

# Factors Driving the Spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Central Rumbek, Republic of South Sudan

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**Abstract:** *The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons remains a challenge to security sector globally. The availability of these weapons influences political instability, communal conflict, posing a great threat to not only lives and property but also sustainable development. When South Sudan seceded in 2011, it was estimated that, there were up to 3.2 million of small arms in circulation and the two-thirds of these arms were thought to be in the hands of civilians. More arms circulated during the 2013 and 2016 crisis that took place in the country. The objective of the study was to examine the factors that influence the proliferation of small arms in Rumbek Central, republic of South Sudan. A descriptive research design was adopted to answer questions needed in investigating the problem studied. Guided interview and focus group discussion were used to collect data from a total of 96 respondents that were identified using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The findings on the factors that influence the proliferation of small arms indicated that, 76% of the household adults in Rumbek acquired small arms to protect themselves and their property. Other demands for small arms such as revenge killing, cattle raiding, fight over grazing land aroused from lack of enough security to the people and their property. With this, the study recommended deployment of more security forces to the area experiencing insecurity to address the problem.*

**Keywords:** implication, proliferation, small arms, security, Rumbek Central, South Sudan

## 1. Introduction

Small arms and light weapons are terms used by organizations such as Integral Authority on Development (IGAD), United Nations (UN) and individuals advocating for the arms control. Small arms refer to a sub-category consisting of automatic weapons up to 20 mm, including sub-machine guns, rifles, carbines and handguns (Krause K, 2002). Light weapon has been used as a generic term to describe all conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or by a light vehicle. This encompasses small arms, bazookas, rocket propelled grenades, light anti-tank missiles, and light mortars, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and hand placed landmines (Klare, 1994 and Philippe, 2001).

The illicit proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons rank among today's most pressing security threats, tens of thousands of people are killed or wounded each year in conflicts that are fought primarily with weapons and crime-ridden areas outside the conflict zones (Matt & Stohl, 2003). The availability of these weapons influences political instability, communal conflict posing a great threat to not only lives and property but also sustainable development (Ngboawaji, 2011). The proliferation of these arms is contributing greatly to high level of armed crimes, and militancy although there are no reliable and accurate data on the number of arms and weapons in the world (Aver, Nnorom and Ilim, 2014).

The market for small arms thrives with strong demand and supply undermining stability and threatening the fragile peace (O'Brien shot in Dark 2008). Mush (2006) who did research on small weapons proliferation contents that, major

source of its proliferation remains the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa by the Soviet Union, the United States of America (USA) and their allies to fan proxy interstate wars. Badmus (2005) maintains that, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) have become widely spread that, not only threaten security across the world but also undermine the peace and stability of civil society.

The Proliferation of illegal Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) is a serious threat to public safety all over the world. The UN Secretary General, in a report to the Security Council (S/2008/258), recognized threat posed by SALW by saying: "Small arms facilitate a vast spectrum of human rights violations, including killing, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture and forced recruitment of children by armed groups or forces. More human rights abuses are committed with them than with any other weapon". The report continues that, because of being cheap, light and easy to handle, transport and conceal, their excessive accumulation and universal availability tends to aggravate conflicts by increasing the lethality and duration of violence and by increasing the sense of insecurity which leads to a greater demand for weapons (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2003/29).

Arms are lethal when introduced in both conflict and no-conflict situations. Estimates generated by Small Arms Working Group (SAWG) shows that "illegal arms are directly responsible for an estimated 60-90 percent of deaths during armed conflicts. The report says that, one person dies from illegal arms use every minute, and the rate of firearm injury is even higher". The International Committee of the Red Cross (1999) supported this argument and noted that children are the most affected; they are killed, injured, and psychologically traumatized especially during conflicts. The

committee provides statistics to the effect that 20million children have been displaced, 2million killed, and one million orphaned, 6million seriously injured or disabled and 12million have become homeless because of war during the last decade.

At the level of continent, Africa's Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of illegal Arms and Light Weapons" was shown in the Nairobi Declaration (March 15, 2000). The declaration observed that, small arms sustains conflicts, exacerbate violence, contributes to the displacement of innocent population and threaten international humanitarian law, as well as fuels crime and encourages terrorism.

At regional level, the history of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light weapons has started since 1899 when Sudan was still one country. In 1899 Sudan was being ruled by a coalition of the British and Egyptians which was commonly known as "Condominium". The problem with this administrative was that while north Sudan was developing politically, economically and culturally as an Arab state, the southern region was largely left undeveloped until 1946 when British has linked the south with northern Sudan (Saferworld, 2012). In 1953, Britain and Egypt began to establish the institutions that would lead to self-governance in the south, however, the government positions in the Southern part of Sudan were all given to northerners. This created a lot of resentments among the Southerners especially the educated class who also wanted to fill these positions (Saferworld, 2012). Due to the resentment and fear of Arab domination because of the new administrative make-up imposed by Britain, a rebellion erupted in Southern Sudan which ended in 1972 with Addis Ababa agreement (Saferworld, 2012). These were periods when cultural and traditional norms broke down leading to the erosion of control that the community historically had over young people, in addition to the development of culture of violence in which small arms became accepted method of dealing with conflict (Saferworld, 2012).

Based on the above background, Sudan was awash with arms before the country split into two. When South Sudan seceded in 2011, it was estimated that there were up to 3.2 million of small arms in circulation and two-third of these arms were believed to be in hands of civilians, (Small Arms Survey, 2014). Despite the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), insecurity remained existing in all parts and of South Sudan. Civilians continue to arm themselves and clash over resources. Relations among ethnic groups have been politicized, fracturing the diverse demographic landscape with mistrust and competition (O'Brien shot in Dark 2008). The numerous cases of armed conflict within the pastoralist zones, armed crimes in the urban centres of South Sudan point to availability of many illicit arms in wrong hands.

Rumbek and other parts of lakes state are hugely affected by insecurity that are usually caused by the wide spread of small arms. The impact includes among others frequent cattle raiding, revenge killings, robberies, communal conflicts as well as fighting over grazing land that are practiced by armed youths. The upsurge of these arms is a

great challenge to the government as it seeks to address increasing insecurity in the country. For example, according to the National Police Statistics (2013), crime figures reported nation-wide increased by 4,954cases which is 7% more compared to the statistic of 2012. In Rumbek alone, crime rate increased by 40% and proliferation of illegal arms was given as one of the factors that contributed to criminal behaviour leading to decrease in human security. This report is supported by the study conducted at Juba teaching Hospital (JTH) on injuries caused by illegal arms. In the two-year retrospective cross-Sectorial study, Odhiambo et al (2008) established that, there were 717cases of fire arm injury treated at the JTH in the period of January 2004 to December 2005. Four hundred twenty-one (421 or 58.7%) of these were admitted. In 2004, there were 6,300 assault cases recorded of which 6.7% used illegal arms. In 2005 reported assault cases went down by 51% but the use of illegal arms went up to 9.7%. This is a significant increase in one year whose trend could reach alarming levels. The broad objective of the study was to examine the factors that influence the Proliferation of Small Arms in Rumbek Central, Republic of South Sudan.

## 2. Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted to answer questions needed in investigating the problem studied. Guided interview and focus group discussion were used to collect data from a total of 96 respondents that were identified using purposive and simple random sampling techniques.

### *Study Area*

The study was conducted in Amongping and Malek Payam of Rumbek Centre County. Rumbek is one of the eight (08) Counties of Lakes state which is located approximately 377 kilometres (234 mi) by road northwest of Juba, the capital and largest city in the country. Its coordinates are 6.81°N and 29.68°E and its elevation is 420 metres (1,380 ft) above sea level with an estimated population of 153,550 (NBS, 2012 Web). The main economic activity of this area is pastoralism where the majority are pastoralists such as Dinka Agar, who are estimated to be 60%, Dinka Gok about 30% while Bongo and Jur Bel are made up of 6% and 4 % respectively. Formerly, cattle raiding between these communities were done by using spears where less death and injuries could be recorded but today with the use of small arms, there is higher level of injuries and death. Hence, such attacks give rise to revenge attacks, thus creating a vicious cycle of violence (Saferworld, 2012).

### *Methods of Data Collection*

The primary data were collected from the 96 respondents using interview guide and focus group discussion guide to address the problem. The study used face to face interview to collect data from household adults and community leaders. The interviews were administered by the research assistants trained on the principles of data management. Focus group discussion was used to collect data from Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and County security sector.

Secondary data were gathered from documents that talk about Proliferation of illegal Arms and its implication on security. These materials included text books, journals and other publications found in libraries, universities, government offices and internet.

### **Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were analysed separately in three main stages namely; data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing.

Qualitative data collected were summarized and coded. The coded data were filtered and organized in different thematic and further described through text and respondents' verbatim. Quantitative data collected were summarized in different thematic areas, coded, typed and analysed. The findings were presented through statistical graphs. Finally, conclusion of the findings was drawn following the relationships between variables identified, and consistency observed from the data analysed.

## **3. Results and Discussions**

Data were collected using interview guides and FGDs and analysed using Excel. The findings were presented in form of tables. The results from each of the themes drawn from the objective were interpreted.

### **Factors that influence the Proliferation of Small Arms**

The proliferation of small arms has been influenced by several factors. One of these factors is that, they are relatively cheap making them easy to be acquired by many people. For example, their prices can be compared to that of a chicken (UNICEF, 2007). They are portable and can be easily carried from one place to another even by children, it requires little training and any individual combatants who are given to use requires no assistant once shown where to start it off (UNDP, 2002). The above is further influenced by the porous boundaries with no fence or wall to separate the countries. For example, the porous border between South Sudan and the neighbouring countries like DRC, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda all have contributed immensely to the movement of small arms into the country.

Apart from the above, the inadequate security measures in many countries of Africa as well as weak institutions that are responsible for security have made the environment conducive for the arms to thrive (WCC, 2012). The manufacturers of arms want a ready market for their product which is normally got in this kind of situation. Jurgen Breauer and Robert Muggah (2006) argued that, the motivation for the acquisition of small arms is partly constructed and imbedded in various social practices and cultural forms. These include the economic, political, social and geographical factors.

### **Economic factors**

The main economic activity of the people in Rumbek is livestock keeping. Since security among the pastoralists is the responsibility of every community member, most of them acquired small arms to protect their cattle. From the findings, majority (58%) of the household adults interviewed revealed that, they acquired small arms to protect their

resources including the cattle which is their main economic activities due to lack of protection from the government. Ten (10) of the household heads interviewed in Among piny Payam said that, they acquired small arms to protect their cattle since the government forces lack access roads to reach their areas. Other economic demands mentioned include unemployment forcing the youth to loot the property of other communities. Soldiers with economic problem sell guns to address their economic problem although it is prohibited by law. It was revealed that, small arms become commodity to trade for across the border by arms dealers normally from Unity or western Equatoria state. This is in line with the finding of Wepundi et al (2012) which argued that, there is a close inter-relationship between insecurity and increased desire for firearms ownership for protection purposes. The study also found out that, the acquisition of firearms by civilian in Rumbek is linked to the perceived need of protection. Therefore, where there exist political, social or economic issues, the demand for small arms always increases as shown in Table one below.

**Table 1:** Economic factors that influence proliferation of small arms

	Frequency	Percent
Protection	46	58%
To loot property of other people	19	24%
To conduct road ambushes and robberies	03	4%
Sold by soldiers with economic problem	02	3%
Sold by arm dealers	02	3%
Unemployment	02	3%

### **Political factors**

During the first and second civil war era in Sudan from 1956 onward, there was a deliberate distribution of small arms and light weapons to non-state actors and local militia, tribal group and civilians by both parties. Arms proliferation continued even after the signing of 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with conventional weapons imports and cross-border trafficking. More arms circulated during the recent political crisis of 2013 and 2016. With a weak security sector where most lack professional competence, security vacuums were created that gave opportunity for the criminals or gangs to cause insecurity in the country. Therefore, with lack of adequate protection in areas settled by pastoralist, arming themselves was the only option to the citizens of Rumbek central. The reports of 1999 UN Panel of Experts (1999) says that, when a state loses control over its security function and fails to maintain the security of its citizens, the subsequent growth of armed violence, bandit, and organized crimes increase the demand for weapons by citizens seeking to protect themselves and their property. This is in line with the finding of the study where, 75% of the households interviewed said that, they acquired small arms to protect themselves due to the failure of the government to crackdown criminals who normally attack and killed the innocent people. The law enforcement agencies have failed to deal with the criminals causing insecurity deep in villages and cattle camps, said some of the households interviewed. Thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents revealed that, the proliferation is due to lack of arms control by the state government. The state government has failed to put measures against the acquisition and misuse of small arms. According to South Sudan Firearms Act



(2016), the private ownership and use of small arms are subject to licence that is valid for a period of one year. It is limited to people over 45 years of age and with no criminal record. However, in Rumbek Central, this act is yet to be implemented since many people including those under 18 years are still possessing small arms deep in villages and cattle camps. Six percent (6%) of the respondents said that, some people especially the youth acquired small arms due to the insecurity caused by the recent political crisis in the country. Refer to Table 2 below;

**Table 2:** Political factors that influence proliferation of small arms

	Frequency	Percent
To protect themselves	60	75%
Lack of arms control	10	13%
Political instability	4	6%

### *Social and Cultural factors*

From the finding of the study, 53% of the household heads revealed that, they acquired small arms to revenge against their dear ones killed by other community members. They further said that, revenge killings happened when the law had failed to take its course. Lack of justice makes the family of those killed to take the law into their hands. Forty one percent (41%) of them said that, they acquired small arms to raid the cattle of other communities. Twenty three percent (23%) said that, they acquired small arms to conduct a communal fighting which normally occurs in form of land disputes, girl elopement, revenge attack. Eighteen percent (18%) revealed that, they acquired small arms to fight over the grazing land. Four percent (4%) said that, most of the youth acquired small arms because of being modern. The finding is in line with Wepundi et al (2012) which says that, where there exist political, social or economic issues, the desire for possession of illegal arms rises which in turn leads to increased insecurity, crime, violence and death. Socially, the pastoralist community see gun ownership as a symbol of power and pride. Among the pastoralists, security is the responsibility of all the members. The role of communal security is to protect the community from inter-clan conflicts, revenge killing, and fight over grazing land, water resources including the use and ownership. These became the drivers of demands for small arms in many pastoralist areas in South Sudan and Rumbek in particular as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 3:** Social and Cultural factors that influence the proliferation of small arms

	Frequency	Percent
Revenge Killing	42	53%
Cattle rustling	33	41%
Communal fight	18	23%
Fight over grazing land	14	18%
Pride of having advance weapon	03	4%

### *Geographical factors*

From the findings of the study, 8% of the households interviewed said that, they acquired small arms due to the frequent attacks from Panyajar community of Unity state. They revealed that, the above community normally crosses the border and attack them in Amongping Payam of Rumbek Central. A member of the household adults interviewed revealed that, they acquired small arms to protect themselves

since it is difficult for the security forces to reach their areas deep in village due to lack of accessibility. Five percent (5%) of them said that, arms are traded across the porous border by arms dealers coming from Unity and Western Equatoria State.

The geographical factors such as terrains, borders and the distribution of people also play an important role in proliferation of small arms in South Sudan and Rumbek in particular. Refer to Table 3 below.

**Table 4:** Geographical factors that influence the proliferation of small arms

	Frequency	Percent
Fear from cross border attacks	06	8%
Cross border arm dealers	04	5%

## 4. Conclusion

The proliferation of small arms remains a challenge to the security management of Rumbek Central. The presence of these arms led to insecurity that affected the free movement of people and goods from one location to another. Education was also affected since parents fear to send their children to school due to the insecurity. This further led to increase rate of crimes that were associated with rampant killings, road ambushes, armed raiding, fighting over grazing land, raping of women and girls. This paper concludes that, although there were measures put forward by the state government to address the above problem, there was still insecurity of cattle theft experienced in remote areas, cattle camps and areas along the border with Unity state.

## 5. Recommendations

The study found that, the need for protection by the citizen of Rumbek constituted majority of the factors influencing the proliferation of small arms. The proliferation of these arms led to insecurity and increased criminal activities such as rampant killing, road ambushes, cattle rustling, raping of women and girls. Although there were measures put in place by the state government to improve the security of Rumbek central, there was still insecurity of cattle theft experienced in remote areas, cattle camps and areas along the border with Unity. The study therefore recommends for deployment of more security forces in the above areas experiencing security gaps to protect the people and their property.

Regarding the cattle camp youth that were not disarmed due to lack of mobility, the study recommends construction of feeder roads to connect the remote areas with the town for easy accessibility by the security forces.

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