



**CNEB**

Conseil National des  
Eglises du Burundi

# Rapid Assessment of the Impact and Perceptions of Small Arms in the Burundi interior



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## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

The major conclusion that can be drawn from this assessment is that disarmament of the civilian population in the Burundi interior is highly feasible in the present context and will meet with widespread support. The daily impact of weapons misuse on community security and development is acute and is currently of greater concern to the majority of rural and semi-urban population than national security or political instability. The widespread perception amongst observers that the present political climate is not favourable to disarmament was universally discredited by interlocutors. Weapons are no longer seen as a useful or necessary means of self defence by the vast majority of the community and their removal should be effected immediately to reduce armed violence and improve community security. Participants were convinced that a well planned disarmament would be successful provided that it contained three related components: an awareness campaign based on grassroots interpersonal communication; non-cash incentives for weapons owners that address alternative livelihoods to crime and the eventual application of forced disarmament.

- Civilian weapon possession is a major preoccupation for the rural and semi-rural population that causes death through accidents, violent resolution of disputes, revenge killings and armed robbery.
- Weapons misuse is disrupting community development by discouraging people to start small businesses or turn their goods into cash. Successful families tend to leave rural areas for the towns where their relative wealth is unknown and they will not be targeted by criminals;
- Weapons impact upon community cohesion through weakening conflict resolution mechanisms. People are afraid of confrontation with both community and family members for fear that they may have a weapon and will use it to resolve the dispute. Legitimate disagreements are therefore not being addressed;
- Weapons owners bring fear into the community. They often use the threat of force to intimidate their neighbours and extort goods and money. Their presence is viewed as a liability for everyone around in the case of an armed attack;
- The failure of demobilised soldiers to reintegrate is a major factor in pushing armed crime. Poverty and sheer lack of alternatives force many former combatants to use weapons;
- The phenomenon of hiring out weapons to criminals is widespread and implicates those guns delivered by previous governments and thought to be inactive;
- ‘Mercenaries’ or hired thugs are available throughout the country and are used in the case of disputes when one party will hire them to attack the other;

- Although weapons were procured for self defence the motivations for their ongoing detention have changed. Most small arms are kept for one of two reasons: either the owner is waiting for a buy-back campaign or, he is keeping the weapon with intention to commit crime;
- Self defence is no longer seen by the majority of the population as a valid justification for weapons possession. People feel that the political and inter-ethnic security climate is tolerably good; that self-defence is impractical in the face of organised attack and that the justification is a pretext for covering up a real and harmful motivation for weapons possession;
- There is little confidence in the capacity of the security services to protect the community from crime. At worst the police and, to a slightly lesser extent, the army are thought to lend weapons to criminals and perpetrate armed crime themselves. The weakness of the police is a factor that actually increases the demand for disarmament as people feel that removing weapons from the community is the only way that violent crime will diminish;
- There is still no evidence of a gun culture emerging in Burundi as weapon's owners are universally viewed with negative emotions. Only children growing up in weapons owning households are thought to be at risk of developing a psychological attachment to small arms;
- There is widespread support for a disarmament programme. It is thought to be feasible at the present time;
- The key components of a successful disarmament are seen as being a grassroots awareness raising campaign; individual incentives for weapons owners and those who give information; livelihoods support to enable criminals to earn a living through peaceful means; forced disarmament.

## **Recommendations**

### *Recommendations for an Awareness Raising Campaign*

- The campaign should focus on community-based interpersonal communication whereby local people are trained to advocate for disarmament;
- The support of the authorities is essential to give the campaign credibility in the eyes of the local population. Zone and sector chiefs (*chefs de zone et de secteur*) should call community meetings to discuss disarmament and introduce the person who will pass advocacy messages;
- Religious leaders are able to influence behaviour change. For specific target groups women's and youth leaders and demobilised soldiers will be effective awareness raisers;
- Radio is an effective support to a community based activity but is not sufficient on its own to promote behaviour change;
- Theatre and film projections are effective and popular channels for communication in rural areas;

- Posters, leaflets and other written information have little impact on behaviour change;
- The destruction of handed-in weapons should be done transparently and publicly to address community fears that the security forces will misappropriate collected small arms.

*Recommendations for a Weapons Exchange programme*

- The government should continue with its policy of not offering cash incentives. There is widespread concern that a buy-back programme would restart a weapons trade;
- Incentives should only be given to weapons owners and to those who give information. Community incentives are not appropriate for three reasons:
  1. weapons were procured for protecting the individual and his immediate family rather than the whole community. In many cases the threat prompting weapons possession came from within the community itself.
  2. the negative impact of weapons is such that their removal from society is motivation enough for the vast majority of the population.
  3. Weapons owners will not be attracted to disarm by communal incentives
- A livelihoods approach must be taken to enable former combatants and professional criminals to find different means of income generation. The approach may be successful if the target group are helped to form associations and given medium term support. Lessons as to why demobilised soldiers failed to reintegrate must be learnt and acted upon;
- Forced disarmament will be necessary to disarm recalcitrant weapons holders and to ensure that the maximum number of people as possible participate in the voluntary disarmament process.

## **1. Introduction**

In June 2007, DCA received funding from the US Department of State, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement to pilot an awareness raising project in support of the Burundi government's civilian disarmament programme. The project is implemented in partnership with the Burundian National Council of Churches (CNEB) and builds upon interventions into the small arms and light weapons (SALW) issue that DCA and CNEB undertook during a preceding community based Mine Risk Education activity. Implementation began in August 2007. The assessment has been undertaken as an essential precursor to activity planning and material development.

### **Justification**

This rapid assessment is intended to expand and update upon the existing research on the small arms problem in Burundi. Separate studies by GRIP and the Small Arms Survey<sup>1</sup> give excellent information on different aspects of the problem and some information on perceptions towards small arms possession and disarmament. While useful for general programming, a greater deal of information is required to plan a small arms awareness campaign. This assessment will provide extra qualitative data and serve as a snapshot of the current impact and perceptions of small arms after two years of democratic governance and fluctuations in peace negotiations with the remaining rebel movement.

In addition to the above, DCA is committed to ensuring community participation in its humanitarian activities, one of the basic tenets of which is the implementation of a proper consultation process with beneficiaries before beginning project planning. International guidelines for behaviour change interventions stipulate that a needs assessment must precede activity design and material development to ensure that the intervention is effective, relevant and culturally appropriate. The SEESAC Guideline RMDS/G 06.10 on Small Arms Awareness Programming provides useful guidance in this regard.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Assessment**

The aim of the assessment was to inform the development of accurate, pertinent and persuasive messages for a small arms awareness campaign in Burundi.

Questions were chosen in order to better understand:

- the groups that need to be targeted by a small arms awareness campaign
- the communication channels that should be used
- the perceptions and attitudes that need to be addressed by a small arms advocacy campaign;
- the behaviour around small arms that needs to be addressed by risk education;
- the expectations of the community regarding disarmament;
- the challenges faced by the small arms awareness campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> "Burundi: The Impact of Armed Violence on Women" GRIP, 2005; « Trafic d'armes: Enquête dans la Plaine de la Ruzizi », Grip 2006 ; « La Prolifération des Armes Légères et de Petit Calibre au Burundi » Small Arms Survey and League Iteka, 2006

## **Methodology**

### *Location*

The assessment was conducted over a period of ten days through a combination of semi structured interviews and focus group discussions. The study was undertaken in the communes of Rugombo, Bubanza, Mweya and Butaganzwa in the provinces of Cibitoke, Bubanza, Gitega and Ruyigi respectively. These communes form part of the interior (*l'intérieur*) of Burundi which refers to all the provinces except that of the capital, Bujumbura Mairie. The economic, political and ethnic factors pushing small arms possession in Bujumbura are numerous, complex and different from those in the interior and merit a separate piece of research. The relatively homogeneous nature of the Burundi interior permits us to extrapolate findings from the four sampled provinces and claim that they are applicable in all rural and semi-urban areas of the country. This supposition is backed up the surprising lack of divergence between interviewees' responses in the four targeted provinces.

### *Methodology*

Interviews were held with three provincial police commissioners or their deputy and staff from two provincial hospitals. In each commune, focus group discussions were held with one group of men, one of women, one of youth and one group of demobilised combatants; a total of 16 discussions over the entire assessment. The discussions were held in Kirundi and led by the DCA project manager and two staff from one of the CNEB churches. Apart from the classification of age, sex and demobilised status no additional criteria was placed on the selection of participants. However, because they were invited to attend by the local pastor, the majority of the participants are members of a CNEB church. The pastors have previously been trained by DCA/CNEB to deliver Mine Risk Education and their respective congregations were therefore not surprised by their request to come and discuss small arms. No incentives or compensation were offered to participants apart from a soft drink. A total of 16 focus group discussions were held involving 118 people, of which 44% were women and 56 % men. While participants were not directly asked to state their ethnic identity, the discrete observation of CNEB and DCA staff was that 55% were Hutu and 45% Tutsi. The minority Twa ethnic group was unfortunately not represented amongst participants.

## **2. Impact of Small Arms**

*“Every night we expect to hear shots” Male interlocutor, Gitega*

*“We fear death every day” Female interlocutor, Gitega*

All interlocutors stated that small arm possession is having a serious and debilitating impact upon rural and semi-urban communities. Weapons possession manifests itself in three ways. These are: armed crime; the violent settling of disputes; and the frequent occurrence of accidents involving small arms. Aside from the human cost of injuries and deaths, participants explained how weapons misuse is disrupting rural development and is attacking the cohesion of communities.

### *Armed Crime*

Armed crime was a common fear of interviewees and is the most common manifestation of weapons misuse. The main type of crime is armed robbery that targets households and small businesses. In Cibitoke and Bubanza there are some areas in which large crop plantations are targeted. Attacks are planned in advance and households are often targeted when they have recently bought or sold something because it is known that contain cash. Weapons are mainly used as a means of intimidation. Interlocutors stated that the majority of criminals do not wish to kill or injure the people they are stealing from. Small arms are sometimes discharged during an attack if the occupants resist, if the occupants are thought to own a weapon or if the attackers use grenades to frighten the occupants. An interlocutor in Ruyigi said that “the first thing they ask for is your weapon” and described how robbers often give the owner a chance to put down his grenade or gun before they enter the house. As discussed in greater detail below, the police are not thought to be very effective at protecting the community from crime. Even if a criminal is caught there is a perception that he will be released a couple of weeks later and that he is collaborating with the police or army. There is a widespread presumption that the army and, to a greater extent, the police lend weapons to criminals.

### *Settling Scores*

The second most cited manifestation of small arms misuse is their employment to settle scores and disputes. Participants commonly stated that they were afraid to enter into disagreements with other members of the community or even with family members out of fear that they could be attacked with small arms. People are particularly careful to avoid conflict with those who are known to have weapons. However, the ease with which weapons can be hired or borrowed leads to a general climate of mistrust and an unhealthy suppression of disputes. The most common cause of conflict is farmland. The disagreement is both intra-familial and intra-communal. The dire lack of cultivable land and over-population means that even close family members will kill each other or hire someone else to do the job (case study 1). Intra-communal disputes often involve one farmer encroaching onto another’s land or a herder allowing his cattle to wander over another’s field and destroy his crops. The latter phenomena is common on the Ruzizi plain in Cibitoke and Bubanza. One interviewed farmer had had to stop farming his field because a herder kept driving cattle across his land. When the farmer complained to the herder the latter told him he had a weapon and would attack the farmer if necessary. The fact that many of the herders are Tutsi and the farmers Hutu adds an element of ethnic tension to the dispute.

Small arms are also used to resolve the most minor and petty disagreements. These can involve very small sums of money or perceived insults or slights. In Bubanza an interlocutor said “when someone’s goats wander into your living area you’re afraid of complaining to the owner if you think he has a gun.” People are afraid of getting drunk in the proximity of a weapons owner for fear they may annoy him. Witchcraft is also seen as a justification for killing someone, although interlocutors recognised this as a pretext to minimise the outcry and the chance that people will involve the police.

### *Accidents*

Interlocutors all highlighted the frequency of accidents involving small arms. In most cases these involve children who are injured after finding weapons in the home.

However, they also described of adults who accidentally set off their own grenades, which are often old and in an unsafe condition. Sometimes the safety pins are in such a suspect state that the grenade's release handle is held down by tape for extra safety. Generally speaking, neither guns nor grenades are systematically locked up nor kept unloaded, thereby considerably increasing the chance that a child will find the weapon and cause an accidents. Demobilised combatants were particularly critical of the manner in which weapons were kept by civilians. As one said “[civilian weapons owners] only know how to shoot their weapons, not look after them safely.”

### Case Study 1

In Cibitoke a recent incident demonstrates how banditry is used as a cover for the settlement of a familial dispute over land. One night an armed group of robbers attacked a house and shot dead two women and two children and seriously injured a young man in the leg. Although it appeared at first to be a tragic case of banditry, the real motivation for the killings was found to be a dispute between nephews and their uncle over shared land. The plot had originally been left to the uncle and his brother by their father. After the brother died, the uncle decided that he wanted to sell the land and move to the town. He negotiated a price of around \$400 but was blocked by his nephews who wanted to farm their portion of the land. Knowing that his nephews had a legal right to the land the uncle hired an armed gang to attack the house. The result was that his sister-in law, her four month old grandson, a female friend of the family and a her four year old son were all killed. The older nephew was in the house and was shot in the leg. Thinking that he was dead, the attackers stood talking over his body and let slip the real reason for the attack. The uncle has now been imprisoned but refuses to reveal the identity of the hired killers for fear that they will attack his own family.

### *Hired weapons and Hired thugs*

As observed in an earlier study<sup>2</sup> there is a phenomenon in Burundi whereby weapons are hired out to robbers either for a set fee or for a share of the profits. Participants confirmed that this practice is ongoing in all of the four provinces targeted by this study. In some cases, the weapons hired out are those distributed by the wartime government to civil servants and supporters for their self-protection. In Cibitoke one male interlocutor pointed to a civil servant in the group who was known to have a weapon and said “it's not a big man (*grand monsieur*) like this who will steal. But he will lend his weapon to a criminal and share the proceeds.”

A cause for greater concern is the accompanying phenomenon of young men - mainly ex-combatants - selling their skills as hired guns or, in the words of one interlocutor, “mercenaries.” As seen in the Cibitoke case study, hiring someone to do the dirty work is a plausible option for settling disputes and is available in urban areas of all the provinces visited during this study.

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<sup>2</sup> “Burundi: The Impact of Armed Violence on Women” GRIP, 2005

## Case Study 2

One day, a nine year old boy in Gitega province saw his father holding a strange object in their house. When he went out to herd the goats he told his friends about the object and promised to show it to them. A few days later he again saw his father with the object, this time cleaning it in his bedroom. Before his father had finished the boys mother called them to eat. Waiting for his father to leave, the boy went to the room. The family heard a loud explosion and ran to find the boy had unpinched his grenade and was dead. The father owned a small bar and had bought the grenade to dissuade people from stealing crates of beer.

### *Extortion and Intimidation*

Weapons owners appear to take advantage of the perceived weakness of the police to extort and intimidate other members of the community. Participants gave examples of weapons owners expanding their land into other's property and of demanding low prices for goods from shop and bar owners. As discussed later, the primary sentiment associated with weapons owners is fear and they use this threat to bully their neighbours into giving them what they want.

### *Impact on rural development*

Participants in every group discussion described how small arms misuse is acting as a brake upon rural development in Burundi. The fear of banditry is so strong that people are discouraged from starting small businesses, making improvements to their houses and even from selling their crops after a good harvest. Because everyone knows everyone else's business, people who have increased their wealth become an instant target for criminals and it is not uncommon for people to be ambushed as they return from the bank or the market after selling their cows. The result is that the people who make money leave the villages for the relative safety of the town as soon as possible. One interlocutor complained that because "it is important people and businessmen who are attacked most often" the rural areas suffer from a loss of wealth and human capital.

### *Impact on community cohesion*

The contributions of participants showed that small arms misuse is having an insidious effect on community cohesion by, firstly, undermining trust between family members and between neighbours. Interlocutors constantly stated that it was difficult to say exactly who had weapons in their community, which heightens the feeling of paranoia and the exaggerated need to avoid all quarrels. Because of land pressures in Burundi many communities experience conflicts that, if not addressed and resolved now, will often re-emerge years later in a violent form. The presence of small arms means that some conflicts are often resolved only to the satisfaction of the person who owns or is thought to own a weapon. This phenomenon creates a sense of injustice that bodes ill for the long term peace in the community.

Secondly, the community's ability to defend itself is undermined by the fact that people are less keen to help their neighbours when they hear that they are being robbed: A woman in Ruyigi said "when we hear gunshots we are too scared to go outside." Previously, people are said not to have hesitated to run to help other members of their community and scare off the criminals. This weakening of cohesion is a concern in that it weakens the capacity of the community to resist the insecurity

resulting from national ethnic or political turbulence. In a climate of insecurity and a recurrence of ethnic or political hostilities, people may well be inclined to use small arms to resolve the backlog of unresolved disputes.

## **6. Attitudes towards small arms**

*What are the current motivations for weapons ownership?*

Interlocutors identified three reasons why people currently possess weapons (as distinct from the reason why they acquired them):

- 1) Weapons are needed to commit crime, intimidation and extortion;
- 2) Weapons are kept in the hope that they can be exchanged for cash in a disarmament programme;
- 3) Weapon kept for self defence from criminals and armed groups.

The number of people for whom the first motivation applies is roughly while the third reason only holds for a small minority, most of whom are businessmen. If the perceptions of interviewed participants can be generalised then it appears that the number of weapons used in crime is on the increase. This is understandable if previously inactive weapons distributed by the government or bought for self defence are now being hired out to criminals. Given that the government issued weapons around ten years ago it is conceivable that they are not all in the hands of the intended owners. Some people may have died while others may have had their gun stolen or transferred it to someone else. The lack of police control means that the current owner can rent out weapons in relative safety.

People may have bought weapons for self defence but they have now seen the benefits of weapons misuse and their motivations for holding onto small arms have changed. The extent to which this change has come about could be perceived from the way in which interlocutors responded to the question “why do people own weapons?” In almost every instance their initial response was “self protection” but when the interviewer clarified the question to refer to *current* motivations, all groups mentioned the three reasons for gun ownership listed above.

*How people feel with presence of weapons in community*

The vast majority of participants used the word “fear” to describe how the presence of small arms in their community made them feel. They are afraid to upset someone who might have a weapon, afraid to prosper in business in case they are targeted by bandits and afraid to denounce known weapons holders to the police. The fact that the presence of weapons is felt but their owners are often unknown leads to a general sense of unease and distrust. This gives way to outright fear when the identity of a weapons owner becomes known. One woman in Bubanza said “when you find out that someone has a weapon you’re afraid and start to panic.” All participants associated weapons with entirely negative experiences and several stated that weapons misuse is one of their main preoccupations. One woman in Gitega said “The only thing we are afraid of is weapons [amongst civilians]. We’re afraid our deaths will come from them.” Another woman in Gitega said that she was so tired of the constant threat of demobilised soldiers that the community should club together and pay them a salary to stop them doing crime. Although everyone laughed at the suggestion it demonstrates the powerlessness felt by the majority of the community in the face of this danger.

*Self Protection is no longer a valid justification for weapons ownership*

One of the most interesting aspects of this assessment was the extent to which interlocutors rejected the argument that weapons were necessary for self protection.

When directly asked if there was any validity to the argument, all groups replied no. Their reply had three aspects: Firstly, participants saw no reason in the current political and security climate for weapons possession; secondly, they saw the argument as a pretext for covering up the real and nefarious motivation; and thirdly, they saw self-defence as impractical and dangerous. Interviewees in all four provinces thought that the national security situation was now “more or less” good and did not see the need for weapons. While some of them expressed concerns over the current political turbulence the vast majority appeared optimistic about the peace process. In Bubanza and Cibitoke, participants were asked whether the presence of the FNL increased the need for weapons and replied that only a small number of people really thought that a gun or grenade could protect them against an armed attack. One demobilised soldier said “people with weapons scare other people in the community but they do not scare the FNL.” By contrast, the main threat posed by national insecurity is not seen to be direct attack by rebels but by criminals who may take advantage of the turbulent situation. For this reason, a small number of businessmen are thought to own weapons in the genuine hope of protecting themselves.

The perception that self-protection was a “pretext” for covering up the real motivation for owning a weapon came up in every single discussion. One participant said that “there are no good reasons for having a weapon nowadays and so [weapons owners] must have bad intentions.” While people accepted that some people are just waiting for a buy-back campaign they thought the argument for self protection to be disingenuous. With the exception of some businessmen the interlocutors thought that those who claimed this justification were really keeping their weapon to steal, intimidate or kill.

**Case Study 3**

Thomas is a quietly spoken 24 year old who, in 2003, lost his right leg and arm when a grenade exploded in his house. The grenade was given to him by a soldier for protection against rebels who might have seen him carrying ammunition and baggage to government troops on the front line. Although Thomas, like many others in his town, had been forced to work as a porter he was afraid that his involvement would make him a target for revenge attacks. For one year he kept the grenade under the floorboards, sleeping with it below his head. He was worried that the weapon was old and the safety pin damaged. One day he reached down to have a closer look and the grenade exploded. Before the accident, Thomas farmed a rented plot of land to support his widowed mother and five sisters. Now they have very little means of support and rely on assistance from neighbours



Interviewees were also well aware of the self-defeating logic of trying to protect oneself with a weapon. The dangers they elucidated were twofold: the threat to the wider community when one person tries to protect himself with a weapon; and the danger to the weapon owner himself. During the period of civil war and ethnic tension small arms were bought for protection of the individual and of the immediate family rather than for assuring the security of the community. A demobilised soldier pointed out that weapons owners are also scattered, autonomous and generally unknown to each other. Other community members do not expect that weapons owners will protect them in the case of armed attack. On the contrary, they fear that attackers would be motivated to use greater violence if they know that some people own small arms.

A similar risk exists for those who try to protect their homes or businesses. Youth in Ruyigi explained that criminals carefully plan their attacks and will arm themselves accordingly. Robbers are not thought to have the desire to kill and will often give the weapons owner a chance to put down his gun or grenade before they enter. If he resists then the robbers will shoot indiscriminately or throw grenades into the house frequently killing other family members and visitors. A man in Gitega summed up the general mood by saying that “if thieves come it’s better for those who don’t have weapons than those who do”.

#### *Attitude towards weapons owners*

The majority of participants spontaneously replied “robber” or “killer” when asked how they perceived weapons owners. As stated above, it is not entirely known which households possess small arms but “when it’s discovered that someone has a weapon they are immediately baptised ‘murderer.’”<sup>3</sup> Because of the entirely negative associations of arms it seems the burden of proof is then on the weapons owner to prove that he is not a threat to his community. When someone is found out to own a gun or grenade, his neighbours’ attitudes towards him change. Most people will avoid social contact with him out of fear of entering into a dispute, while a minority of people will try and create better relations with the owner in the hope that he will protect them in case of insecurity.

The primary sentiment towards a weapons owner is fear, increased by the perception that police weakness or complicity gives them immunity from prosecution. Arms holders are viewed as bullies who are able to intimidate and extort to get what they want from their fellow community members. Nonetheless, community members understand that some of the criminals are motivated by extreme poverty and the complete absence of alternative means of generating income. The majority of people falling into this category are demobilised soldiers who wasted their cash payments, had their money stolen or failed in their business enterprises. Participants gave the example of ex-combatants who tried to turn to agriculture or selling goat meat without having any of the necessary skills. Often lacking land or property, these young men are forced to survive through crime.

As well as fearing other members of the community, some women described the fear that exists within a weapons-owning household when a husband keeps small arms against his wife’s will. Often, the woman fears the risk of an accident to their children or the consequences of an armed attack but the man will ignore her concerns. This

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<sup>3</sup> Female participant in Gitega

finding confirms the observations made in a previous study that many women are held hostage to the husband's desire to own a weapon.<sup>4</sup>

On the evidence of this assessment there is still no proof that a weapons owning culture is taking root in Burundi. Previous studies<sup>5</sup> have remarked on the absence of cultural factors pushing small arms demand and this appears to still be the case. None of the interviewed youth expressed admiration for weapons owners or a desire to join them and procure guns. Similarly the demobilised soldiers interviewed expressed distaste for weapons after seeing what they are capable of during the war. The only concern was elucidated by youth in Bubanza and Gitega who feel that children growing up in weapons owning households will grow used to their presence. The young people felt that these children will mature with the paranoid notion that weapons are essential for their protection and will try and procure a gun when they reach adulthood.

#### **Case study 4:**

A case that was ongoing in Ruyigi at the time of the investigation demonstrates how the threat of weapons possession enables some people to transcend the law. A man and his family abandoned their land in 1994 when fleeing from the war. When they recently returned from a refugee camp in Tanzania they found that someone else was occupying their land. The man went to the communal court and received permission to evict the new occupier but, when he tried to do so, this person said that he had a weapon and would attack the man and his family. Even though the man never saw the weapon he was so convinced by the threats that he decided to let the new occupier keep his land, only holding onto the hope that he would be allowed to farm a part of it. At the time of the investigation the man had not yet been given any of his old land.

#### *Perceptions of Security Forces*

As is already well known by observers, the Burundian population have little confidence in the capacity of the police to assure their security and protect them from criminals. At the worst, interviewees presumed that police and, to a slightly lesser extent, the military, were complicit in much armed crime. They are perceived to lend weapons to criminals, commit crime themselves or turn a blind eye. Even when the police act to take a known criminal into custody there is a perception that he will not be prosecuted. Interviewees in all provinces were able to give precise examples of people who were known to have killed or stolen but were released from prison after a short period of detention. Even if valid reasons for freeing these men exist the impression it gives to the population is that some people are immune from prosecution.

#### *Attitudes towards disarmament*

This assessment found universal support for the Government's disarmament campaign. There is widespread awareness that the campaign had been launched and that a commission had been created. All participants stated categorically that disarmament was feasible in the present time. The only essential condition given was the need to compensate weapons owners in some way: disarmament was not seen as dependant upon improvements to the security forces or disarming the FNL.

<sup>4</sup> "Burundi: The Impact of Armed Violence on Women"

<sup>5</sup> In particular the Small Arms Survey/League Iteka survey, 2006

The weakness of the police was actually seen as a factor increasing the urgency of civilian disarmament. In the absence of an effective security service, communities are currently feel more or less defenceless against weapons misuse and do not want to resort to guns themselves for self protection. There seems to be low expectations that the police will turn into a professional and effective service. We were warned that the longer this situation persists the more businessmen will procure arms to try and fill the void left by the security services despite the known dangers of using weapons for self protection.

Participants expressed a certain amount of frustration that no tangible actions have yet been taken and several questioned whether the government is really willing to follow through with the campaign. There is a perception that the authorities in Bujumbura indifferent to the problems that small arms cause the population in the interior. The level of importance that the rural and semi-rural population attach to the initiative could be seen by the eagerness with which the interlocutors participated in group discussions. One women in Cibitoke expressed disappointment to discover that we were only undertaking an assessment. She thought that she was going to a community meeting to launch the disarmament proper.

## **7. Awareness Raising Campaign**

A persuasive and thorough awareness raising campaign is seen as being core to a successful disarmament programme. Participants emphasised that the awareness raising should be based on grassroots interpersonal communication backed up by radio, theatre and written information.

### *Communication Channels*

Interpersonal communication was seen as the most effective channel for persuading weapons owners to change their behaviour and disarm. They will be most easily persuaded by someone from their own community that may be a religious, demobilised, youth or women's' group leader but needs to be trained and equipped to engage the rest of the community in dialogue and debate on the problem of small arms possession. The animators can work as unpaid volunteers on the condition that they are receive some material "motivation." Interlocutors were reluctant to express exactly what incentives they felt were necessary but agreed that these should similar in scope those offered in a weapons exchange programme.

According to interviewees the second most important communication channel is radio. Although the medium was not seen as being sufficient on its own – one participant pointed out that the radio "doesn't ask questions to your face" – it was thought to be an essential support to interpersonal communication. Volunteer animators will have greater credibility if their messages are repeated on the radio and they are seen to be part of a wider campaign. Because messages would be passed nationwide people would understand that disarmament is happening across the country and is being taken seriously. Importantly messages would reach those who missed direct awareness raising sessions. The most popular radio stations are jointly Isanganiro and RPA, followed by RTNB while peak listening times are the morning and evening news bulletins. As well as publicity spots, interviewees suggested that debates, reportage of small arms destruction and vox pops would be interesting to

listen to. It was seen as important that people hear the pros and cons of disarmament being discussed rather than just receiving a one-way message.

Theatre was seen as useful for convincing weapons owners in rural areas and especially for demonstrating the dangers of weapons possession. Townspeople are used to seeing theatre as light entertainment and will probably take the medium less seriously than in the villages where habitants do not have this perception. An exception is the group 'Ninde' that have a soap opera running every night on RTNB. This group are extremely popular in both urban and rural areas and frequently integrate messages on serious themes such as HIV/Aids into their scripts. If this group were to put on a live show then interlocutors said that it would be extremely popular and effective. Following the performance a discussion should be held with audience members on the themes portrayed by the actors.

Film projections represent an alternative to theatre and would serve the same purpose. Sketches on the dangers of small arms possession would be filmed and shown in villages. Each screening would be accompanied by a group discussion.

Participants did not consider posters or leaflets to be of great use in promoting behaviour change. A significant proportion of the rural population are illiterate and do not interpret written messages or a complicated series of images easily. While billboards will attract an initial level of interest and leaflets are a useful support to animators they will only have a relatively superficial impact. One exception to this rule is written information explaining the exact details of a disarmament campaign. If images of people are to be used then they should be photographs rather than cartoons.

#### *Target Groups*

Because it is hard to identify exactly who owns weapons, interlocutors said that awareness-raising has to encompass the entire adult community. However, particular efforts must be made to reach some groups including: unemployed youth suspected of committing crime and dissatisfied demobilised soldiers who do not participate in communal meetings; businessmen; youth militia such as the JPH (*Jeunesse Palipehutu*) and JGP (*Jeunes Gardiens de la Paix*). Police and army should also be involved to address their perceived complicity or tolerance of armed crime. Apart from risk education on the dangers of touching weapons, children are a low priority for an awareness raising campaign.

#### *Useful social networks*

All interlocutors stressed the absolute importance of implicating the social network of local authorities as a precursor to any awareness raising activities. The rural population invest a good deal of authority in the local social hierarchy and will respect meetings called by the *chef de zone* or *chef de secteur* (village chief). Because people are used to attending these meetings they will not ask for per diem or refreshments and will be receptive to the awareness raising messages. It is not considered appropriate for the local authorities to deliver the messages themselves.

The animators conducting the awareness raising discussions can be drawn from a variety of groups within the community. The essential condition is that they are local to the area. That the person has been authorised to speak by the local authorities and has received training and facilitation materials already lend the animator a certain

amount of credibility in front of her peers. However some categories of people, such as religious leaders, the heads of women's groups or demobilised associations and even survivors of accidents, can speak with greater authority still. Religious leaders of any denomination are most capable of reaching dissatisfied ex combatants or youths suspected of committing crime. Peer group animators from amongst the demobilised ex-combatants must be carefully chosen to take into account the frustrations between those who prospered from the DDR process and those who did not. For example, the focal points that represent their demobilised peers within the DDR process will have little influence on their dissatisfied colleagues due to the perception that they have profited more than others from reintegration. That being said, some associations of demobilised soldiers have a good deal of credibility amongst the rural population.

### *Messages*

Participants thought that messages should serve two purposes:

- 1) Convince weapons owners of the arguments against weapons possession;
- 2) Convince owners of how incentives will bring them a prosperity that exceeds that which they can realise through crime and weapons possession.

Messages should explain the risk of accidents and the self-defeating logic of keeping weapons for self protection. They should include practical advice on how the incentives offered as part of a weapons exchange campaign will, in the long term, enable the weapons owner develop and advance more than through committing crime. Messages must address the desire for a buy-back campaign and explain why cash incentives cannot be given. Finally, they should explain the modalities of the disarmament campaign and the precise details of how weapons are to be handed in, amnesty periods etc.

### *Denouncing weapons owners*

The practice of denouncing illegal weapons owners to the police is ongoing but is seen as extremely risky. If people find out who informed on them then they are likely to take revenge. For example, in Cibitoke a sector chief informed the police about young people in his community who were using weapons to commit crime. These people were arrested but shortly afterwards their friends attacked the chief's home, threatened his family and killed his livestock. Despite the risks, interlocutors felt that it will be essential to eventually denounce weapons owners to ensure that all small arms are removed from their community. Incentives should be offered to informants and anonymity guaranteed. The national water and electricity supplier run a similar programme whereby anyone who provides information about people tapping power lines receives a cash reward.

## **8. Weapons Exchange**

Interlocutors were relieved that the government envisages incentives to persuade weapons owners to disarm. Although most people hope to receive cash reimbursement there was widespread concern that this would restart the weapons trade. Interlocutors from Cibitoke and Bubanza were particularly worried about the ease with which guns can be bought in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. Even if not offered cash, interlocutors were optimistic that the majority of people would disarm if incentives were well chosen to reflect the value of the weapon. A factor complicating non-cash rewards involves the youth militia that

received sporadic payment for their weapons. Some members of the *Jeunes Gardien de la Paix* received 100,000 Burundian francs (see case study below) while others received nothing. Because of high levels of frustration amongst those who missed out a specially targeted approach is necessary.

There was universal support for the principal that incentives should be delivered to the individual handing over the weapon rather than the general community. Weapons were only bought with the intention of self-defence or protection of the immediate family from, in some cases, other members of the community. An attempt to collectivise incentives would therefore generate resentment and resistance amongst weapons owners and would be very likely to fail. In addition, the wider community needs no extra motivation to get rid of the weapons in their midst. The impact of small arms misuse is being so deeply felt that their removal is a reward in itself.

Interlocutors stressed that a simple exchange of incentives for guns would not be enough for people who have no source of income other than armed crime. They suggested a livelihoods approach in which the target group form associations and are supported to undertake alternative income generation activities. Interviewees were well aware of shortcomings in the reintegration of former combatants and are still feeling the consequences as these people turn to crime to survive. Many demobilised soldiers lacked the skills to invest their cash payments wisely or make a success of their business ventures. If they are to be persuaded to finally give up armed violence and find other ways of making a living then they need close support and targeted assistance.

#### **Case Study 5**

The case of the *Jeunes Gardiens de la Paix* (JGP) in Ruyigi is a particularly difficult one for disarmament actors. The JGP (“Young Keepers of the Peace” in English) was a local militia of mixed ethnicity trained and armed by the government during the civil war. Following the end of hostilities the transitional government gave some members of the JGP in Ruyigi 100,000 FBU (\$100 US) to disarm. Unfortunately these payments were not part of a systematic programme and many former militia received nothing and retained their weapons. They now form a discontented and frustrated group within the community and demand their payment. A former leader in the JGP interviewed during this study stated that out of 33 youths under his command only he and three others received payments. He now sees his colleagues daily in bars and as they neither work nor farm presumes that they participate in the frequent criminality afflicting the area. He used his payment to start a small bar and his frequently threatened by his former colleagues who are jealous of his success. The interviewee thinks that if it is not possible to give cash payments to the remaining JGP then the only people who may reach them are religious leaders. Coming from any denomination, religious leaders will be taken more seriously by the youths than the local authorities. If they are brought together as a group to start a development project the former leader thinks that his colleagues can be disarmed.

The need for an eventual forced disarmament was emphasised time and again during this study. While interviewees felt that the majority of people would hand over their weapons through a combination of awareness raising, individual incentives and livelihood support there will be a minority who resist all attempts at voluntary disarmament. These people may stay out of the process for numerous reasons. For example:

- Refusal to hand over weapon for anything other than cash reimbursement;
- Expectation that government will raise value of incentives on offer;
- Desire to continue to commit armed violence and crime;
- Belief that weapon is essential for self protection or earning a living.

Participants were unanimous in stating that the voluntary disarmament must be backed up by the threat of force once the amnesty period expires. Thereby, people will realise that this represents their only chance to receive something in return for their weapon. The police can then be confident that the remaining weapons are being held for nefarious purposes and should disarm the owners by force. Interlocutors thought that former weapons holders would be motivated to denounce those who did not comply with the voluntary disarmament on the basis that “I gave up my gun, so why not them?”

## **Annex A: Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire**

### ***Impact and Perceptions towards Small Arms***

How do weapons affect your community ?

In your opinion, why do people in the community continue to own weapons?

What sections of the community own weapons?

*Do you think that some demobilised ex-combatants own weapons ? Why?  
(demobilised group only)*

Do people need their weapons for self defence ? Why/why not?

How does the presence of weapons in your community make you feel?

How do you view people who own weapons ?

Do people know how to keep their weapons securely ?

*What level of awareness do community members have of the risks of small arms?  
(demobilised group only)*

### ***Attitudes towards Disarmament***

What have you heard about the Government's civilian disarmament programme ?

Do you think that its feasible to disarm people in your community at the present time ? Why/why not?

What will motivate people to hand in their weapon ?

### ***Awareness Raising***

What is the best way to talk to weapons owners about disarmament ?

Who is best placed to discuss disarmament with weapons owners?

What media can be used to convince people to disarm (e.g. radio, theatre)? How?

## Annex B : Map of Burundi



## Annex C : Work Plan

Week	Date	Location	Activity	No. Participants
2	6 - 11 Aug	Bujumbura	Development of Interview guides and translation into Kirundi	
		Gitega/Ruyigi/Bubanza/Cibitoke	Visit to CNEB church staff in Gitega/Ruyigi/Bubanza/Cibitoke to discuss assessment with authorities and plan Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	
3	13-Aug	Rugombo, Cibitoke	Meet Police commissioner	1
			FGD Women	7
			FGD Men	7
	14-Aug	Rugombo, Cibitoke	FGD Demobilised combatants	8
			FGD youth	6
			Meet Staff Cibitoke Hospital	1
	16-Aug	Bubanza ville, Bubanza	Meet Police commissioner	1
			FGD Men	7
			FGD Women	8
	17-Aug	Bubanza ville, Bubanza	FGD youth	7
FGD Demobilised combatants			8	
FGD Demobilised combatants			9	
FGD Women			7	
4	20-Aug	Mweya, Gitega	FGD Men	8
			FGD youth	7
			Meet authorities	1
			Meet deputy police commissioner	1
	21-Aug	Ruyigi ville, Ruyigi	FGD Men	7
		Butaganzwa, Ruyigi	FGD Women	7
	22-Aug	Butaganzwa, Ruyigi	FGD Demobilised combatants	8
			FGD youth	7
	23-Aug	Gitega Ville, Gitega	Meet staff Gitega Hospital	1
	5	27 - 31 Aug	Bujumbura	Analysis of Results
6	3-7 Sept	Bujumbura	Write Messages	
		Mweya, Gitega	Test messages with target groups	30