

Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation – Global Youth Fellowship

Fellowship Summary for Christina Yeung September 22, 2008

Policy Issue of Investigation

Contrary to popular belief, violent deaths in non-conflict settings, estimated at 490,000 a year, amount to double the number of those dying directly or indirectly as a result of armed conflict, according to a recent report published by the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey. The consequences of armed violence that is not war-related also imposes huge economic costs and holds back development, costing up to \$160bn annually in lost productivity for developing nations, amounting to nearly 1 per cent of GDP of Lesser Developed Countries.

In response to the growing awareness of the destabilizing and detrimental effects of armed violence on development, international and national actors have implemented a variety of initiatives including weapons collection programs. In pastoralist areas of North-eastern Uganda, the national government, at times with the support of the international community, has unsuccessfully attempted disarmament multiple times in recent years. Failed attempts to disarmament the pastoralists of their small arms have exacerbated state-society relations, and have worsened the security of both individuals and communities, resulting occasionally in serious human rights abuses. There has also been no demonstrable positive effect on development in the region, contrary to conventional wisdom.

My fellowship project sought to explore alternatives to the disarmament of communities in Karamoja, Uganda, based on the communities' needs and priorities. The aim was to provide policy-relevant findings to Ugandan and international development policy planners (hopefully with positive implications for other pastoralist communities in East Africa); and to bring these findings back to the local communities to encourage empowerment and ownership of strategies for reducing armed violence within their communities.

Summary of Activities

Throughout the year I have been involved in a variety of research and advocacy activities:

- Updated my knowledge of the case study and the debate on small arms/armed violence reduction, through press scans, reports by donor governments, international agencies, and NGOs.
- Gave a presentation at a workshop on "Gender, Armed Violence and Sustainable Development" to the Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group and Small Arms Working Group of Peacebuild, the Canadian coalition of peacebuilding NGOs, November 2007.
- Consulted as an issue expert for the report: 'Emerging Issues: Youth, Gender, and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict', published by Peacebuild, March 2008.
- Field research trip to the United Nations, NYC, March 2008.

- Authored a policy paper entitled: 'Armed Violence Reduction and Development Programming: The Canadian Experience and Status', published by Peacebuild, April 2008.
- Presented at a civil society consultation meeting with DFAIT and CIDA, on the National Committee Report for the Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on the 'Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects', 22 April 2008.
- Conducted one month of field research in Nairobi, Kenya and Uganda, July 2008.
- Conducted interviews in London, UK, and Paris, France, July-August 2008.

Summary of Key Findings

I began this project with a variety of ideas, largely from my PhD research, about possible policy alternatives to disarmament to discuss with the local communities in Karamoja. These included: arms control, community-based security initiatives (vigilantes, militias), alternative livelihoods projects for gun users, etc. However, over the course of the fellowship the human security conditions in North-eastern Uganda degraded significantly due to a growing situation of famine, and increasing armed conflict between Ugandan government forces and Karamojong warriors. This changed the policy context for me as it seemed inappropriate to talk simply about development initiatives in the face of severe food insecurity and almost war-like conditions between the government and pastoralist communities.

From my field research, I learned and observed that relations between the government and local communities had deteriorated due: to the inability of the government to relieve the humanitarian crisis of a growing famine; the involvement of government forces in a variety of illegal activities (e.g. human rights abuses, large scale expropriation of cattle, sale of weapons and ammunition from government stockpiles, etc.); the lack of public consultations with affected communities; and the increasingly coercive nature of the disarmament programme led by the army.

Influenced by what I heard during my field research and a book on 'The Politics of Collective Violence' by Charles Tilly, I felt it was necessary to reconceptualise the challenges of armed violence in Karamoja. I believe the issue of gun violence in the region and the possible 'policy solutions' should not be framed as ideational (e.g. 'pastoralism is not conducive to modern socio-economic development') or behavioural (e.g. addressing the demand-side of gun use), but rather *relational*. Under the colonial and post-colonial regimes, pastoralist regions in the Northeast have increasingly become isolated from the rest of Uganda. There is little civic awareness amongst the pastoralists that they belong to the Ugandan nation, are subject to the laws of the land like other non-pastoralist communities, and should benefit from the protection and service of their government. The policymakers in Kampala, on the other hand, increasingly see Karamoja as a problem area to be contained and pacified, to avoid contagion into other parts of the country.

In essence, the Karamojong need to develop a sense of 'citizenship', to learn their accompanying rights and responsibilities as citizens of the Republic of Uganda. On the other hand, the Uganda

government could encourage a sense of civic duty amongst the pastoralists, through confidence-building measures, which would also address armed violence in the region, these could include: increased service delivery; food for work programmes; community policing initiatives; reducing the governance role of the army in the region (and generally maintaining their discipline); increasing the capabilities of an impartial judiciary, etc. Other projects, to control the use of weapons and to increase community security, could also be attempted; however, without a paradigm shift in thinking amongst both the pastoralists and their central government, these initiatives and disarmament attempts will be unsustainable and will continue to aggravate deteriorating relations between the state and local communities, and the Karamojong and their neighbours.

Possible Follow-ups

An important focus of my project was the participatory nature of the research. I wanted to learn more about what kinds of solutions the communities in Karamoja proposed for their region. So a great deal of my efforts now will be to share the findings of the final report with the local communities in North-eastern Uganda, and disseminate the lessons learned amongst policymakers, NGOs and donors who are involved in disarmament and development in that region. This will certainly involve another trip to Uganda (Karamoja and Kampala). I could write an op-ed piece in a Ugandan or regional newspaper on my findings and policy alternatives for armed violence reduction programming in Karamoja, but this will likely have to be cleared of a conflict of interest with my new employer.

Another potential venue for the dissemination of my report would be a sponsored, sidebar workshop during the sessions of the United Nations First Committee on Disarmament and International Security. This is a possibility that I have discussed with my mentor, Amb. Peggy Mason. It is likely that such an event could coincide with debates on the proposed UN General Assembly resolution on "Armed Violence and Development" in December 2008. There are also a variety of other regional events planned, related to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, and the development of OECD-DAC Guidelines on Armed Violence Reduction.

Closer to home, this year (2008-2009) I am a Visiting Fellow at the University of Ottawa's Centre for International Policy Studies. I will be presenting my Gordon Foundation fellowship findings over the course of the year at a research seminar.