

Small Arms Survey

Perceptions of Small Arms Availability and Use Among Oxfam-GB Field Personnel

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Oxfam

A joint collaboration
of the Small Arms Survey
and Oxfam

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

This article synthesises the responses of a questionnaire entitled “Oxfam-GB Questionnaire on Arms Availability and Humanitarian and Development Impacts” that was administered in over twenty countries where Oxfam-GB is operating. It was conducted in order to raise awareness of and policy responses to the threat of small arms. The questionnaire finds its antecedent in an ICRC survey conducted with experienced delegates returning to headquarters in 1999. Apart from the following report and the seminal work of the ICRC, to the author’s knowledge there have been no analogous surveys conducted on field staff “perceptions” of insecurity. The only other (qualitative) assessment of humanitarian personnel experiences encountered by the author include a study entitled “Safety and Security of UN Personnel” submitted to the UN Secretary General in 2000, the work of the International Council of the Voluntary Agencies and the World Food Program and an article in the *British Medical Journal* entitled “Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers” written in 2000 by Sheik, Gutierrez, Bolton, Spiegel, Thierren and Burnham. None of these studies focus exclusively on small arms and light weapons. The following exercise, then, is a theoretically and practically relevant contribution to the debate on the humanitarian impacts of small arms. It is the first of a series of similar reports that will be produced by the Small Arms Survey.

Findings

Between December 2000 and February 2001, 94 Oxfam-GB staff-members responded to survey-questionnaires that were directly administered from Oxford. A large majority of the respondents claimed to be working in war-torn countries, with over sixty per cent describing the area where they worked as “severely affected by systemic violence”. Primary weapons users consisted of governments, guerrilla and militia groups and organised criminal gangs. Importantly, over 50 per cent of respondents believed that civilians owned and used small arms and 95 per cent claimed to have seen groups in possession of both handguns and military-style assault rifles. The Kalashnikov and the common revolver were identified as the largest contributors to death and injury among civilians.

There appears to be a growing awareness among field workers of the insecurity generated by small arms - whether in terms of reducing their own personal mobility or reversing development interventions in the field. Small arms are viewed as ubiquitous and are believed to increase the exposure of both civilians and agency personnel to death and injury. More than 80 per cent of respondents believe that a relationship exists between small arms availability and violations of international humanitarian law. Over 75 per cent of all respondents were aware of incidents where civilians had been deliberately attacked with small arms. Furthermore, 40 per cent of all respondents have themselves experienced a “security incident” involving a small arm: a combination of non-fatal injuries, armed intimidation, banditry and kidnapping at gunpoint. Oxfam-GB’s explicit policy not to enlist private or commercial security in the field resonates with many of the field workers own thoughts on the issue: more than 50 per cent believe that private security guards do not contribute to their overall security.

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I. Respondent Profiles

Number: Of the hundreds of questionnaires sent out to the field, approximately 94 respondents submitted completed forms by email and post. Another three respondents did not provide sufficient information to allow for inclusion. Local Oxfam-GB staff completed the majority of “respondent forms” - although a small number of expatriate staff (10 per cent) also submitted responses.

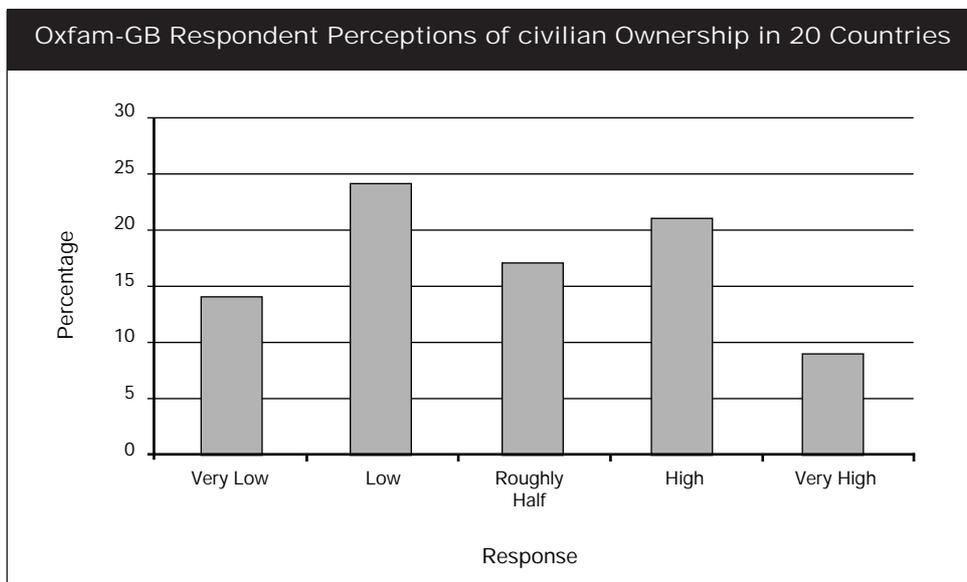
Demographics: Among respondents, experience with Oxfam-GB and humanitarian or development work varied from between one month and 22 years. The mean **duration of employment with Oxfam-GB in the field was two years** - with the average at approximately 2.78 years of service. The average amount of work experience that staff had in the humanitarian and development sector was relatively high - approximately 6.3 years. Almost 70 per cent of all respondents were men. Over **twenty countries** were represented in the respondent submissions - with the bulk of responses returned from Sierra Leone, Uganda, Burundi, Sudan, the Philippines and Afghanistan. By region, responses were received from: (1) **Asia** (East Timor, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Nepal), (2) **Eastern Europe** (Georgia and Albania) and **Africa** (South Africa, Zambia, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Sudan and Sierra Leone).

Country situations: Respondees were working in **predominantly conflict-affected countries**, though Oxfam-GB employees from many post-conflict affected societies also submitted a questionnaire. Some of the countries described by the respondents fell out of conventional classifications included in the questionnaire (e.g. pre-conflict, conflict, post-conflict) and were therefore described as having “no classification”. Importantly, almost **65 per cent countries were regarded as being severely affected by systemic violence**. Approximately 20 per cent of the countries were described as being moderately affected by social and criminal violence. Respondents from Zambia and Thailand believed that the societies in which they operated were less affected (5 per cent), or, alternatively, did not mark an answer to the question (5 per cent).

II. Small Arms availability in the Field

Groups believed to be holding weapons: In a recent publication of the *Small Arms Survey* (2001), it is reported that the vast majority of small arms in the world today are held either by governments, including military and policing institutions, or private owners - including

civilians. Less than one per cent is believed to be in the hands of guerrilla or insurgent groups. Evidence of the breakdown of weapons holders is partially borne out in the responses of Oxfam-GB staff. According to all of the respondents, **military, guerrilla and militia groups** were believed to be primary owners and users of weapons. In addition, **organised criminal groups** were perceived to be key users in over 65 per cent of all responses. Perhaps more surprising, **civilians were identified as key owners and users** in more than half of the respondents' questionnaires. Other groups identified as key users included: common criminals, children, pastoralists, civil defence groups, political parties, religious associations and hunters. It should be stressed here that each category, whether military, guerrilla, militia, civilian, criminal or otherwise, is not exclusive, and that respondents frequently identified several categories of "weapons users".



Weapons believed to be held by civil society: As noted above, a surprisingly high proportion of small arms are believed to be in the hands of civilians (whether in conflict or post-conflict situations) according to Oxfam-GB staff. Questions were asked regarding the extent to which staff perceived civilians to be in possession of small arms in a given society or situation.¹ A breakdown of findings demonstrates the following trends: 14 per cent of respondents had a *very low* perception of civilian ownership and 25 per cent a *low* perception. This suggests that fewer than 40 per cent of Oxfam-GB respondents did not articulate an urgent concern with regards to the extent of small arms ownership among civilians. A further 18 per cent believed that *roughly half* of all civilians possessed small arms. Finally,

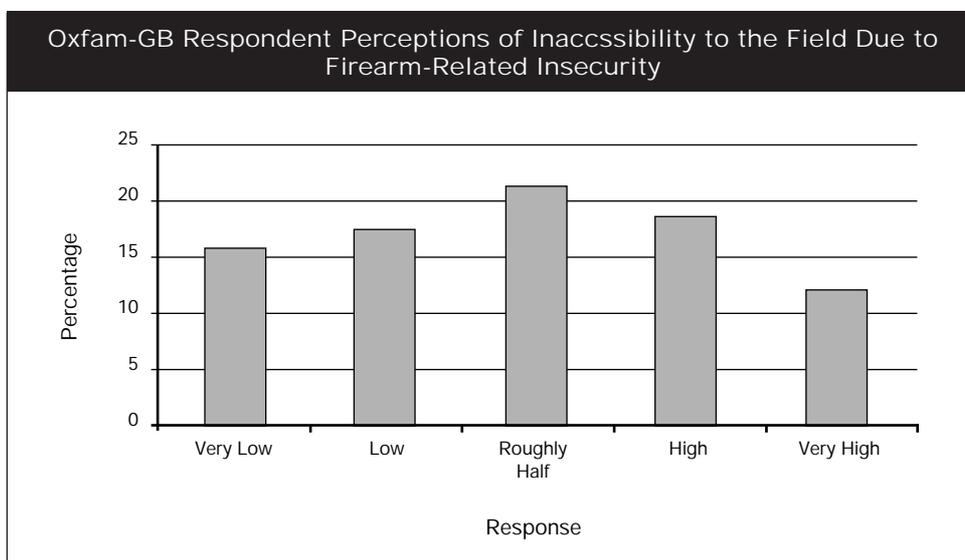
around 22 per cent believed that a *high* proportion of civilians were in possession of small arms and an additional 19 per cent felt that the civilian ownership rates were *very high*. In other words, **almost half of responding Oxfam-GB were concerned with the high degree of civilian possession of small arms.**

Types of weapons held and ammunition: A particularly disturbing finding of the questionnaire is that **over 95 per cent of all respondents said that they had themselves seen groups in possession of both handguns and automatic rifles.** The most common weapon type reported to be held by military groups, guerrilla factions, militia, criminal organisations and civilians alike was the military-style assault rifle. Many respondents also emphasised the prevalence of handguns among criminal groups and civilians. The perceived impacts of these weapons are discussed in the following sections. According to Oxfam-GB respondents, **over 90 per cent of all ammunition is believed to be imported** into the country in which they are working. In addition to being imported, a small minority of respondents noted that ammunition was also manufactured domestically. Homemade guns, where perceived to be used are obviously produced in affected countries themselves.

III. Effects of Small Arms on Oxfam-GB operations

Interruptions of Oxfam Work: Reports generated by Oxfam-GB in the DRC (2001a) the Philippines (2001b) and Uganda (2001c) vividly illustrate a number of ways that small arms are negatively affecting the well-being and livelihoods of civilians. They also allude to the impacts such weapons have on Oxfam-GB operations themselves. Although only a few reports have attempted to appraise the vulnerability of humanitarian and development personnel to insecurity more generally, the overall impression is that an increasing number of aid-workers are killed or injured in acts of violence (Muggah & Berman, 2001; Van Brabant, 2000; Sheik et al, 2000).

A growing number of Oxfam-GB staff are also clearly concerned with the constraints that small arms availability and use impose on their day-to-day operations. According to one respondent in the Philippines, “armed groups affect fieldwork if they were [sic] encountered - or even presence - at checkpoints ... near the site ... or mid-way on hi-way [sic] going to operational sites”. According to a respondent in Burundi: “l’augmentation des morts innocents ne facilite pas la tâche de ceux qui travaillent dans ce système. C’est très difficile de travailler quelque part où les balles tombent n’importe comment, tirées par n’importe qui dans n’importe quelles conditions”.



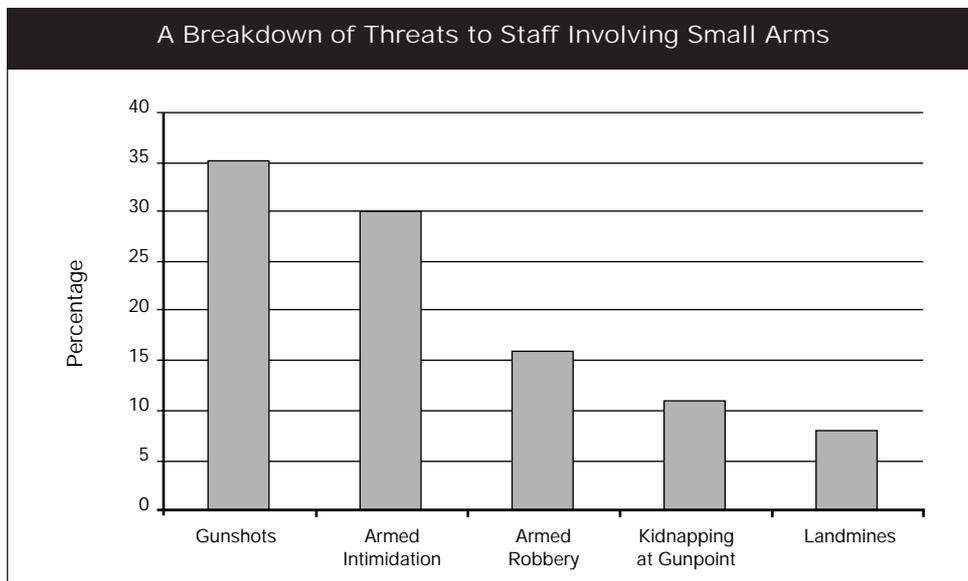
Virtually all respondents claimed to be facing a related security challenge with respect to small arms - though one respondent noted a number of perverse “positive” implications in addition to those already highlighted above. He noted that, if nothing else, a prevailing climate of fear has spurred on a growing interest in security threat and risk assessments – and that these measures might improve the security of staff in the field. It is worth quoting the respondent from Sierra Leone at length: “arms have got both positive and negative impacts in my developmental and humanitarian sphere. *Negative:* the closure of PLAN International operations in Northern SL that was servicing over 25,000 beneficiaries in health education, agriculture and livelihood. The closure of Action Contre La Faim Operations in Northern SL [Sierra Leone], servicing 20 per cent of its pop [sic] in the area of malnutrition and 12,000 farm families in agriculture. *Positive:* Gain wider knowledge in security situation (and) Human Resource Development [sic] for Information Systems to Administer and currently as Log Co-ordinator” (italics added).

Subject to Attack with Small Arms: A troubling trend that affects the entire spectrum of humanitarian and development agencies involved in complex emergencies is the increasing vulnerability of personnel to attack. The widespread availability of small arms in the hands of untrained and trained soldiers, criminal groups and key interest groups has made this phenomenon increasingly likely.² The questionnaire revealed that over **40 per cent of all respondents experienced a security incident involving small arms** - ranging from a physical firearm injury to armed intimidation, armed robbery and kidnapping at gun-point. This is an acutely alarming statistic. One staff member from Uganda claimed to have been

the victim of a gunshot wound and subject to armed intimidation, armed robbery, kidnapping, and landmines in less than two years of service. The chart below indicates the type of attacks that took place among respondents while working with Oxfam-GB. Following a review of the data, the most dangerous places for responding Oxfam-GB staff were Afghanistan, where 80 per cent of all respondents experienced an incident involving firearms, followed by Sri Lanka (65 per cent of staff exposed to a “security incident”), Sierra Leone (48 per cent), Sudan (45 per cent) and Uganda.

Relationship between IHL and small arms availability: An important consideration for the designers of the questionnaire was whether there was a perceived relationship between IHL and small arms availability and use. An assumption of the questionnaire designers, however, relates to the extent to which personnel fully appreciate the intricacies of IHL to begin with. Whether the Geneva Conventions and the Protocol are fully known or not,³ **approximately 80 per cent of Oxfam-GB staff surveyed believe that a relationship exists between small arms availability in the field and violations of IHL and human rights.** Of particular importance, a small minority believed that there was no positive association - noting that small arms either do not in themselves contribute to violations, or that such a relationship does not exist.

Small Arms and Development: As expected, well over 90 per cent of all Oxfam-GB staff agreed that arms availability, whether assault rifles, handguns, landmines or mortars,



contribute to insecurity in their day-to-day operations. But respondents repeatedly noted the impacts of small arms in relation to both their development work and their relative capacity and opportunity to intervene on behalf of vulnerable groups in the field. According to one particularly experienced respondent from Sierra Leone: “I worked in a development project for 12 years and that project closed down during the peak of the war”. Another respondent stated that: “the armed conflict in Sierra Leone ... has thrown spanners into the wheel of all development programming in the country ... most of the economically productive areas are yet inaccessible for development interventions”. While it is generally acknowledged that small arms availability has grave implications for humanitarian relief and assistance, there are more sinister implications for long-term and sustainable human development. Recognising, responding to and reporting these impacts should be a growing priority for humanitarian and development organisations.

Do Armed Guards Contribute to Security in the Field: As a result of, *inter alia*, the impunity with which perpetrators of violence can act; the perception of agencies as wealthy or soft targets; the manipulation of aid and; a rise in criminal banditry made possible by small arms availability the humanitarian and development community have increasingly sought to protect their staff and operations (Van Brabant, 2000). Protection here refers to the reduction of risk through procedures and protective devices such erecting physical barriers, enacting gun-free zones and curfews. Where strategies to negotiate with armed actors are unlikely and protection is insufficient, agencies have hired armed and unarmed private security companies as a form of deterrence.

Increasing attention has been devoted to how the militarisation of humanitarian action leads to the militarisation of the “humanitarian space” available to agencies. Practitioners have studied how increasing private security, designed ostensibly to ensure protection of staff and beneficiaries, has counter-intuitive effects. Others have pointed to the deep-rooted anti-military and anti-weapons bias that persists among relief organisations and their acceptance of weapons as a necessary evil for reaching their goals in unsafe environments (Winslow, 2000; Dworken, 1998). The debate is emotive - and strikes at the roots of the humanitarian objectives of “impartiality” - as an armed presence often escalates tensions between vested interests in the field and the NGO presence.

Oxfam-GB policy is that they do not hire armed personnel under any circumstances, except with the permission of senior management. Oxfam-GB’s conscious decision not to engage armed actors is tacitly supported by the responses received. **Less than one quarter of Oxfam-GB respondents noted that they used armed security at either their office, during transportation of goods to and from the field or in their private residence.**⁴ Importantly, there appears to be common belief that “guns draw gunfire” and should be

avoided. **More than half of all respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion that private security or armed guards⁵ significantly contribute to their personal security.** Nevertheless, a small proportion of Oxfam-GB respondents note that some form of private security could potentially contribute to their personal security. Some five per cent believe that there is no discernable benefit or impact from having private security on the premises.

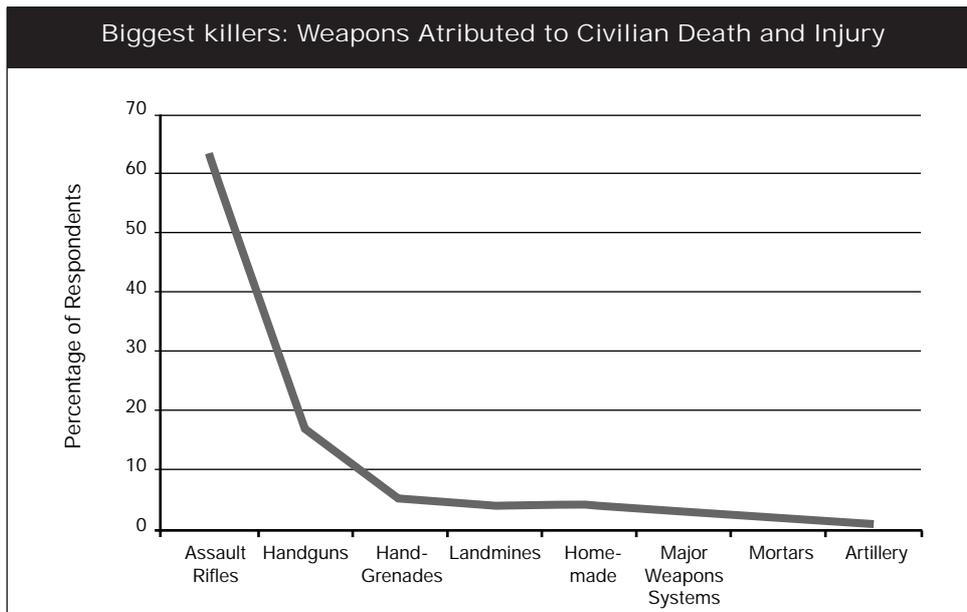
That said, the very real threat of small arms use remains - and is felt intensely by some staff in the field. In the view of one respondent from Uganda "More and more I am frightened to travel to the field. By air we go - small aircrafts ... by road, the risk of death and rape is very high. The worries before and during travel I am sure will leave a permanent impact on my health - long after I have left Oxfam-GB ... I have lost relatives ... I cannot cope any more".

IV. Effects of Small Arms on the Civilian Population

Most frequent weapon attributed to civilian death: There is a growing appreciation of the varied impacts of certain types of weapons and weapons systems on civilian populations (Muggah & Berman, 2001; ICRC, 1999; Michaels et al, 1998). The AKM series (e.g. AK-47, AK-74) are perceived as the biggest killers in past and on-going internal conflicts in Africa - though .38 and 9mm pistols and revolvers are seen as chiefly responsible for deaths in crime and low-level violence in Latin America and throughout South East Asia. Though some overlap exists, it appears that these views are borne out in the field. As the chart illustrates, **more than 60 per cent of respondents believed that assault rifles and automatic weapons induced the most casualties among civilian victims.** Slightly more than 15 per cent of respondents believed handguns to be chiefly responsible for deaths and injuries among civilians. Others perceived hand-grenades, landmines, homemade weapons, mortars and artillery to be chiefly responsible for civilian mortality. Some caution should be applied when considering these statistics - as there was a concentration of respondents in countries such as Uganda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan - where conflicts allow military-style weapons to pass between civilians.

Percentage of respondents aware of incidents where civilians were targeted: A disconcerting finding relates to the awareness among Oxfam-GB staff to gross violations of human rights of civilians involving small arms. Traditionally, development actors were reluctant to report these kinds of activities for fear of jeopardising their operations in the field, or extending themselves beyond their mandate. These are vital and salient concerns. But the humanitarian landscape is also changing - a reflection of more overtly political

agendas - and a growing range of actors are finding ways to transmit their concerns to organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty and International Alert (IA) - agencies that are better equipped to sound alarm bells.



According to findings generated by the questionnaire, **more than three quarters of all respondents were aware of situations where innocent civilians were being targeted with assault rifles**. Less than 20 per cent believed that such activities were not transpiring. Over eighty per cent of all respondents recognised that civilians were caught in the crossfire, or being indiscriminately targeted with assault rifles, while a small number of respondents believed this was not taking place. One respondent in Albania noted “it is estimated that about 10,000 people have been killed in Albania since 1997 when the population stormed and looted the military armoury ... This, in a country of approximately 3.5 million people”.

V. Discussion

This final section is designed to raise vital **questions and concerns** relating to the questionnaire, in order to begin thinking about operational recommendations. It is intended to begin thinking critically about how to improve the questionnaire itself, in light of plans to extend its coverage to other agencies and in other regions. Before reviewing specific findings, it is worth reviewing a number of general trends. First, the questionnaire responses reinforced the widespread belief that **small arms are ubiquitous** in areas where Oxfam-GB is active, and that assault rifles and handguns are commonly the principal cause of **death or injury to civilians** in the field. Second, Oxfam-GB operations and personnel are frequently **exposed to serious threats** as a result of firearms availability in conflict, post-conflict and violence-affected societies - resulting, in some cases, in the temporary **suspension of activities**. Finally, a large proportion of respondents believed there to be a **relationship between IHL and small arms availability**. With these general findings in mind, it is worth reviewing, in detail, a number of more case-specific conclusions.

At the outset, there needs to be a clear recognition of the **limitations inherent in the findings** highlighted in previous sections. None of the Oxfam-GB respondents are weapons experts nor are the respondents themselves necessarily drawn from a representative sample. Indeed, there are clearly more (clusters of) respondents from particularly affected region (or regions) than others. The unbalanced number of respondents from Uganda, Burundi, Sierra Leone and the Philippines, suggest that the sample is biased toward “complex emergencies” and/or societies emerging from or experiencing all-out conflict. Still, the framing of the questions and the varied nature of the respondents suggest an unbiased and unambiguous profile of the kinds of problems encountered by Oxfam-GB staff in the field.

Related to the concerns over limitations, it should also be noted that some staff had only recently arrived – and had therefore not witnessed the closure or suspension of Oxfam-GB offices or operations. They also may not have been subjected to limitations or restrictions on their movements - even where other personnel at the very same office may have witnessed repeated closures and obstructions – sometimes on a monthly or weekly basis. This suggests that **information may need to be better transferred among personnel in the field**, and the need for training and **awareness raising** among all staff. More importantly, recent findings from the aforementioned Sheik *et al* (2000) study, note that humanitarian workers are more likely to be killed in the first three to four months of their arrival - and that constructive training and intervention programmes to sensitise workers to the risks of small arms and light weapons (including landmines) can reduce these associated risks.

Related, another finding that is instructive from an allegorical point of view relates to “celebratory shooting”. Women sometimes noted the occurrence of celebration shooting even when men (who were often based at the same office and for the same approximate time) did not. In other cases, respondents who came from the same locality as the Oxfam-GB operation frequently noted celebratory shooting while other expatriate staff did not. It is unknown why this is the case, and such findings clearly require further exploration. One could speculate that this has to do with, among other things, a more intimate knowledge of the situation and to definitional issues of “celebratory shooting”.⁶ Some respondents have noted that celebration shooting occurs during Independence Day, Heroes Day, funerals and where there are army officers. Others noted military forces, returning soldiers and Islamic festivals or, on the other hand, in non-government occupied areas. In terms of constructive intervention (e.g. lowering risks of staff to injury), taking note of these events and mitigating against associated risks may constitute an “early warning” indicator - and this has been taken up in other fora (Van Brabant, 2000).

Of particular concern, then, are the **discrepancies between observations of respondents** that work in the same country or country-office. Building on the example of celebratory shooting, there are two other areas that bare further consideration. First, there were many instances where Oxfam-GB staff was unaware of people being directly or indirectly targeted by firearms, grenades, mortars, artillery, etc. These respondents were not informed of such occurrences even when others in the same country office responded affirmatively to the questions relating to the targeting of innocent civilians, increasing security risks and violations of IHL in said country. Second, with respect to more factual questions regarding ammunition production, there were many respondents, particularly in Uganda and Sudan, who were unaware that munitions were being simultaneously imported *and* produced in Uganda and Sudan, though others on the same team acknowledged the possibility. While knowledge of this latter point is hardly essential in the context of providing humanitarian or development assistance, it does illustrate the disparities of information-transfer at the field level.

Another critical finding relates to relative perceptions or **thresholds of personal insecurity**. Much has been written in the humanitarian literature of the “risk-taking” behaviour and “moral hazard” of staff that are repeatedly exposed to armed threats in the field. Indicators of these effects relate to increased risky conduct such as drug and alcohol consumption, unprotected sexual activity and other more dangerous activity during missions (Bracken & Petty, 1998). On the other hand, there has been little attention to how humanitarian workers differentially experience insecurity. To take one example, some staff that responded to the questionnaire claimed that they had not “experienced a serious incident involving firearms”. Yet these very same respondents also marked that they were fired at or were

in the vicinity when arms were used. This could be attributed to confusion associated with the wording of the survey-questionnaire, though might also suggest that various staff did not necessarily consider the incident to represent direct threat or risk - and perhaps part of the otherwise “ordinary” business of assisting populations in need.

A final finding relates to **private security**. As mentioned in previous sections, Oxfam-GB has decided not to engage private security unless absolutely necessary to administer critical activities (such as transportation of relief goods to and from the field). Although more than half of all respondents felt that private security diminishes their personal security in the field; there are others who strongly feel that private security guards would improve security conditions even where there are currently none present in the field (e.g. most respondents in Burundi). On the other hand, there are some staff members with (unarmed) guards at the site who do not feel that private security increases their physical security. These observations suggest that either further work needs to be carried out in terms of awareness raising on what constitutes private security, why security is or is not provided and alternative approaches to ensuring safety.

Endnotes

- 1 Of note, 8 respondents did not answer question 8 (see Appendix 2).
- 2 A recent study commissioned by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Muggah and Berman, 2001), concluded that the firearm homicide rate for UN civilian staff was between 17 and 25 per 100,000. This rate is analogous to those experienced by civilians in the top ten most dangerous countries in the world.
- 3 Relevant Conventions are the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *Genocide Convention* (1948), the first *Geneva Convention* (1949) and *Additional Protocols* (1977).
- 4 According to one observer, however, the respondents interpretation of question 20, “does your Oxfam-GB office require armed guards in any areas where you operate” could be distorted by the wording of the survey. In this regard, respondents may have believed that the question implied “would you like armed guards”, rather than “do you use armed guards” (see Appendix 2).
- 5 Private security is here used to describe commercial security companies, who provide Oxfam-GB and other humanitarian agencies with unarmed guards for security of offices and residences. The meaning of the term, however, may differ among respondents. At a recent meeting on “the politicisation of humanitarian action and staff security: the use of private security companies”, there was considerable confusion and little agreement over the appropriate terminology. Comments from Heather Hughes, May 2001.
- 6 A definition of “celebration shooting” was provided in the questionnaire and reads: “Celebration shooting implies the firing of rifles into the air and occurs during or following weddings, political rallies and festivals or parties”.
- 7 Valuable advice and support were provided by Ed Laurance and Bill Godnick of the MIIS.
- 8 Approximately 207 of 3948 fields were marked “unknown” or five per cent of the total number of responses.

Appendix 1. Preparation and Implementation: Methodological Issues

Content: The questionnaire is eight pages in total - subdivided into six sections: (i) **Respondent Information** (e.g. name, years of service, nationality, country described, etc); (ii) **Weapons Availability** (e.g. description of country situation, military groups in action, types of weapons used, frequency of civilian death, origin of ammunition, etc); (iii) **Effects of Weapons on Oxfam-GB Operations** (e.g. areas that were rendered inaccessible, suspended operations, personal involvement in and type of security incidents, etc); (iv) **Effects of Weapons on Civilian Population** (e.g. handguns, automatic rifles, hand grenades, landmines, mortars, artillery, targeting of civilians, perceived relationships between availability and small arms), (v) **Oxfam-GB Security** (e.g. private security, safety and armed guards, etc) and (vi) **Your View** (e.g. optional contributions).

Format: The **design and structure** of the self-administered questionnaire was perceived by respondents to be constructive and user-friendly. Importantly, it generated interest and enthusiasm from those who submitted responses. From a purely logistical point of view - gains could be made in improving the readability and facility of the survey questionnaire by adding the suggestion in the opening preamble "please write directly on the form - whether inputting directly on a word processor, or manually marking responses". In terms of analysis and inputting, there may be a need to standardise the questions so that a *number value* can be more easily assigned for each response (e.g. very low=1, low= 2, roughly half= 3, high=4, very high=5). Specifically, this would require reversing the order of "choices" (e.g. (a) daily, (b) once a week, (c) once a month, (d) once every six months, (e) never) so that each can be assigned an ascending number value. The numerical value allows for a rank-ordering of perceptions - along a Likhert's scale.

Style: Great care was taken in selecting an **appropriate style** for the questionnaire. The original template was designed with advice from experts working with the ICRC and WHO. It was intended for a non-expert audience, and questions were worded so as not to be leading, or biased. There was a deliberate attempt to keep the questionnaire as short as possible - requiring a trade-off, on the author's part, between brevity and detail. In retrospect, the SAS recognises that some questions may have come across as confusing and or leading (e.g. Part 3 question 12) and could be usefully re-worded. Related, the final two questions in part 4 (i.e. 18, 19) could be construed as "loaded", in that respondents are being lead toward certain conclusions and may or may not appreciate the practical applications of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Finally, it may be useful to allow more "optional" fields for respondents to answer in full. In many cases, respondents chose to volunteer thoughts on the situation, the questionnaire, or personal experiences, all of which

added tremendous value to the exercise. More of these kinds of contributions should be welcomed.

Delivery and Return: The questionnaires were prepared, translated and refined between September and December 2000.⁷ Following agreement with Oxfam-GB's Directorship, they were subsequently delivered to Oxfam-GB personnel in over 70 countries via Oxfam's Conflict and Arms Policy Advisor. It was agreed that a short deadline for return would be set in order to encourage rapid response - with March 1st, 2001 agreed to be the threshold. In late December 2000 and early January 2001, the questionnaires were sent out via email to the co-ordinating officers in the countries selected, and distributed to personnel in the field. The response time was generally satisfactory, with most of the respondents submitting their copies by email before March 1st, and only a few thereafter. Another set of responses arrived in mid-March from Sierra Leone, Uganda and the Philippines as they were sent via post. Related to the point made in (2), however, there may be a need to distribute an "email friendly" version (e.g. responses could be fed directly into the email copy on screen) with a direct input function that would allow surveys to be standardised.

Processing and Inputting: As already mentioned, the questionnaire requires a **standard coding** format - with key variables and number coding that would be continuous. Coding is important for the researcher to draw quantitative valuations and statistical findings from the raw data. In the questionnaire, two sets of coding values were introduced where: (1) "0" was equal to "disagree", "did not occur" or "no" with "1" meaning "agree" or "yes" and (2) with "0" equal to the smallest value of a 0-4 or 0-5 scale. The iteration was dependent on the variable field. For example, in Part 3 (12) the question reads "In your estimation, what proportion of the "beneficiary" population are inaccessible as a result of armed security threats: (a) very low; (b) low; (c) roughly half; (d) high; (e) don't know". In this question, (f) "unknown" would be left as "unknown" in the final input. However, "(a) very low" would become 1, "(b) low" would become 2, "(c) roughly half" would become 3 and so on. Another example might usefully explain the process. For example, question (13a) reads: "On average, how often were Oxfam-GB operations suspended due to war or complex humanitarian emergencies: (a) never, (b) once per 6 months or more, (c) once per 3-4 months, (d) once per month, (e) once per week or several times per week". In this question, the coding would read as follows: (a)=0, (b)=1, (c)=2 and so on. Finally, question (14a) reads, "Have you been involved in any armed security incidents? (a) yes (b) no". The coding here would read: (a)=1 and (b)=0.

Responses: Of note, many responses were assigned with an "NA" (not answered) because they were left blank. There was a significantly high number (i.e. approximately 197 of 3948 fields - approximately five per cent of the total) to warrant comment and perhaps changes

to the “instructions” of the questionnaire itself. Indeed, many of the NA fields were left blank where the respondent could otherwise have selected the option “Unknown”⁸ or “yes/no”. It is unclear whether this was a result of incomprehension, objection or forgetfulness. As in any survey exercise, there is a need to encourage full-response otherwise the entry becomes void. There should perhaps be more explicit instructions in the beginning of the questionnaire that it is designed to yield perceptions and that expertise in small arms is not a pre-requisite for submitting a response.

PART 2 Weapons Availability

(5a) Which terms below best describe the situation in the country during your mission:

a pre-conflict *b* armed conflict

c post-conflict *d* none of these

(5b) If you have chosen "a", "c" or "d" above, please select the best description from the following terms:

a little or no violence

b moderate level of social or criminal violence

c high level of social or criminal violence

(6) To the best of your knowledge, which of the following groups possess weapons:

a military forces *b* rebel or insurgent forces

c civilians *d* organized criminal groups

e non-organized criminal elements *f* children

g other (please specify): _____

(7) To the best of your knowledge, choose from the following list which types of weapons:

(A) handguns, **(B)** assault rifles, **(C)** hand grenades, **(D)** landmines, **(E)** mortars (e.g. small system that can be transported by one or two people on foot), **(F)** artillery (e.g. large system that cannot be transported by one or two people on foot), or **(G)** major weapon systems (e.g. tanks or aircraft), that were possessed by each group listed below (leave blank if you do not know). *(For example - 1. Military forces: B, C, and E).*

1. *Military forces:* _____
2. *Rebel or insurgent forces:* _____
3. *Civilians:* _____
4. *Organized criminal groups:* _____
5. *Non-organized criminal elements:* _____
6. *Children:* _____
7. *Other (as specified in 6g above):* _____

(8) In your estimation what proportion of the population possess guns:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>a</i> | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>b</i> | <i>low</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>c</i> | <i>roughly half</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>d</i> | <i>high</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>e</i> | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>f</i> | <i>don't know</i> |

(9) To the best of your knowledge which weapon was most frequently the cause of civilian death or injury in the country:

- a* handguns *b* assault/automatic rifles
- c* hand grenades *d* landmines
- e* mortars (e.g. small system that can be transported by one or two people on foot)
- f* artillery (e.g. large system that cannot be transported by one or two people on foot)
- g* major weapon systems (e.g. tanks or aircraft)
- h* home-made guns

(10) As far as you know, was ammunition:

- a* produced in the above country
- b* imported
- c* both produced in the country and imported
- d* don't know

**(11) Were you aware of occurrences of "celebration shooting"?
(Celebration shooting implies the firing of rifles into the air and occurs during or following weddings, political rallies and festivals or parties).**

- a* yes *b* no

PART 3 Effects on OXFAM-GB Operations

(12) In your estimation what proportion of the “beneficiary” population are inaccessible as a result of armed security threats:

- a* *very low* *b* *low* *c* *roughly half*
- d* *high* *e* *very high* *f* *don't know*

(13a) On average, how often were OXFAM-GB operations suspended due to war or complex humanitarian emergencies:

- a* *never* *b* *once per 6 or more months*
- c* *once per 3-4 months* *d* *once per month*
- e* *once per week or several times per week*

(13b) On average, how often were OXFAM-GB operations suspended or delayed due to urban or rural armed insecurity - such as crime or banditry.

- a* *never*
- b* *once per 6 or more months*
- c* *once per 3-4 months*
- d* *once per month*
- e* *once per week or several times per week*

(14a) Have you been involved in any armed security incidents?

a *yes*

b *no*

**(14b) If yes, which type(s) of armed security incident occurred
(please list all that apply):**

a *firing of weapon at or near OXFAM-GB personnel*

b *use of weapon to commit a robbery*

c *use of weapon to threaten, intimidate or harass*

d *ongoing threat of landmines hindered operations*

e *kidnapping*

f *other (please specify):* _____

PART 4. EFFECTS ON CIVILIAN POPULATION

**(15) Of the death and injury among the civilian population caused by weapons
please indicate below your estimate of the proportion caused by each of the
following weapons:**

a *handguns* _____

a *none*

b *very low*

c *low*

d *roughly half*

e *high*

f *very high*

g *don't know*

b *assault rifles*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

c *hand grenades*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

d *landmines*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

e *mortars*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

f *artillery*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

g *major weapon systems (e.g. tanks or aircraft)*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a | <i>none</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <i>very low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <i>low</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> d | <i>roughly half</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e | <i>high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> f | <i>very high</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> g | <i>don't know</i> | | |

(16) Were you aware of the following occurrences:

Targeting of civilians with assault rifles: Yes/No

a yes *b* no

If yes, did this occur:

a daily *b* weekly *c* monthly
 d every six months or less *e* don't know

Unintentional death or injury among civilians due to assault rifles:

a yes *b* no

If yes, did this occur:

a daily *b* weekly *c* monthly
 d every six months or less *e* don't know

Targeting of civilian areas with mortar or artillery fire:

a yes *b* no

If yes, did this occur:

a daily *b* weekly *c* monthly
 d every six months or less *e* don't know

Unintentional death or injury among civilians due to mortar or artillery fire:

- a* *yes* *b* *no*

If yes, did this occur:

- a* *daily* *b* *weekly* *c* *monthly*
 d *every six months or less* *e* *don't know*

Use of arms against civilians for criminal or coercive purposes:

- a* *yes* *b* *no*

If yes, did this occur:

- a* *daily* *b* *weekly* *c* *monthly*
 d *every six months or less* *e* *don't know*

(17) In your opinion, to what extent did the availability of weapons negatively affect the level of safety and security for civilians?

- a* *not at all* *b* *moderately* *c* *severely*

(18) In the context you have described, do you think:

a there was a relationship between the availability of arms and violations of international humanitarian law?

- a* *yes* *b* *no*

b Is there was a relationship between the availability of arms and the deterioration of the situation of civilians during or after armed conflict?

yes

no

Elaborate if you wish:

PART 5 OXFAM-GB Security

(20) Does your OXFAM-GB office require armed guards in any areas where you operate?

At the Office or OXFAM-GB field sites

For staff transportation to and from the field

For transportation of relief and/or materials to field sites

At staff residence and/or staff dependents residence

(21) In your view, does the presence of armed guards contribute to or reduce security in your area of operation?

The presence of armed guards increases my personal safety

The presence of armed guards has no noticeable impact on my personal safety

The presence of armed guards decreases my personal safety

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Additional findings of the Oxfam-GB/SAS Questionnaire, and others, will be included on our website at: www.smallarmssurvey.org. More information can also be obtained by contacting Robert Muggah at muggah@hei.unige.ch or Tel - (41 22) 908 5777, Fax: (41 22) 732 273.