh, 2012) investigate the connections between the availability of weapons, militia organisations, and private, non-state actors, and also the dynamics of weak nations. Moreover, the study does not give a comparative analysis of external actors in arms control in the East Africa region. Their study is important in understanding the role of external actors in curbing arms flow in Asia.

Bankale and Uchegbu (2021) examine the practical arms control or disarmament measures taken by Mali. A SALWs Convention was signed by Economic Organization of West African States [ECOWAS] member nations. The convention is far-reaching since it has prohibited SALWs transfers within the region. Bankale and Uchegbu (2021) argue that the convention contains measures on civilian possession of firearms and ammunition. Nonetheless, their study gives an account of ECOWAS efforts in limiting SALWs as a result. They recognize steps that various multilateral and other external actors take to regulate arms control in West Africa. Bankale and Uchegbu (2021) do not give information on the role of external actors such as the European Union, donors and other stakeholders in arms control in the case of East Africa.

According to Nganga (2017), the African Union (AU) is the principal regional body consisting of all the African governments. He argues that the Bamako Declaration, which was ratified in 2000 to stop the spread of SALWs, serves as the foundation for many of the present AU actions. African heads of state have typically taken diplomatic precautions to link their anti-illicit arms trade activities with AU decisions (Nganga, 2017). He notes that AU has remained a slow-moving institution with very little authority on the issue of SALWs. Although some African states are harmonising their policies concerning SALWs proliferation, it is, however, the slow nature of the African Union enacting policies to prohibit the illicit flow of arms. Consequently, it is a serious problem for the AU since it renders it impossible for African governments to effectively integrate their regulations, providing illegal arms traffickers opportunity to expand their business. The goal of Nganga's study is to provide basic information about the AU's involvement in reducing the use of weapons throughout Africa; yet it does not focus specifically on the East Africa region.

According to Green and Rynn (2010), there has been an enormous spike in the flow of SALWs into the Southern African portion of the continent. The signatories to the Protocol were successful in creating regional standards for small weapons marking before it entered into force in 2004. This would consequently make it easier to track down SALWs trafficking and establish and carry out various national action plans that adhere to the standards suggested. In contrast to previous regional initiatives, Southern African Development Cooperation [SADC] has made an effort to limit the trafficking of SALWs by implementing improved internal controls. Despite the fact that the policy adopted by SADC member states has been successful in the region, a significant issue with border and customs personnel has persisted (Green & Rynn, 2010). They do not give much thought to the significance of stopping illegal cross-border trading, which leaves open the possibility of continuing the trade in SALWs. Although these findings will be applied to the East Africa region on which this study is based, the study plays a significant role in analysing the function of SADC in preventing the proliferation of SALWs.

Grip (2017) examines the historical background of the Nairobi Protocol, an international agreement that states in the region of East and Central Africa established to handle issues related to the growth of SALWs. The ongoing militarization and increasing numbers of SALWs trafficked through various regional borders are alarming. For the Nairobi Protocol to be effective, proper control of borders is needed. Moreover, this study will be important in identifying policy frameworks which can be adopted by RECSA. To fill the gap, the study explores why the East Africa region remains a hot spot for continued arms trafficking despite several sub-regional initiatives enacted.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a descriptive survey design. This design usually involves larger sample sizes to ensure representativeness and requires careful selection of participants to reflect the target population. It may use random, stratified, or systematic sampling methods depending on research goals. The design was suitable as it allowed the researcher to gather comprehensive and objective data that accurately characterizes a certain phenomenon.



3.2 Study Location

This research study was undertaken in Northwestern Kenya and North Eastern Uganda. The Pokot, Turkana, and Marakwet inhabit the region of Northwestern Kenya. The expansive region covers Baringo County, Turkana County, West Pokot County, and Elgeyo-Marakwet Counties. North-Western Kenya is an Arid and Semi-Arids Land (ASAL) region

3.3 Target Population

The research focused on staff of security agencies including security services such as the Kenya Police, Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), and the Uganda National Police. In addition, the study includes community elders, opinion leaders, political and administrative authorities, and local and international non-governmental organisations engaged in regulating SALWs. The population used in this study consisted of 204 people

3.4 Sampling Technique

The sampled respondents totalling 55 were drawn from the security agencies, members of civil societies, foreign relation offices, non-state actors and religious leaders. Purposive sampling was utilized to select respondents for the study’s Key Informants. In this regard, their selection was based mostly on their breadth of knowledge on the proliferation of SALWs. Additionally, since the study was dealing with sensitive issues, the knowledge of the insiders was required; therefore, this was obtained through snowballing.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection methods employed encompassed questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, as well as the evaluation of secondary sources such as journals, books, and government documents.

3.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis and presented in its original form, while the quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented through the use of tables and graphs.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Initiatives Adopted by Kenya and Uganda at the Domestic Levels

In order to address the concerns of the objective, the researcher sought to get the respondent views on the initiatives that both Kenya and Uganda have enacted at the domestic level. These responses were focused on the respondent’s rate of agreements with the list of initiatives undertaken by the respective countries in terms of disarmament programmes, legislative and regulatory measures, capacity building programs, border control measures, public firearm destruction, relinquish and reregistration of firearms, information and dissemination among stakeholders and collection and destruction of SALWs. The statements from the respondents were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale between 1—strongly agree and 5—strongly disagree. The data was analysed, and the findings were presented using Table 1.

Table 1

Kenya and Uganda Domestic Initiatives for the Control of SALWs

Initiatives	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	TOTAL %
Disarmament programs	9	34	43	12	2	100
Legislative and regulatory measures	8	34	34	22	2	100
Capacity-building programs	9	23	44	12	12	100
Border control measures	18	23	32	20	7	100
Public firearm destruction	16	33	33	12	6	100
Relinquish and reregistration of firearms	7	43	23	21	6	100
Information dissemination among stakeholders	6	44	31	18	1	100
Collection and destruction of SALWs	85	0	0	15	0	100

Table 1 shows variations in responses across different measures adopted by both Kenya and Uganda at their domestic levels. Disarmament programs received the most mixed responses, with 9% and 34% of the respondents strongly agreeing and agreeing respectively to the effectiveness of such initiatives. 43% of the respondents were neutral towards such initiatives while 12 and 2% of the respondents Disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively to the existence and effectiveness of such initiatives. From the data on disarmament, it can be adduced that though the two countries have embarked on the disarmament initiatives, their effectiveness still remains a challenge.

The mixed responses on disarmament programs in Kenya and Uganda (Table 1) suggest limited public confidence in their effectiveness. While 43% of respondents were neutral, only 34% agreed, and 14% disagreed, indicating ambivalence (Bevan, 2008). This aligns with studies showing that voluntary disarmament often struggles due to weak enforcement and community distrust (Musa, 2022). The high neutrality rate (43%) may reflect insufficient awareness or perceived inefficacy. These findings underscore the need for stronger stakeholder engagement and transparent implementation to enhance trust in disarmament initiatives (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021).

From the key informant interviews, it was revealed that there has been notable progress made by the individual states in the implementation of the disarmament strategies for accelerating the control of SALWs. In particular, a respondent reported that:

“Both Uganda and Kenya have implemented various measures, including the establishment of the National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the development of a National Action Plan on SALWs. These efforts focus on improving legislation, enhancing law enforcement capacity, and promoting community awareness and engagement in disarmament initiatives. Specifically, Uganda has been actively involved in disarmament campaigns, particularly in regions like Karamoja, where the possession and use of illegal firearms are prevalent. The government has implemented stringent laws under the Firearms Act to regulate the possession, manufacture, and sale of firearms” (KI 11 Female, 38 years, CSO staff, 26th November 2023).

This statement highlights the proactive steps Uganda and Kenya have taken to control the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) through disarmament initiatives. Both countries have established dedicated bodies (National Focal Points) to coordinate these efforts and have developed comprehensive National Action Plans. These measures aim to strengthen laws, improve law enforcement capabilities, and involve communities in disarmament activities to build awareness and cooperation.

In Uganda, especially in Karamoja, the government has focused on disarmament campaigns to tackle the high prevalence of illegal firearms (Mkutu, 2008). They have enforced strict regulations under the Firearms Act to control the possession, production, and distribution of these weapons. This multifaceted approach is crucial for reducing violence and enhancing security, demonstrating the effectiveness of well-coordinated disarmament strategies (Uganda Ministry of Internal Affairs & UNDP, 2022).

Regarding supportive measures from legislative and regulatory standpoints, the response was divided; 8% and 34% Strongly Agree and Agree respectively to the existence of such initiatives. On the other hand, 22 and 2% of the respondents Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively while 34% were neutral on existence and effectiveness of legislative and regulatory initiatives in the control of SALWs. The findings were triangulated with interview findings. One key informant noted;

“East African states have shown willingness to address the SALW menace by signing the ATT, which regulates the international trade in conventional arms. However, ratification and full implementation remain a challenge. Countries like Kenya and Uganda have developed National Action Plans on SALWs, focusing on improving legislation, enhancing law enforcement capacity, and promoting community awareness and engagement in disarmament initiatives” (KI 17, Security Officer in Nairobi 28th November 2023).

The interview statement implies that East African states, by signing the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), have shown their commitment to regulating the international trade of conventional arms, which is a positive step towards addressing the SALW issue. Despite this commitment, there are significant hurdles in fully ratifying and implementing the ATT. This suggests difficulties such as political, logistical, or resource-related challenges that hinder effective enforcement.

With reference to “Capacity building programs” as initiative adopted to address proliferation, Table 1 shows that almost half (44%) were neutral about the statement. However, over 32% disagreed with the statement. For border control measures, 41% disagreed that it was an effective measure in addressing proliferation of SALWs. About public firearm destruction, 49% disagreed that it was an effective measure. About 50% of the respondents disagreed that relinquishing and reregistration of firearms was an effective initiative. The table also shows that still half of the respondents (50%) disagreed that information and dissemination among stakeholders was an effective initiative in addressing proliferation of the SALWs. Finally, collection and destruction of SALWs was rated strongly disagreed with most of the respondents (85%).

The findings reveal widespread public scepticism toward SALW control initiatives, with particularly strong disapproval (85%) of collection and destruction programs (Small Arms Survey, 2002). Neutral responses (44%) toward training programs suggest ambivalence or lack of awareness, while 32% disagreement indicates perceived ineffectiveness (Wepundi et al., 2012). Border security measures faced 41% disagreement, highlighting enforcement gaps. Half of respondents doubted firearm registration processes, reflecting systemic distrust (UNDP, 2023). The overwhelming rejection of destruction programs (85%) underscores a crisis of confidence in state-led disarmament. These results demand urgent policy reforms, including community engagement and transparent implementation to restore public trust (Organization for Economic and Cultural Development [OECD], 2022)



Qualitative findings through Key informant interviews and FGDs showed complementary information relating the above quantitative findings. One discussant posted'

"... presents a concerning pattern regarding the effectiveness of various SALW control initiatives. There are few participants for capacity building programs, found these programs effective, highlighting a significant credibility gap in training and institutional strengthening efforts" (FGD 04, Male Participant, Aged, 68 years, Turkana, 11th November 2023).

Through the interviews, one KI observed;

"... due to scepticism, there is little effectiveness. This suggests potential issues with porous borders, inadequate resources, or corruption in border management systems. The high level of disagreement (49%) regarding public firearm destruction programs indicates possible issues with transparency, public trust, or program implementation" (KI 01, Male Aged, 52 years), Turkana, November 2, 2023).

The 50% disagreement rate for both firearm reregistration and information dissemination initiatives suggests systematic failures in administrative processes and stakeholder communication. Furthermore, the notably high disapproval rate (85%) for collection and destruction programs indicates a fundamental breakdown in public confidence regarding SALW disposal methods.

The findings imply that current approaches to SALW control may need significant revision and that there's a need to understand why these initiatives are perceived as failing. The findings also form new strategies or substantial modifications to existing ones may be necessary. This implies that more stakeholder engagement might be needed in designing control measures. This data suggests a serious gap between policy intentions and practical effectiveness in SALW control initiatives.

On the more optimistic end of this spectrum, public firearm destruction had 33% agreement and 16% strong agreement, meaning some level of support; relinquish and reregistration showed somewhat better numbers with less opposition as well (43% neutrality) but are purely seen as potentially effective by some and nothing else. The trend is repeated for communication among stakeholders, with 44% stating they agreed and 31% neutral. An 85% majority in favour of the collection and destruction of SALWs expressed the highest consensus across all questions, suggesting that this initiative was widespread among respondents (strongly agree).

In this study, an analysis of the Kenya-Collaborative initiatives was conducted from both the questionnaire and the KIIs and FGDs. The questionnaire required the respondents to rate their level of agreement with a list of statements on Kenya-Collaborative initiatives. The results were presented in Table 2

Table 2
Kenya-Collaborative Initiatives

Initiatives	SA%	A%	N%	D%	SD%	TOTAL%
Legislative measures	22	34	39	3	2	100
The Firearms Act	12	13	54	12	9	100
Stockpile management	23	12	65	0	0	100
Record keeping and gun marking	22	23	54	1	0	100
Licensing Policy	21	27	45	4	3	100
Public Education and Awareness Program	20	21	55	2	2	100
Military Measures and Civil Society-Based Approaches	3	13	63	11	10	100

Table 2 presents the respondents' typologies of opinion for various Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) control programs at Kenya-Uganda collaborative levels and through Kenyan domestic strategies. Among the Kenya-Uganda collaborative aspects, a substantial number (22% strongly agree; 34% agree) view that GSL indicates Joint legal frameworks in addressing SALWs. However, other measures, such as the Firearms Act and record keeping and gun marking, received a more neutral 54% of responses in regard to a measured response yay or nay, indicating that people were unable to come up with an opinion yet (or did not hear much about these socialist actions).

The findings reveal significant public ambivalence toward SALW control measures, particularly regarding stockpile management, where 65% neutrality suggests limited public awareness or engagement with these initiatives (Greene & Rynn, 2010). This could indicate either poor communication from authorities or the technical nature of stockpile management being less visible to communities. In contrast, public education programs received more balanced approval (41% combined agreement), though the majority (55%) remained neutral, highlighting the need for more impactful outreach strategies (McDonald & Valasek, 2018).

Military-led security measures faced scepticism, with 63% neutrality reflecting uncertainty about their effectiveness. This aligns with studies critiquing top-down approaches in SALW control, which often lack transparency and community involvement (UNDP, 2023). Conversely, legislative efforts and SALW destruction programs garnered relatively higher approval, suggesting trust in formal, tangible actions over militarized interventions.

The data underscores a critical gap: while some initiatives (e.g., public education) are moderately trusted, others suffer from low visibility or perceived inefficacy. To enhance public confidence, policymakers must prioritize: Transparent communication to demystify stockpile management and military operations. Community-centric approaches, leveraging civil society to bridge trust deficits (OECD, 2022). Regular feedback mechanisms to assess and adapt programs based on public perceptions.

4.2 Kenya-Uganda Collaborative Efforts against Proliferation of SALWs

The Kenya-Uganda border security collaboration demonstrates a proactive regional approach to SALW control and conflict reduction (Maroa, 2013). By prioritizing coordinated operations and intelligence sharing, both nations address key challenges like illicit arms production and livestock rustling. The establishment of EAPCO further institutionalizes multinational cooperation, extending beyond Kenya and Uganda to include other East African states (EAC, 2022). However, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on sustained resource mobilization and operational transparency. While promising, long-term success requires addressing trust deficits among member states and ensuring local community participation in border security measures (UNDP, 2023).

The governments of Kenya and Uganda have been collaborating to diminish the availability of weapons to nomadic groups. Uganda is engaged in a collaborative disarmament initiative aimed at restoring peace within these communities. Kenya has implemented a comprehensive community-based approach to limit the proliferation of firearms and promote a culture of non-violence. The measures encompass public awareness campaigns, community safety initiatives, the establishment of alternative livelihood options, disarmament, and the eradication of illegal guns.

The study established that, in Uganda there were multi-sector and integrated efforts aimed at combating SALW proliferation, especially in the North West Uganda. Uganda's efforts to address the spread of SALW are composed of legislative measures, military actions, and ways involving civil society, as outlined in the comments from the respondents.

Uganda's multi-sectorial approach to combating SALW proliferation in North West Uganda demonstrates a comprehensive strategy integrating legislative, military, and civil society efforts (Detzner, 2017). While legislative measures provide a legal framework, military actions offer immediate security responses, and civil society engagement ensures community participation (Mwenda, 2021). However, the effectiveness of this integrated model depends on sustained coordination among stakeholders and adequate resource allocation. Challenges such as trust deficits between security forces and communities, as well as inconsistent policy implementation, may hinder progress (UNDP, 2023). Future efforts should prioritize local ownership and transparent monitoring to enhance impact.

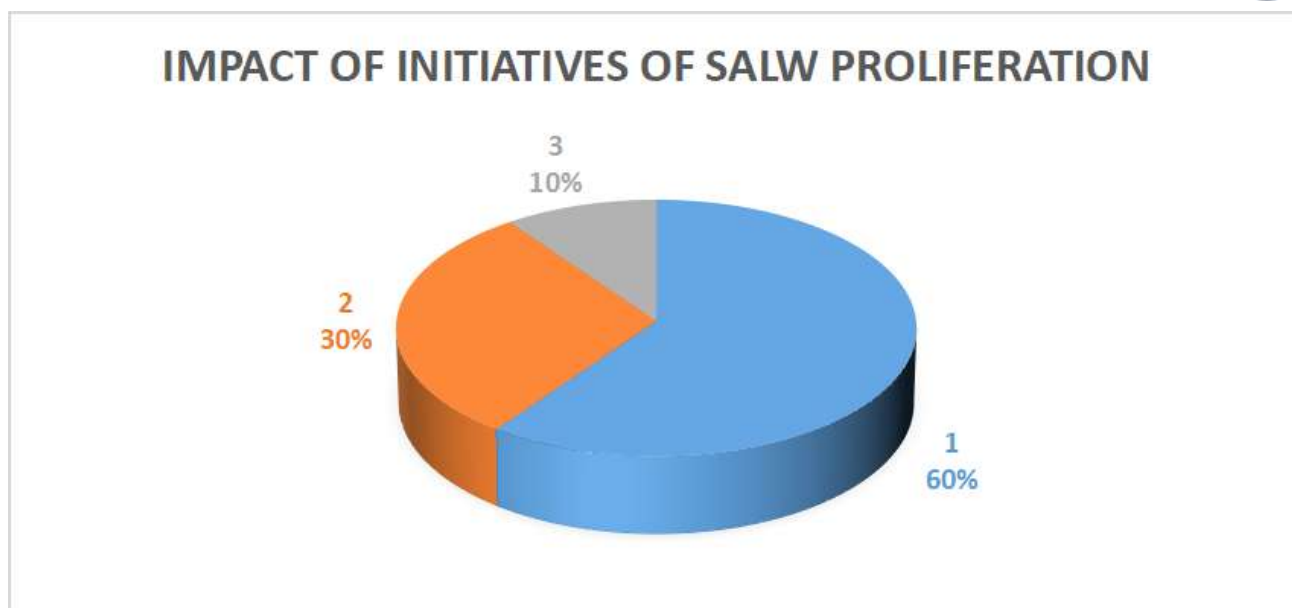
The study also found that several laws and regulations in Uganda have provisions that are applicable to the control of SALW as well as terrorism. The laws in question encompass the Firearms Act of 1970, which has been modified in 2005. This legislation specifies the penalties for unlawful possession of weapons, as well as other offenses relating to firearms. One respondent familiar with legal issues on arms proliferation commented;

“The amendment implements the government's strategy to regulate the proliferation of SALWs. The implementation of the act is carried out through the utilization of the National Action Plan, the National Action Plan on Arms Management and Disarmament, and the National Focal Point” ... (KI14, Kaabong, 13th November 2023).

The revelation by the KI highlights the government's efforts to control SALW proliferation through an amendment and associated action plans. Additionally, it underscores the importance of coordinated action and policy frameworks in addressing security challenges posed by SALWs. Further, the study noted that, following the widespread illegal use of small arms including in cattle rustling in the Karamoja region and crimes of opportunity between 2000 and 2008, the Firearms Act was amended to align it with the severity of the threat.

The findings demonstrate Uganda's responsive policy approach to SALW proliferation, particularly through legislative reforms like the Firearms Act amendment following Karamoja's security crises (2000-2008). This reflects adaptive governance in aligning laws with emerging threats (McDonald & Valasek, 2018). The emphasis on coordinated action plans underscores the recognition that isolated measures are ineffective against cross-border security challenges (Jacqmin, 2017). However, long-term success requires: 1) consistent enforcement, 2) community-sensitive implementation beyond military solutions, and 3) regional cooperation to address transnational arms flows (UNDP, 2023). While policy reform is crucial, its impact depends on addressing root causes like poverty and inter-communal tensions that fuel arms demand.

Uganda's local community members were asked whether the amendment bore any fruits, and sixty percent of the respondents strongly agreed that indeed there were positive results. Thirty percent agreed that the amendment had borne desired results and 10 percent disagreed that the amendment resulted in anything meaningful. This was as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

Impact of Initiatives of SALW Proliferation

On the whole, as shown in Figure 1 what this means is that the amendment is largely seen as successful by the local community, with 90% of respondents acknowledging positive results (either strongly or moderately). However, there is a small minority (10%) who did not see any beneficial impact. This feedback is valuable for understanding different perspectives within the community and addressing any concerns or issues raised by the dissenting minority.

The local community were subjected further questions on specific initiatives by the government and other stakeholders, and the responses were mixed and diverse. The questions were on a range of initiatives including, legislative measures, the Firearms Act, stockpile management, record keeping and gun marking, licensing Policy, Public Education and Awareness Program, Military measures and Civil Society-Based Approaches.

The amendment facilitated the development of a collaborative task force comprising the Uganda Police (UPF), Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), the External Security Organization (ESO), and Internal Security Organization (ISO) to address the issues of proliferation through coordinated operations and sharing of intelligence. Furthermore, the government initiated an interagency security operation called Operation Wembley, which effectively decreased the prevalence of illicit firearms in the Karamoja region. This was achieved by the implementation of cordon and search operations, snap check points, and the enforcement of some aspects of the amnesty law.

The results demonstrate strong community approval (90%) of Uganda's Firearms Act amendment, validating its effectiveness in curbing SALW proliferation through coordinated security operations like Operation Wembley (UPF, 2023). However, the dissenting 10% highlights persistent gaps in localized impact, possibly reflecting uneven implementation or unmet socioeconomic needs (UNDP, 2022). Mixed responses to specific initiatives—such as stockpile management and civil society engagement—suggest varying degrees of trust in different measures. While interagency collaboration (UPF/UPDF/ISO/ESO) has bolstered intelligence-sharing and enforcement (Casey-Maslen, 2021), long-term success requires addressing minority concerns through inclusive dialogue and transparent monitoring of disarmament outcomes.

The operation was based on the requirements of the Uganda Firearms Act and received assistance from international partners. A key informant from the Ministry of foreign affairs opined;

“The government of Uganda has put in place harsh regulations and laws to deter illegal ownership and use of firearms. These legislations include the Fire Arms Act 1970, the UPDF Act of 2005, and the Anti-terrorism statute of 2002 that reinforces the existing laws and thus making it an act of terrorism, having arms”... (KI15, Ministry of Foreign affairs, Kaabong, Uganda, 24th November 2023)

This underscores the government of Uganda's commitment to combatting illegal firearms possession and usage through the implementation of stringent regulations and laws. Significantly, it highlights the importance of legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in addressing security challenges associated with firearms proliferation.

4.3 Kenyan Domestic Initiative against Proliferation of SALWs

In compliance with the 2004 Nairobi Protocol on the control of proliferation of SALWs, the study found that Kenya has developed its own domestic initiatives. This is according to key informants and participants in FGDs. For example, through extensive discussions, it was disclosed that Kenya has been actively implementing disarmament

programs with the goal of fostering stability. Since gaining independence, the Kenyan government has implemented various measures to tackle the issue, particularly focusing on the disarming and destruction of firearms that have been found. Subsequent administrations have been dedicated to the endeavour of diminishing illegal firearms in circulation in order to enhance human security. The disarmament operation Dumisha Amani (Sustain Peace) was meticulously planned with a comprehensive and all-encompassing multi-sector strategy. It involved communities voluntarily surrendering their weapons, while also providing them with incentives such as alternative employment opportunities and the restoration of local infrastructures.

The findings highlight Kenya's sustained commitment to SALW control through domestic initiatives aligned with the 2004 Nairobi Protocol. The Operation Dumisha Amani model exemplifies a progressive, multi-sectoral approach combining voluntary disarmament with community incentives (Mwangi, 2023). While these efforts demonstrate policy continuity since independence, their effectiveness hinges on addressing root causes of arms demand, such as unemployment and infrastructure deficits (UNDP, 2022). The participatory approach (FGDs/KIIs) reveals local ownership but underscores the need for transparent monitoring to ensure long-term impact. Comparative regional studies suggest such programs succeed when paired with cross-border cooperation (Saferworld, 2023)

Reviewed literature supported by field data are both indicative that, Kenya has undertaken numerous and multifaceted national initiatives to address the proliferation of SALWs. Prominent ones being enactment of stringent laws to control the possession, use and trafficking of firearms, conducted several disarmament exercises to collect and destroy illegal firearms, launched public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the dangers of SALWs. Another important effort has been active engagement with regional neighbouring countries. The Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control, and Reduction of SALW in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa being one such initiative. Notable events include the destruction of 8,299 firearms in 2003 and 3,800 firearms in 2005 (Nation). Additionally, the government has encouraged and sponsored training programs for police and other security personnel focused on improving skills in detecting and intercepting illegal arms and managing arms stockpiles.

Majority of the key informants generally agreed that Specific aspects of SALW proliferation control initiatives aim to address are known to the local community, while a paltry 25 % disagreed with the perspective. On whether legislative and regulatory measures had been implemented to control SALWs in East Africa were well understood by the local communities, 55% agreed, 45 disagreed and only 10 percent strongly agreed. Similarly, 85 % representing the majority of the respondents strongly held the view that, capacity-building programs have been conducted to enhance effectiveness of relevant stakeholders involved in SALW control. Twenty percent (5%) disagreed and only five percent (5%) strongly disagreed that capacity-building programs have ever been conducted.

The general interpretation of the foregoing reveals that while there is a strong general awareness and positive perception of SALW control initiatives and capacity-building programs, there is still a significant need to improve communication and education regarding legislative and regulatory measures to ensure a more comprehensive understanding among all community members. The data suggests that most people recognize and value the efforts made, but a focused approach is needed to address the concerns and gaps highlighted by the dissenting minority.

The Dumisha Amani operation, conducted from 2005 to 2010, resulted in the seizure of 3,499 weapons and 6,083 rounds of ammunition. The Dumisha Amani disarmament program commenced in 2005 and has been in progress ever since. At the commencement of the campaign, a total of 2,433 firearms and 5,260 rounds of ammunition were retrieved. From 2006 to 2007, the process utilized amnesty and voluntary surrender methods. In 2008, the government-initiated Operation Okota (collect), which involved a more assertive strategy implemented by security services. Subsequently, the government implemented Dumisha Amani 2 to proceed with the disarmament process.

The *Dumisha Amani* operation demonstrates Kenya's evolving approach to SALW control, transitioning from voluntary surrender (2005-2007) to assertive enforcement (*Operation Okota*, 2008) and sustained efforts (*Dumisha Amani 2*). The seizure of 3,499 weapons and 6,083 rounds (2005-2010) reflects tangible outcomes, though the shift in tactics highlights challenges in voluntary compliance (UNDP, 2021). The phased strategy—from amnesty to coercion—mirrors regional trends where initial goodwill requires bolstering with enforcement (Saferworld, 2021). However, long-term success demands addressing demand-side drivers (e.g., cattle rustling) to prevent rearmament, as noted in Kenya's North Rift disarmament programs (Mwangi, 2023).

The foregoing perspectives were similar to the ones expressed by one respondent as follows;

"The main goals of disarmament are to decrease the prevalence of illegal firearms, specifically among nomadic pastoralists, and to facilitate the implementation of development projects and enhance security. The outcome of disarmament has often failed to make a strong impression on the impacted communities and human rights organizations"... (KI17, Turkana 10th November 2023)

This illustrates the intentions behind disarmament efforts while acknowledging the challenges and mixed results associated with their implementation. Further, it emphasizes the importance of addressing community perceptions, human rights considerations, and broader socio-economic factors to achieve sustainable disarmament and promote peace and development. The government stands accused of breaching human rights by several stakeholders,

including community members, the media, opinion leaders, and politicians. When a community is disarmed, people have a heightened sense of susceptibility and defenselessness in the presence of their armed neighbors and adversaries.

It was further established that in order to diminish the quantity of illegal firearms in circulation, the government has repeatedly carried out public firearm destruction events. As part of the ongoing efforts to combat poaching, a total of 5,250 illicit guns weighing 120 tons were incinerated at the Nairobi National Park in November 2016. The arsenal consisted of a variety of illegal firearms and small arms, which were seized during different security operations and subsequently destroyed in Ngong Hills, located near Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. The decision was also made as a measure to combat crimes such as cattle rustling, carjacking, and to eradicate the risks posed by terrorism, human trafficking, piracy, and drug trafficking. The illicit weapons were acquired through two primary means: seizure by law enforcement authorities and voluntary relinquishment by the individuals in possession of the illegal SALWs.

Kenya's public firearm destruction initiatives, exemplified by the 2016 Nairobi National Park event (5,250 weapons incinerated), demonstrate a strategic commitment to curbing SALW proliferation through visible, symbolic actions (Kenya National Police Service [KNPS], 2017). This dual approach—combining law enforcement seizures and voluntary surrenders—aligns with global best practices for reducing illicit arms circulation (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs [UNODA], 2020). However, while weapon destruction addresses supply, sustained impact requires parallel efforts to disrupt demand drivers like cattle rustling and terrorism (Institute for Security Studies [ISS], 2022). The Ngong Hills destruction further signals governmental transparency, though critics argue such events risk being performative without complementary community reintegration programs (Saferworld, 2021).

In May 2003, a total of 8,299 weapons were disposed of, compared to 3,800 firearms in 2005. In March 2010, the government conducted a drive to eliminate illegal small guns and light weapons, which are believed to be the main cause of rising violent crime in Kenya and Africa as a whole. As part of this operation, a total of 2,545 firearms were incinerated at Uhuru Gardens in Nairobi (Bankale & Uchegbu, 2021). The rationale for arms destruction was expressed by a key informant who opined;

“Since the signing of the Nairobi Declaration in March 2000, the government has annually collected and incinerated firearms in public as a demonstration of its dedication to reducing the presence of illegal firearms and to raise awareness among the general public about the hazards of SALWs”... (KI17, Nairobi 28th November 2023)

The statement is a clear demonstration of the government's initiative-taking measures to address the issue of illicit firearms through public demonstrations of commitment, educational initiatives, and symbolic gestures aimed at raising awareness and promoting public safety.

Despite Kenya's significant disarmament achievements, persistent insecurity—including cattle rustling, terrorism (e.g., Al-Shabaab attacks), and armed crime—reveals systemic limitations in SALW control. The continued violence underscores that weapon destruction alone cannot address the root causes of arms proliferation, such as cross-border trafficking, ideological extremism, and socioeconomic marginalization (ISS, 2023). Al-Shabaab's exploitation of illicit firearms highlights the regionalized nature of the threat, demanding coordinated East African responses (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2022). To enhance efficacy, Kenya must integrate disarmament with community policing, border surveillance, and counter-radicalization programs, as isolated measures fail to disrupt entrenched criminal networks (Saferworld, 2023).

In yet another effort, the research suggested that Kenya has just obtained marking machines and implemented a nationwide system for record-keeping and data management. The process of labelling and registering the state's stockpile has been a continuous endeavour. In March 2019, the Kenyan government carried out a process to confirm the validity of privately owned firearms and to register them again. The gun owners were instructed to relinquish their firearms for the purpose of registering them and conducting forensic investigations. The process entails submitting an application to the firearms bureau, obtaining a clearance certificate from the DCI, and providing the application form along with valid records of the national ID card, certificate of good conduct, and a doctor's certificate to demonstrate mental and physical fitness. Only after fulfilling these requirements can one be granted clearance. This technique is the only legal means by which one can possess a handgun.

However, the study also found that the government of Kenya has a parliamentary Act in place to regulate, license, and control the manufacturing, importing, exporting, transporting, selling, repairing, storing, possessing, and using of firearms, ammunition, air guns, and destructive devices for related purposes. A firearms licensing board was created with the specific responsibility of carrying out several functions. A key respondent familiar with legal operations highlighted the roles;

“The responsibilities include verifying the eligibility of the applicant and the duration for which they will possess the firearm, granting, revoking, and terminating licenses, registering civilian firearm holders, dealers, and manufacturers, overseeing and regulating shooting ranges, and establishing, maintaining, and monitoring a centralized record management system”... (KI08, Nairobi 15th November 2023).

This response highlights the multifaceted role of the regulatory authority in managing firearm possession, licensing, registration, and oversight. These responsibilities are essential for promoting public safety, preventing

firearm-related incidents, and ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Additionally, the study observed that the Act comprehensively delineated all the offenses pertaining to the utilization, possession, production, and dissemination of guns, and the sanctions for each criminal transgression were clearly specified in the text.

The study highlights Kenya's innovative use of Community Barazas and conferences as critical tools for SALW awareness, complementing enforcement measures. These grassroots dialogues—with over 20 programs implemented—have proven effective in Northern Frontier counties, fostering voluntary weapon surrenders by addressing local perceptions of insecurity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). Such participatory approaches align with global evidence that community engagement enhances disarmament legitimacy and sustainability (Saferworld, 2022). However, long-term success requires scaling these efforts alongside economic alternatives to deter rearmament, particularly in pastoralist communities where cattle rustling fuels demand for weapons (ISS, 2023).

Efforts have been made to organize national conferences that aim to bring together government officials and a diverse range of national and local civil society players, regardless of their involvement in the small arms and weapons issue.

“The groups have convened to deliberate on the nature of the small arms issue in the country and explore potential strategies for both civil society and the government to address it. Convening conferences and barazas can enhance the political and popular determination and momentum to effectively address the widespread distribution of small guns...” (KI04, Lodwar 2nd November 2023)

The import of the respondent's statement is its underscoring of the value of convening conferences and barazas to engage stakeholders in addressing the small arms problem. By fostering dialogue, building consensus, and mobilizing support, these gatherings play a crucial role in advancing collective efforts to tackle small arms proliferation and promote peace and security.

The process of selecting civil society organizations to participate in a national conference is crucial. The participation must be nonpartisan and include representatives from all segments of society.

“A national conference should encompass a wide range of participants, including NGOs, professional groups, trade unions, traditional leaders and authorities, business sector representatives, MPs, and provincial and national authorities. This composition should accurately represent the organizational structure of the national focal point, which involves multiple agencies working together” (KI05, Lodwar, 14th November 2023).

This statement emphasizes the importance of inclusive representation and stakeholder engagement in national conferences, highlighting the diverse groups that should be involved and the benefits of collaborative decision-making processes.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Analysing emerging issues in addressing the proliferation of SALWs in East Africa is a critical step towards developing effective, sustainable, and coordinated responses to a complex problem that impacts security and human well-being in the region. By understanding the challenges and dynamics at play, stakeholders would certainly implement strategies that not only control the spread of the dangerous but also address the underlying causes of violence and insecurity in the study area. The article showed that various initiatives including Disarmament programs and Legislative and regulatory measures were in place in Kenya-Uganda border effort. Various outcomes of the control of proliferation merged as the results show that 75% strongly agreed that to a large extent, specific goals and objectives set for each initiative have been achieved.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the EA countries strengthen human resource capacity, harness technology in surveillance, and improve on the terms and conditions of security forces. Additionally, proper and adequate equipment for intelligence gathering and response capabilities need to be bolstered to effectively deal with proliferation of arms. This should include improvement of road infrastructure to promote accessibility to the remote parts and to enhance border control initiative.

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