

The GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Brief

Research and Analysis in Security and Defence Pillar

Persistent barriers to disarmament in Kerio Valley

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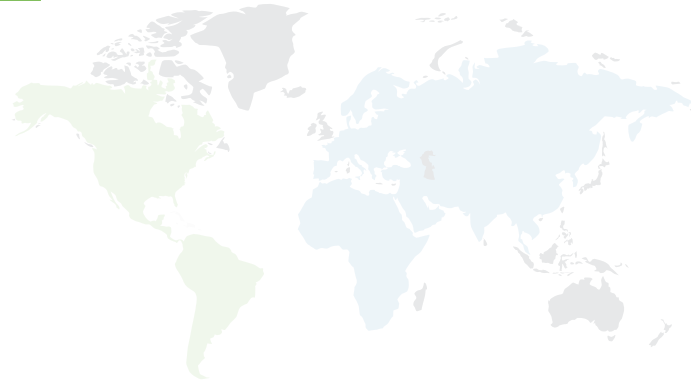
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Executive Summary

Successive disarmament efforts in Kerio Valley have failed to bring lasting peace in the region as illicit weapons proliferation escalates. On 13th February 2023, the government issued a three-day amnesty for civilians to surrender illegally held weapons, which was followed by forceful disarmament. This is in response to a recent spike in banditry attacks which have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, and displacement of populations. However, without addressing issues such as politicization of disarmament, East Africa's black market for

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), cross-border governance, and holistic development shortfalls, current security efforts remain ineffective. The brief recommends, increasing political support to ongoing disarmament campaigns; enhancing the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol; heightening information sharing and coordination of cross-border initiatives; and engaging in inclusive human development interventions.





Context

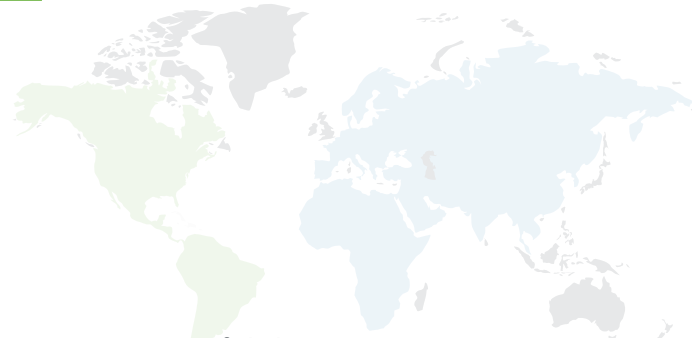
Disarmament in Kerio Valley has been a major concern in Kenya due to the continued proliferation of SALW. This in turn has contributed to insecurity and violence in Turkana, Laikipia, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Baringo, Samburu, and West Pokot Counties. The insecurity situation in the North Rift region has led to the death of over 100 civilians and 16 police officers between September 2022 to February 2023, the destruction of social amenities, and disruption of economic livelihoods. As a consequence, banditry has been declared a national threat. Government interventions to this national emergency include the recruitment of 450 National Police Reservists, 30 days' dusk-to-dawn curfew, deployment of a

joint land and air military, police operation, and disarmament of civilians holding illicit weapons. It is envisaged that disarmament would result in the reduction of illegal arms estimated at more than 50,000 in the Valley. Nevertheless, past exercises have recovered few weapons with a majority still in circulation. Past efforts have often been reactionary and have failed in their objectives due to interrelated factors including politics and cross-border governance. Equally, the lack of investment in post-disarmament processes such as enhancing community resilience inhibits the success of these exercises. This brief thus interrogates the above-mentioned issues to propose new policy interventions.



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Key Issues

The following are the barriers to successful disarmament exercises in Kerio Valley region.



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Politicization of disarmament

Political figures in Kerio valley have taken advantage of the disarmament process to consolidate their political bases, protect their economic interests, and secure future votes by rallying their constituents against the disarmament. For instance, key politicians have been arrested and questioned over their suspected involvement in arming bandits in the locality and bailing them out when arrested. In the other instances, intercommunal politics, particularly among the Pokot and Turkana, has also emboldened some communities to resist

the disarmament, arguing that they need to protect themselves from their historical enemies and preserve their cultural identity and way of life. The politicization increases resistance to these operations thus jeopardizing efforts to secure lasting peace in the valley. Lessons on disarmament globally have affirmed the need for political will and support in enabling successful disarmament exercises. Additionally, information sharing and strategic communication are key in managing community expectations and support for these interventions.





East Africa's black market for SALW

The existence of a lucrative SALW black market in East Africa undermines regional disarmament efforts. The market provides access to sophisticated illicit armaments thereby creating opportunities for disarmed communities to easily re-arm themselves. These weapons are sourced from conflict-ridden countries such as Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some have also been diverted from national stockpiles, while others are shipped into the war-torn Somalia and later trafficked to Kenya and other East African countries. In a conflict-ridden region, the complicity of state officials and border porosity serve as enablers to the arms flow.

Regional policies aimed at preventing and reducing the proliferation of SALW such as the Nairobi Protocol (2004) remain crucial in disrupting the market. However, much remains to be done in enhancing their implementation. For instance, many signatory states to the Protocol have weak institutional and legal frameworks to efficiently implement it. These include the lack of effective border and arms control mechanisms. Similarly, political instability and conflict in the region impede its effective execution. Armed groups continue to operate in many of the states, and political leaders have not fully supported the Protocol's enforcement.



Photo Credit: guardian.ng





Cross-border governance

Cross-border governance plays a significant role in regulating arms possession across national borders through joint disarmament exercises. It is essential as kinship ties, the proliferation of SALW and banditry transcend national borders. As such, close collaboration and effective information sharing between different actors, such as government officials, community members, and civil society are required. This cooperation creates opportunities for developing common standards and procedures for disarmament. Nevertheless, insufficient coordination and cooperation between Kenya and her neighbors in overseeing these exercises, further minimizes the effectiveness of disarmament interventions.

Several cross-border policies already exist with impacts on disarmament and wider security provision. These include among others, the Karamoja Integrated Development Plan 3

(2021/22-2025/26) which aims to strengthen multilateral military liaison operations with Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan to enhance peace and security. Similarly, Kenya and Ethiopia have carried out peace interventions, such as the Memorandum of Understanding (2015) which aims to enhance development and security. However, politics and fragmented coordination have derailed their roll-out.

Equally, these operations require significant operational costs. Resource constraints arise from the overreliance on the donor community to support these exercises. Consequently, this obstructs joint monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Cross-border operations require the political support of respective governments and political leaders. However, limited political will due to varied interests undercuts their implementation.





In addition, political instability in neighboring countries such as South Sudan has an impact on disarmament. These civil wars create opportunities for the supply of arms and which in turn erodes gains made by previous disarmaments.

The ongoing Kenya and South Sudan dispute over the oil and water rich Ilemi triangle also complicates the ongoing disarmament operation. On 7th February 2023, South Sudan accused Kenya of encroaching its territory.

This was followed by communal clashes by communities along the contested area. The historically contested area by Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia serves as a major transit point of SALW. This makes it easy for communities like the Turkana to rearm themselves after they are disarmed. Additionally, the disarming of Turkana community leaves them vulnerable to attacks by the Toposa and Dassanech communities from South Sudan and Ethiopia respectively.



Photo Credit: rlc-blog.org

Holistic development shortfalls

Past disarmament exercises in Kerio have not adequately addressed a viable plan for holistic development of the region which in the long term would minimize the proliferation of small arms. The region has suffered neglect from successive governments with minimal investments in development and security provision. The area has inadequate educational, health, transport and security installations. Without alternative economic opportunities and inadequate security presence,

bandits and other criminals fill this vacuum. This generates an arms race among communities for self-protection. Best practices in line with holistic development would need to account for related interventions such as carrying out targeted education and the provision of alternative livelihoods. Education is critical as it changes the mindset of individuals against the long entrenched gun culture among pastoralists in North-Rift Kenya.





Conclusion

Disarmament exercises remain indispensable in curbing the proliferation of SALW in Kerio Valley, which has fuelled conflicts and criminal activities over the years. However, policy gaps in addressing local, regional, political, and governance dynamics influencing disarmament efforts has hampered their success. Holistic development backed by political support is imperative to silencing the guns in the valley.



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Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered:

1. The National Government should:
 - a) prioritize holistic human development in the Valley such as the provision of key infrastructure and services such as education, roads, hospitals, and coordinated security provision.
 - b) carry out targeted education among the youth in Kerio Valley to change attitudes towards pastoralism and cultural practices such as cattle rustling.
 - c) increase inter-community dialogues on peace and security to change negative perceptions on disarmament and to enhance community support.
 - d) enhance information sharing and coordination of cross-border governance.
 - e) allocate more financial and technical resources to cross-border initiatives.



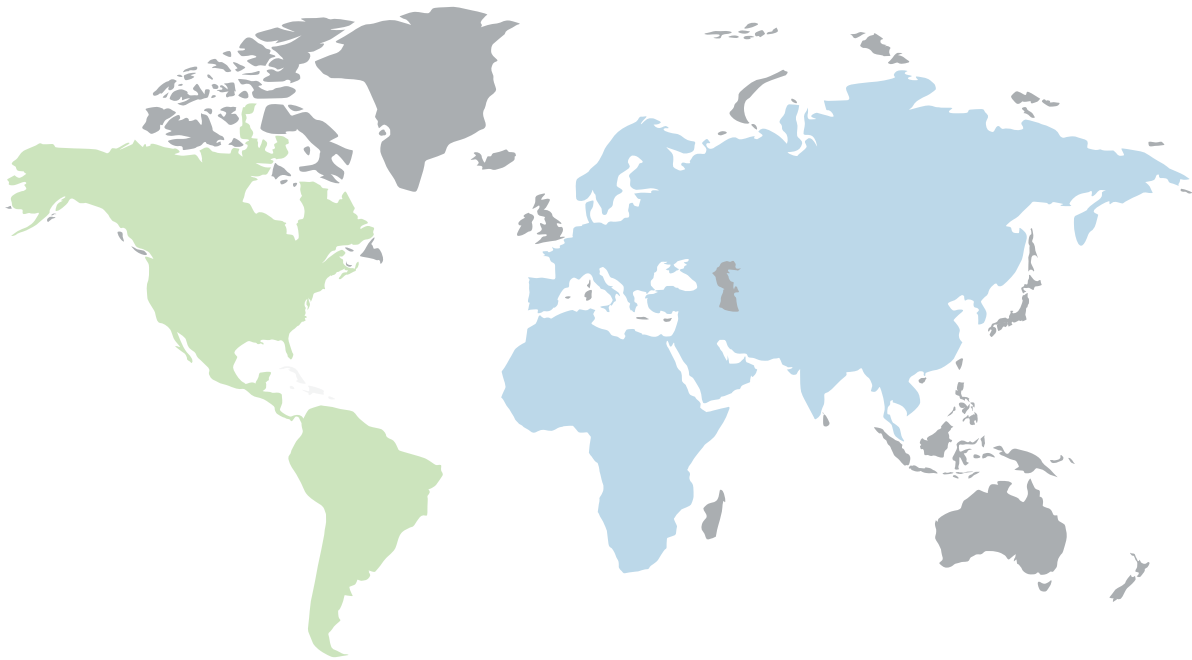


- f) increasingly host regional seminars and conferences to review the implementation of Nairobi Protocol with an aim of enhancing it.
 - g) send its special envoy to South Sudan to engage in peace and disarmament dialogues within the disputed territory.
2. The Ministry of Interior and National Administration in collaboration with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions should investigate, arrest and prosecute individuals facilitating banditry and politicizing disarmament exercises.
 3. Politicians and local leaders in Kerio Valley should offer political support to ongoing disarmament exercises by carrying out grassroots campaigns on the importance of disarmament.





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