

BUY OR BARTER

The History and Prospects of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes

Sarah Meek

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PREFACE

Conventional weapons systems, so decisive in conflicts where military is pitched against military, have little real effect in maintaining the security of civilian populations during and after wars. The majority of casualties, of abuses of authority and of indiscriminate killings are caused by the availability and use of small arms.

Since small arms and light weapons, which include landmines, machine guns, grenades, pistols and rocket launchers, are standard issue during violent conflict and are not normally controlled during post-conflict processes, the potential of these weapons for illegal use - and abuse - is substantial. Because conflict resolution processes depend on socio-economic development, effective democracy and security (as seen in a credible law and order structure), these remedies require time and stability for their successful implementation. If there is indiscriminate access to the tools of violence (i.e., weapons), stability will be harder to maintain and development in time of peace will not take place.

Seldom, if ever, have all weapons been collected at the end of an armed struggle. Physical security, primacy and economic necessity generate the force that propels the trade in small arms;¹ a trade that no longer requires a new influx of weapons to be destabilising. It depends instead on the constant, ever-widening circles of distribution of the massive stocks already in existence.

THE TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE PEACE PROJECT AT THE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

One of the legacies of conflict in Southern Africa is the glut of light weapons and small arms. These

weapons are being transported illegally across borders, where they are used to generate political instability and to carry out crimes in many rural and urban areas in the region. Under these circumstances, democratisation programmes (which include demobilisation, disarmament and policing) are being jeopardised to the point that most people feel the need to acquire weapons for self-defence. In consequence, communities have abandoned their traditional, negotiated mechanisms of conflict-resolution and conflict-management, seeking instead to resolve violent situations with solutions equally violent. Although in its infancy, a culture of violence has begun to emerge in the region, threatening democracy and development as a result.

With this context in mind, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa has developed its *Towards Collaborative Peace* (TCP) project which aims to study the dynamics of the illegal trade in small arms in Southern Africa. In the course of this study, the TCP project will demonstrate the linkages between an increased availability of small arms and the emergence of a culture of violence in transit and end-user societies. The countries in the geographic region chosen² manifest a number of similarities which permit their linkage for the purpose of this study. Thus, all are either victims of the violence accompanying small arms proliferation or act as transit points from where weapons are distributed further afield. Likewise, all have been affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the existence of porous borders which connect them to nation-states that have accumulated a massive surplus of light weapons as a result of decades of internal strife and ill-managed disarmament operations during multinational peace processes (i.e., Angola, Mozambique). A final point of connection is that all countries in the study are members of the same regional and sub-regional organisations, namely the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The project, therefore, seeks to discover what is the nature of the small arms proliferation problem in all of these countries; how increased availability of weapons is affecting the societies; and what structures within existing regional groupings could be utilised to diminish the flow and effects of light weapons proliferation in Southern Africa. Furthermore, the project seeks to implement a south-south approach in dealing with this issue by contrasting the existing trends in Southern Africa with the southern part of South America.

The TCP project has several components of which the most important are field research, and the publication of a series of books and monographs, the end result of which will be to propose viable mechanisms for both the regional control of weapons flows and the reversal of a culture of violence at local level.

The main purpose of the field research is to establish what the impact of ineffectual demobilisation and disarmament is in countries such as Mozambique and Angola; and what the effects are of the resulting excess of weapons on the surrounding countries. Particular attention is being focused on the way the light weapons, available in such massive amounts, pervert the societies through which the weapons transit in order to determine if a culture of violence follows in the wake of such indiscriminate proliferation of light weapons. The examples uncovered in the field research so far touch upon such diverse societal elements as demobilised soldiers, refugees and other migrant communities, rural communities and urban populations of Southern Africa.

If the TCP project's field research is beginning to show why light weapons should be more effectively controlled in Southern Africa, its publications highlight the underlying reasons for the occurrence of the proliferation of light weapons, the present dynamics of light weapons proliferation and the way in which existing regional structures could be used to stem the flows. There are four books in the TCP project series, and a number of monographs. The books look at the global environment in which the proliferation of weapons occurs and the causes for such a proliferation in Southern Africa, the existing regional mechanisms that might be utilised as control vehicles for stemming the proliferation of light weapons in Southern Africa, and the culture of violence which has emerged as a result of ineffectual controls and easy availability of light weapons in the region. The final volume will produce a series of recommendations for improvement of control mechanisms at regional level and for reversal of the culture of violence locally.

To accompany the set of books, the project is publishing a series of monographs, of which this is the first. These are designed to produce a comprehensive view of the actual status of small arms proliferation nationally and to cover general issues which are relevant to the ultimate recommendations of the entire project. Thus the monograph series includes research on the status of weapons flows in Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland; as well as the status of arms flows in the four MERCOSUR countries of South America. Other issues which will be covered in the monograph series include a study of comparative legislation for firearm ownership and use. This monograph, *Buy or Barter: The History and Prospects of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programmes*, focuses on one of the many challenges facing policy makers: how to collect weapons that are in the hands of individuals and outside state control. These programmes, often known as gun buy-backs or exchanges, have been used by community groups and governments as a means of giving people a way to dispose of weapons that may be unwanted or become illegal under new legislation. Outside of the United States, little research has been conducted on this topic and this monograph makes a first attempt at identifying common areas across various programmes that have been held in countries around the world.

Since the project brings applied research to the field of light weapons control, it does not stop at field research and writing. Two further components of the project deal with proposing specific recommendations for application at the levels of regional organisation and local community. The channel for implementing the first type of recommendation is a set of workshops and conferences designed as inter-agency discussions between point persons dealing with weapons control at national and regional levels. The second type of recommendation focuses on the creation of an educational package to be applied by local communities for the reversal of a culture of violence that has been radically influenced by the use of firearms. This package will be implemented via a pilot project set up near Johannesburg. This model for the control of weapons and the reversal of the culture of violence will be observed and documented and the results will be included in the last volume in the Towards Collaborative Peace book series.

This project, therefore, is a first look at a complex problem, one that is so multi-layered that decision makers often are deterred from taking effective action. In gaining some understanding of certain aspects of the problem of the proliferation of small arms, the ISS, through its TCP project, hopes to highlight the nature of the problem and to offer insights for its resolution.

Virginia Gamba
Halfway House, March 1998

ENDNOTES

1. As exemplified in J Boutwell *et al.*, **Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons**, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995; and in J Singh (ed.), **Light Weapons and International Security**, Indian Pugwash Society and British American Security Information Council, New Delhi, 1995.
2. South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, and Tanzania.

THE HISTORY AND PROSPECTS OF VOLUNTARY WEAPONS COLLECTION PROGRAMMES

INTRODUCTION

The number of weapons circulating freely in communities in recent years has occasioned a growing awareness and a deep concern. These arms, both legal and illegal, are seen by some as being responsible for increases in violence, crime and fatal accidents. In countries undergoing post-conflict transformations, the number of weapons and the lack of control over their possession and use have

disrupted social and economic development, endangered the security of citizens and forced people to arm to protect themselves.

Traditionally, actions to curb the prevalence of weapons have either been focused on gun control, at national level, or arms control, in a regional or international context. Each has tended to focus on measures to limit or restrict supply by implementing legislation to circumscribe ownership of firearms, and limitations on their import and export; or regulations to ensure the safe use, storage and carrying of weapons by individuals. In particular, the arms control community has, in the past, been more concerned with weapons of mass destruction or larger conventional weapons systems than machine guns, pistols and hand grenades. *"For too long it has been assumed that small arms were inconsequential. It is becoming increasingly evident that in reality they are the most dangerous of all."*¹ In addition, these gun control and arms control measures generally focus on the proliferation of weapons, while *"[t]o a large extent, the proliferation has already occurred which leaves the problem of reversing rather than of control"*.²

The complexity of collecting weapons already circulating cannot be underestimated. As noted by T Naylor, *"tertiary supply-side control ultimately bumps up against the fact that the arms supply business is subject to the law of entropy - the further the material moves away from the primary source and the greater the degree of dispersal, the greater the problems of putting the process in reverse."*³ Internal instability, the breakdown of civil order and economic imperatives induce people to possess weapons. In addition, countries which were caught up in the fighting of proxy wars during the Cold War created an arms market previously unknown. The remnants of these wars still exist in the form of light weapons ranging from 9 mm pistols to shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles. These weapons are now circulating internally within countries or within regions: there is no need for the import of more weapons and so traditional supply-side restrictions (for example, export bans by supplier states) become irrelevant.

There is thus a need for *"new thinking at the conceptual level ... Some solutions may lie in the grey area between arms control and gun control."*⁴ This new approach includes involving more issues and actors, including development, human rights, justice and public security processes and agencies. It also means looking at ways of reducing the number of weapons available and changing the demand for weapons.

Programmes to reduce or change demand tend to either focus on education or changing behaviour and attitudes. Education programmes for both children and adults have focused on improving awareness about safely handling firearms and learning conflict resolution techniques that deflate tense situations before they become violent. The public health approach to guns and gun violence tries to change behaviour and attitudes, as did the anti-smoking campaign in the United States. A final necessary element in changing demand is those programmes which address the lack of services or conditions which cause people to possess weapons in the first place.

The options for collecting weapons are more limited, being either coercive or voluntary. This monograph will focus on voluntary weapons collection programmes (VWCPs), often known as gun buy-backs, as one way in which governments, communities and individuals have attempted to make available a means of disposing of illegal or superfluous weapons. These programmes have been used in diverse settings: urban communities in the United States, nationally in Australia, South Africa and El Salvador, by the United States army in Haiti and the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia. They are not without controversy, and a meaningful evaluation is complicated by the conditions under which they are generally run: amnesty from prosecution and anonymity.

Thus rather than attempting to evaluate the utility of these programmes in terms of what they hope to achieve, be it a reduction in the supply of weapons or gun violence or a change in public attitudes towards guns, this monograph presents information collected on different types of VWCPs, a series of case studies of collection programmes, and a discussion of some of the issues surrounding these programmes. It concludes with a description of factors to be considered in planning a VWCP.

AMNESTY, BUY-BACK AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES

While it is difficult to compare the reasons for weapons possession and proliferation across regions and even more difficult to do so across hemispheres, what can be equated are the methods used to collect weapons, which are often similar, regardless of the means of earlier supply. In recent years various attempts have been made to collect weapons from individuals or groups who have firearms that have either become surplus, are considered dangerous in the prevailing security situation, or will become banned under new or revised legislation. One means of collecting these weapons is through VWCPs, which include amnesties, gun buy-back or exchange programmes.

These programmes have been used in a wide range of situations: United Nations mandated peace operations; inner cities and rural towns in the United States; in Australia to collect weapons that are banned under new legislation; and in post-conflict situations, such as countries of Central America, Africa, and Europe. Often the current situation dictates the type of weapon that will be turned in. For example, in the United States most firearms collected are rifles, shotguns or handguns, while in former conflict areas a much broader array of weaponry, including machine guns, ordnance, grenades and mortars, is collected.

It is often in reaction to a local event in which a firearm was the 'tool' used that a community or neighbourhood chooses to implement a VWCP. Examples include the accidental shooting of a child, the murder of a local community leader, or the suicide of a teenager. The response is to find a way to remove these tools from the area, voluntarily and as a community initiative.

Governments have also implemented such programmes, the largest to date being the one recently concluded in Australia, but others have been undertaken, including in Nicaragua. In addition to these local or national efforts to collect weapons, disarmament as part of peacekeeping operations, either by the United Nations or other coalitions, has also used VWCPs as a means of allowing citizens to turn in weapons which would otherwise be subject to seizure. Such programmes have been held in Haiti, Eastern Slavonia, in the former Yugoslavia, and in Albania following the unrest there.

While the approach of a local community or a government differs from that of a UN military-style operation, not only in terms of the organisers, communities involved and the incentives used to encourage participation, but also the precipitating conditions, the objectives and the way in which these programmes are implemented are similar.

The majority of the programmes operate on a 'no questions asked' basis, combined with an amnesty from prosecution. Even those which do ask questions of participants do not record the name of the person turning in the weapon. The number of weapons collected ranges from a handful in some United States cities to 600 000 in Australia. Sometimes voluntary weapons collection programmes are conducted in conjunction with other tactics, a 'carrot and stick' approach, in which voluntary surrender is followed by increased policing, search and seizure operations, and stiffer penalties for illegal weapons possession. Others are the kick-off for longer-term education and outreach programmes or part of broader rehabilitation programmes for ex-combatants in former conflict areas.

VWCPs have varying objectives depending, in part, on the situation which stimulated the programme, the politics involved and the function of the group which has undertaken the programme. The goals of community groups who run VWCPs are often to "*publicize the connection between weapons and violence, develop norms against such use, and lower the number of weapons available for crime and violence*".⁵ In contrast, in Haiti, the United States army ran a gun buy-back programme to collect weapons in circulation prior to handing the operation over to the United Nations peacekeeping force. The army's mandate was to ensure a secure and stable environment, and they used the gun buy-back as one means of achieving this end by reducing the visibility (firearms carried on the street were seized) and the number of available weapons.

VWCPs include three main types: amnesties, buy-backs in which weapons are exchanged for money, and exchanges in which weapons are traded for non-cash incentives. Each of these methods is elaborated on below.

Amnesties

Amnesty programmes are the least complex of the three types of collection programmes, and often are not collection programmes at all. There are several uses for amnesties. These are:

- To allow unlicensed or lapsed-license owners to register their firearms; and
- For the collection of weapons that may become illegal under new legislation.

Amnesties are also often a component of either a gun buy-back or exchange programme. In such cases, the weapon is turned in during an amnesty period for one of the above reasons, but some type of incentive is offered for the firearm.

Gun Buy-Back Programmes

The term 'gun buy-back programme' should refer only to those instances in which a weapon is bought by the collecting agency for cash or vouchers to be redeemed for cash. Other forms of remuneration, such as gift vouchers, farming tools, toys and computers, are technically in-kind incentives which replace cash and so are part of the exchange programmes discussed below. However the term 'gun buy-back' is often used to refer to all types of VWCPs.

The reasons for conducting buy-back programmes are broader than those for amnesties and often attract more attention. Recent examples of gun buy-backs include Haiti, Panama, various United States cities and Australia. Remuneration is offered for weapons based on either the black market price or a percentage of it (as was done in Haiti) or on average sales prices from dealers' catalogues, as was the case in Australia.

The basic premise of a gun buy-back is that a community, an organisation or a government decides that weapons which are currently in circulation should be collected. As such, collection points are identified; co-operation with local law enforcement agencies is agreed upon; a set of prices for compensation is devised, generally based on the type of firearm; a duration for the programme is set; and a publicity campaign is initiated. Organisers have found that the number of weapons turned in is influenced greatly by the prices offered, the amount of publicity and the location of the collection site. For example, if a location site is a police station in an area where there is distrust of law enforcement, this can deter participation.

Exchange Programmes

Exchange programmes have become popular due to some of the negative effects of offering cash for weapons. Examples include the creation of a weapons market, as people use the cash received from a weapon that was turned in at a buy-back to purchase additional, cheaper, firearms to turn in, and firearms dealers who have used the opportunity of a buy-back to rid their stores of excess and obsolete stocks. While there are ways to reduce both of these abuses, many organisers have instead chosen to use in-kind incentives rather than cash as the 'payment' for a weapon.

Incentives offered vary greatly, depending in large part upon the needs of the community in which the exchange programme is operating. For example, in Nicaragua farming implements, clothing and motor vehicles were used as incentives, while in the United States concert tickets, used computers and gift vouchers to local stores have become popular.

Using VWCPs to Reduce Weapons Availability

Increasingly weapons are being identified world-wide as a source of the rising prevalence of crime.⁶ In response to this, governments and communities are creating policies which are directed at both legal and illegal weapons possession. Recent examples are the inclusion of firearms as a prime issue in South Africa's National Crime Prevention Strategy, and the expansion of a United States federal government initiative to trace the sale of illegal firearms to young people.

Action is also being taken by the public either to supplement government action or to supplant what is seen as either inaction or ineffective action. The use of VWCPs is one way in which local communities can be involved in developing and implementing a programme to address weapons availability, and work in tandem with local authorities.

There is considerable debate surrounding whether these programmes should be used as a method of disarmament or gun control and how effective they are. This section will discuss in greater detail the motivations for conducting VWCPs, the debate surrounding them, their efficacy in reducing the number of weapons in circulation and, in conclusion - in the absence of their reducing the number of available weapons - the other common objectives, namely the development of norms against the use of guns and the publicising of the connection between guns and violence.

The Debate

Little research has been done on VWCPs as a means of reducing firearms. The United States has been most active in this area but, even there, due to the fact that such programmes are organised in an *ad hoc* manner and are usually conducted under amnesty, there is little material available for research or evaluation. Yet, even though there is no empirical evidence that these programmes work to reduce weapons, they continue to be an extremely popular choice with policy makers.

Often the impetus for undertaking these programmes is some event that acts as a catalyst - a local murder or suicide or a general increase in crime that is identified by the public as weapons-related and which reaches intolerable levels. Thus the stated objective of the programmes is often to lower the number of weapons available for crime and violence. Other objectives are commonly:

- to publicise the connection between weapons and violence;
- and to develop norms against the use of weapons for violent means.⁷

Another popular slogan is 'One Gun, One Life',⁸ which allows for the immediate success of a collection programme, as the first weapon turned-in achieves the programme organisers' goal!

In the United States, opponents and detractors often point out that there is no evidence that these programmes do reduce gun violence. They also argue that the programmes are a waste of money and resources that could be used for other purposes or for programmes which are shown to be more likely to reduce the number of guns and associated violence, for example, search and seizure operations by local law enforcement. Often opponents of weapons collection programmes are not the anti-gun control lobby, the National Rifle Association, for example, but researchers and others involved in the pro-gun control debate who feel that these types of programmes detract from their work to change or enforce legislation and lobby for stricter firearm controls.⁹

Even among supporters of such interventions in the United States, there is the realisation that, due to a variety of factors, it is almost impossible to determine whether or not VWCPs are effective in reducing gun-related violence or crime. A study was conducted which evaluated two programmes in St Louis, Missouri, in the United States to determine whether or not gun violence declined in the period following the weapons collection programmes. The evaluation of the programmes indicated that "*neither program had an appreciable impact on the frequency of gun assaults and homicides committed in St Louis*".¹⁰

The success of VWCPs often depends not only on their planning and implementation, but also, perhaps more importantly, on the current conditions, social, political and even economic, when the programme is initiated. For example, a lack of trust among potential participants towards the organisers can jeopardise the programme before it begins, especially in the case of government-run programmes.

The Popularity of VWCPs

Generally, there is little belief that VWCPs can, in themselves, reduce the number of weapons in

circulation or prevent crime, or even crimes committed with firearms. However, they continue to be popular and are being used with increasing frequency. What are some of the reasons for the continued popularity of VWCPs in the face of apparent contradictions about their effectiveness in achieving their stated objectives? There are several possible answers. First, voluntary weapons collection programmes conducted by communities can be an important way of building community cohesiveness and improving relations between the people and local law enforcement officers. Second, these programmes focus attention on the issue of guns and gun-related violence and can possibly lead to a change in attitudes and behaviour. Third, these programmes serve as what have been termed 'soft social controls' that incorporate conflict resolution and violence prevention programmes at one end of the spectrum, and education about gun ownership and use at the other.¹¹ As a social control, VWCPs may draw enough notice to a gun-related situation to focus attention on other types of controls that may be able to reduce gun violence.¹²

Additionally, VWCPs are outside the framework of most criminal justice systems and the way in which these systems address the misuse of firearms. They are "*preventive rather than reactive; they attempt to alter the means and circumstances that facilitate violence rather than deter violent conduct; and they focus on problems, such as access to guns or youth violence, rather than individuals*".¹³ Increasingly, as courts and prisons are collapsing under the weight of case backlogs and overcrowding, alternative approaches to addressing issues become necessary. The shift taking place in the United States and elsewhere to begin to address gun violence as a public health issue and, as such, as one that can be reduced through intervention and prevention rather than through criminal justice approaches, is gaining popularity. VWCPs are one way in which communities can become involved.

VWCPs also allow for community participation and action at the local level, giving organisers and participants a feeling that they are doing something to address an issue affecting their community. As noted in one study of a gun buy-back, the police consider programmes such as buy-backs and exchanges as an opportunity to interact with communities in which "*every weapon turned in is a conversation*".¹⁴ VWCPs are also seen as a means of "*lowering voluntarily the prevalence of handguns within a community*".¹⁵

Advantages and Drawbacks

However much the publicity and support that they generate, VWCPs have both advantages and drawbacks, which often depend on which side of the gun-control/crime prevention debate one stands.

Some claim that VWCPs are a means of promoting gun control,¹⁶ others that VWCPs reduce the number of available weapons. In the instance of Australia this is arguably the case, as the firearms that have been bought back are now banned under new legislation.¹⁷ A study in Sacramento, California also found that 41 per cent of participants no longer had firearms in their homes following participation in an exchange programme.¹⁸ However, an evaluation of the gun buy-back in St Louis found that many people participating in the buy-back programme were planning to replace the weapons they had turned in.¹⁹

Some argue that the strength of a VWCP, especially as a community initiative to reduce weapons availability or gun violence, lies in its apparent weakness. That is, it is politically appealing and popular because it is the 'weakest' intervention for addressing either of the issues. The argument is that there is little to dislike about VWCPs, because they are politically 'safe'. For example they are not an overt attempt at gun control, nor do they require the commitment of significant manpower or money.²⁰ VWCPs have also been characterised as 'feel good' measures²¹ that have positive benefits for supporters, organisers and sponsors, but no demonstrable effect on their target (gun violence or weapons reduction). Additionally, as they are often one-off or limited interventions, any impact they may have is not likely to be maintained over the long-term.

It has been argued, further, that VWCPs that use amnesties (which most do in order to encourage participation) thwart the criminal justice system and prevent criminals from being tried for crimes committed with weapons that were turned in. While there is validity in this point, the fact remains that the number of criminals who use VWCPs to dump hot weapons is arguably low. A survey of weapons collected in San Diego, California and Seattle, Washington programmes which were subsequently traced

using serial numbers, found that the percentage of stolen weapons turned in was between 0,5 and 1,8 per cent, suggesting that a very small percentage of the total weapons turned in was stolen, and a smaller, or perhaps non-existent, number had been used in crime.²²

Additionally, in those programmes in which demographic information was collected, most participants in United States VWCPs tended to be typical gun owners rather than offenders or at-risk youth. Often in those cases studied, weapons were turned in by middle-age men and women who either had more firearms at home or planned to replace the turned-in firearm with a new one.²³ Due to a lack of demographic information it is impossible to know if this is the case in other countries, although anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the participants in the recent VWCP in El Salvador, or at least those who agreed to be interviewed, were adults, both male and female.

One frustration for organisers of VWCPs and those called upon to evaluate or research them is that, by their very nature, the effects that these programmes have on communities are often not able to be measured. Efforts to link the collection of firearms to reductions in gun violence have not yielded statistically significant outcomes in programmes which have attempted this type of evaluation. More than the collection of limited demographic information and participants' support for the programme is thwarted by policies of amnesty or 'no questions asked', both of which are important in attracting participation in the programmes themselves.

The use of cash as an incentive for VWCPs has been controversial among organisers and has sometimes had undesirable results. In setting a price for weapons being turned in, organisers generally establish an amount below the current black market price and below the current book price for similar weapons. If prices offered are higher, gun markets are being created in which people use the opportunity to purchase less expensive weapons that they then turn in for more money, using that money to purchase further weapons for turning in. In the United States there have also been instances of firearms dealers using VWCPs with cash incentives as an opportunity to get rid of old or low quality stocks. While there are ways of combating these abuses, including limiting the number of weapons that may be turned in by each individual, many organisers have chosen not to use cash or vouchers but to use in-kind incentives instead. The notable exceptions are VWCPs conducted by governments or peacekeeping forces which have traditionally used cash or vouchers redeemable for cash.

A final criticism of VWCPs, especially those organised by communities with access to public funds, is that the money could be better spent in improving detection methods, hiring more law enforcement personnel or improving enforcement facilities. What this point tends to overlook, however, is that often the public funds used for VWCPs are minimal and are from funds, for example asset forfeiture funds, that are not necessarily available for other purposes.

Efficacy of VWCPs in Reducing the Availability of Weapons

Firearm-related violence is becoming increasingly recognised as a social problem, one which is exacerbated by the possession and use of firearms. While VWCPs attempt to address this issue by collecting legal and illegal weapons, their success in achieving a reduction in firearm-related violence is limited by the usual participants in the VWCPs and limitations inherent in the process. The evaluation of VWCPs is complicated and often inconclusive in determining whether or not they have succeeded in reducing weapons possession or gun-related crime and violence.

Issues which affect the efficacy of VWCPs as a means of reducing the number of weapons in circulation and/or the number of acts of violence committed with firearms are, amongst others, the following.

First, VWCPs generally aim to collect guns currently owned by people, i.e. the existing stock of used guns. As such, VWCPs, especially in the context of limited community-based programmes, cannot begin to address the myriad of supply-side issues which must also be considered to effectively reduce the number of available guns.

Secondly, at least as evaluated in the United States, VWCPs rarely attract the type of individual most

likely to use a firearm to commit a crime. The profile of the average offender points to the young male who, when using a firearm to commit a crime, frequently uses a stolen weapon.²⁴ It may be that in other situations outside the United States, especially in former conflict areas, where VWCPs are conducted as part of post-conflict peace building or during disarmament campaigns, the profile of the participant more closely resembles that of the 'typical' offender, but this is difficult to determine as demographic information is generally not collected during these types of programmes.

Thirdly, the age and type of weapons typically turned in during a VWCP are older weapons and generally not the semi-automatic rifles or handguns currently favoured for the perpetration of crime.²⁵ The exception to this is the case of Australia, where the weapons collection programme was targeted specifically at semi-automatic rifles and shotguns.

A fourth element which can affect the efficacy of VWCPs in reducing the number of available weapons is the process of substitution, during which a cheaper firearm is turned in and the money received used to purchase a more expensive, larger calibre weapon that is of better quality and therefore more likely to fire accurately and to be lethal.²⁶

The efficacy of VWCPs will be debated as long as adequate means of evaluating them continue to prove difficult. The formulation of the programmes themselves complicates this task, as the use of amnesties and anonymity make it difficult to trace turned-in weapons to determine whether or not they have been used in crimes and, therefore, whether or not the 'at-risk' population for committing crimes with firearms is responding to the programmes.

In some evaluations, patterns of crime and violence have been analysed to determine whether rates of crime declined at the time of the programmes more than would have been expected from other factors (seasonal fluctuations and policy interventions are two other possible causes for decreases in committed crimes). However, the results of those evaluations have been inconclusive and have failed to determine if decreases in crime levels were attributable to the impact of the programme.²⁷

There is one tangible way in which some of these programmes have contributed to reducing the availability of firearms: the destruction of weapons turned in. In some programmes, though not all, the collected weapons are either crushed or melted down. This at least ensures that those weapons will not be available for further use.

Additional Factors for the Popularity of VWCPs

If the effectiveness of VWCPs as a means of voluntary disarmament is under debate, what are some additional factors which might contribute to the continued popularity of these programmes?

Foremost is perhaps education, which increases the awareness of the public to the issue of gun violence. This is a key to the public health approach to the problem, which identifies education as the first step in prevention, for without education there can be no action. These types of programmes often include medical practitioners among their organisers and try to increase awareness around the dangers of unsafe gun use, storage and ownership. They also try to highlight the costs of gun-related violence both to the victims and to the public at large. These costs include, for instance, long-term care for people paralysed from spinal cord injuries and who are thus unable to work.

The second is that VWCPs serve as a means of allowing people to safely dispose of unwanted firearms, often with the chance of getting something in exchange. Currently, in Mozambique, citizens are leaving weapons along the side of the road to be destroyed by mine clearance teams working in the area. If the weapons are turned in to the police they are not destroyed and often reappear in the surrounding neighbourhoods.²⁸ In other cases, for people who no longer want a firearm in their home and are ignorant as to how to dispose of it, VWCPs offer an opportunity for the firearm to be safely disabled and destroyed. VWCPs can also serve as a means of educating people about the safe disposal of a firearm, the risks incurred in keeping a weapon at home, especially if the firearm is not stored safely or there are young children around, and the use of weapons in crime, violence, suicides and accidents.

As noted by one author, there are very few effective ways to address gun violence, especially such as can be undertaken by communities. Thus, VWCPs offer a way in which communities can be involved in finding solutions to the problem.²⁹ They can also be used to initiate dialogue between community groups and local government.

VWCPs and other violence prevention initiatives can also allow for norms to develop against the use of firearms and can work towards changing attitudes about firearm possession and use. Other perceived benefits of VWCPs, including building community cohesiveness and focusing attention on the issue, may be quite substantial. If the objective of the programme is to educate or increase awareness, the effectiveness of the programme should be judged by these criteria, including the satisfaction of the organisers with the results, and whether or not the programme prompted additional awareness of, or action on, the problem.

CASE STUDIES FROM FOUR REGIONS

Countries around the world have experimented with VWCPs. In this section examples of programmes from four regions will be discussed. The first region is Southern Africa, and two countries in particular, namely South Africa and Mozambique. The South African programme was conducted in 1994, while the Mozambican programme is on-going.

In Central America the focus will be on three programmes, a 1992 weapons exchange in Nicaragua, a 1994 gun buy-back conducted by United States forces in Haiti and the 1996-1997 programme in El Salvador.

The Australian case study is unique, as it is the only programme which was conducted completely with government funds and was government initiated and run. The section ends with a survey of similarities between weapons collection programmes that have been conducted in the United States, with a focus on a collection programme in Oakland, California.

Southern Africa

Mozambique

Mozambique was in the midst of civil war for sixteen years, during which time military-style weapons flooded into the country, to arm the two main warring factions: the *Frente da Libertação Moçambique* (FRELIMO), which was the party of the national government, and the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO), the main opposition group. While, as in many situations, there are no accurate statistics on the number of weapons that were in the country by the end of the war in 1992, estimates have put the figure between 1.5 and 2 million.

In 1992 the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) was deployed with a mandate that included the demobilisation and disarmament of both government and RENAMO troops. While the UN reported that ONUMOZ collected a total of 189 827 weapons from "*military and paramilitary forces, as well as from the general population*",³⁰ most of these weapons were transferred to the new Mozambican Defence Force (FADM) while only a small number were destroyed. The weapons turned over to the FADM were inadequately secured and quickly the warehouses were emptied and the weapons back on streets.

This left the task of collecting the weapons to the FRELIMO government and its police force, a task that soon proved less than feasible, due to problems ranging from corruption within the police force to the reticence of RENAMO supporters to hand their weapons over to the government.

In an effort to circumvent the apparent stalemate, in 1992 the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM)

initiated a 'Swords into Ploughshares' weapons programme. Initially the co-ordinators worked with the government and ONUMOZ to try to get information on weapons in the country. The 'Swords into Ploughshares' programme later developed into a voluntary weapons collection programme in which weapons were exchanged for tools and machinery ranging from carpentry tools to pickaxes, bicycles, sewing machines, ploughs and tractors. Recently Graça Machel has become involved in the collection programme and has made available as exchange items wind-up radios which require no batteries or electricity.

The 'Swords into Ploughshares' programme runs mainly in the capital city of Maputo and its environs. It is run wholly by the CCM and there is no police or political presence at the urban collection sites. In rural areas however, police officers are often present or are called in to handle the destruction of explosives and ammunition or arms caches. Participants in the programme are guaranteed anonymity and no identification is required to participate in the exchange.

The CCM receives funding for the programme from ecumenical partners in Europe, but has had to suspend operations at times due to a lack of funding. The programme is endorsed by the government of Mozambique which is "*equally concerned that there are a lot of weapons, ranging from guns and grenades to [anti-personnel] mines, among the Mozambicans*".³¹

The programme started in early 1996 and was still continuing in late 1997. Originally the programme organisers used a bench saw in the back of a truck to provide a mobile collection and destruction site. However, this proved too expensive and too unreliable and now people are requested to bring their weapons to the church for destruction, where they receive tools in exchange. Generally the weapons are destroyed at the collection site, but explosives and ammunition are given to the police for destruction. It is the hope of the organisers is that the materials from the weaponry might be used to "*make peace-related items such as rosaries or souvenirs or household items*",³² as symbols of the country's transformation from war to peace.

The total number of weapons collected by the CCM by February 1997 was about 2 000 weapons and thousands of pieces of related war *matériel*. Of this total, 881 were small arms. The project leaders have noted that the number of weapons themselves is not the emphasis, "*we are not thinking about what 811 small [arms] means out of the existing arms in Mozambique, but we think in terms of the lives that would have been lost with the use of what we have collected*".³³ Critics of the programme note that participation would be potentially greater if money, food and other items more relevant to urban dwellers were offered rather than farming implements: "*Everybody has to eat but not everybody wants to farm*".³⁴

The CCM runs the VWCP in conjunction with awareness and public education campaigns and makes extensive use of the media to promote the programme and the location of collection sites.

South Africa

South Africa acknowledges, like its neighbour Mozambique, that there are a large number of firearms, both legal and illegal, in the possession of its citizens. While again the statistics on numbers are inadequate, estimates put the number of legally owned firearms at 4,1 million and the number of illegal weapons range anywhere from 400 000 to eight million.

In 1994 a campaign was launched known as the Gun-Free South Africa Campaign (GFSA). Its goal was to focus attention on what were seen as the tools of the escalating crime and violence: firearms. After discussing several ideas, GFSA decided to undertake a VWCP, combined with a toy gun exchange and a widespread education campaign.

GFSA was supported by local business, media, religious organisations and government. Newly-elected President Nelson Mandela gave his full support to the weapons collection programme, stating that "*this campaign is both necessary and timely. Dealing with the violence in South Africa will take time and requires a multi-faceted strategy, but people need something visible in dealing with crime and*

violence."35 The South African Police Service (SAPS) was also supportive of the programme, assisting in publicity and being present at the hand-in locations during the exchange programme.

Places of worship were chosen as collection sites because it was felt that people were more likely to go to a site other than a police station. However, where churches or mosques were not available, people were asked to use local police stations to turn in their weapons. In the final tally, 80 per cent of the weapons turned in were received at religious depots. The duration of the programme was twenty-four hours, starting on 16 December 1994.

There were 167 operational collection sites around the country, although most were concentrated in more urban areas. The programme was conducted on a 'no questions asked' basis and a retroactively passed amnesty law allowed participants to be free from prosecution. Owners of licensed weapons were asked to bring the licence with the firearm and the police officer present cancelled the licence when the weapon was turned in.

At the collection sites, each weapon was received by a member of the clergy who handed it to a SAPS officer to check that it was disarmed and then render it inoperable, using a welding machine and an angle grinder. At the end of the day all collected weapons were transferred by the SAPS to a storage facility.

There was a six week media campaign prior to the start of the collection programme. The support of the media and wide media coverage was seen as a key element in ensuring a successful outcome to the programme. However, due to lack of time, organisers were unable to advertise the incentives offered in the programme and felt that this may have hampered participation. Materials distributed included handbooks for volunteers, posters, stickers and handbills. A newspaper advertisement was also printed, which people were asked to send in to the organisers if they supported the aims of the campaign.

There were several types of incentives offered at the buy-back. Each participant was given a certificate featuring President Mandela and thanking them for participating in the programme. Additionally, each participant received gift vouchers to a local store and was entered in a raffle to win prizes of up to R100 000 (US \$25 000). The campaign raised a total of R785 400 (US \$196 000) in three months, which included both cash and in-kind donations.

While official support for the programme was strong, participation by individuals on the actual day of the turn-in was much lower than expected. Country-wide, approximately 900 firearms and explosive devices were collected, including 199 pistols and revolvers, forty-two AK-47s, seventy-two grenades and more than 7 000 rounds of ammunition.³⁶

There was strong opposition to the collection programme from the South African Gun Association (SAGA) and some businesses chose not to endorse the programme because they disagreed with the name of the campaign. Newspaper coverage was also affected by opposition to the programme, as some newspapers covered the story, while others noticeably did not.

In assessing the programme, organisers noted that it was too large and unwieldy in its attempt to cover the entire country in one short period. They also noted that it should have broadened its reach to focus not only on collecting weapons, but also on educating the public and raising awareness of guns and gun-related violence. A final critique notes that the programme was an isolated effort that was not part of a larger campaign to collect weapons, change public opinion or improve education about guns and violence. Gun-Free South Africa does, however, remain an active organisation within South Africa and has carried its activities into a broader arena, although it has not considered undertaking another collection programme.

Central America³⁷

Nicaragua

The war in Nicaragua between the Sandinista government and the Nicaraguan resistance, known as the

contras, lasted from 1982 to 1988 when a provisional cease-fire was signed. In December 1989 the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Nicaragua (ONUCA) was deployed. Within its mandate was the voluntary demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of the *contras*. A Venezuelan battalion was responsible for overseeing the demobilisation and disarmament of these irregular forces. The operation began in Honduras where a number of *contras* were based and then moved into Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

There are no reliable estimates of the number of weapons that were held by the Nicaraguan resistance prior to the ONUCA mission. This complicated the mission's ability to determine whether, through its collection process, most of the weapons in the hands of the *contras* were turned in. The demobilisation process began in April 1990 and continued until June of that year. During that time 22 373 *contras* were demobilised and a total of 17 833 weapons, explosives and missiles were collected. All weapons turned in were destroyed *in situ*. According to the commanders of the resistance fronts, all weapons had been handed in and none "*remained under their command or had been hidden*".³⁸

By 1991, however, it became clear that this was not the case. There was the appearance of *recontras* (former *contras*) and *recompas* (organised groups of demobilised Sandinista soldiers), individuals who rearmed after the war, using either weapons not collected - by the UN operation or the demobilisation of government forces - or which had subsequently been smuggled into the country.

These rearmed ex-combatants were seen by the government as having a destabilising effect on the country, so in September 1991 the government established a Special Disarmament Brigade (*Brigada Especial de Desarme* (BED)) to develop and run a country-wide gun buy-back programme to reduce the number of weapons in the country.

The BED was made up of government officials and ex-combatants from both sides of the conflict. Funding for the buy-back programme came from government sources and a donation from the Italian government to fund micro-enterprise projects in the country. The total cost of the buy-back programme, which ran for twenty-four months, was US \$6 000 000, making it one of the most costly.

The objectives of the buy-back were to "*remove weapons from individuals and find and collect weapons in arms caches*".³⁹ There was agreement among those involved that the collection programme did meet these objectives.

The BED began to collect weapons in January 1992. It would identify and approach groups known to have rearmed and offer them incentives to turn their weapons over to them for eventual destruction. There were several types of remuneration offered. First, cash equal to approximately US \$100 was offered for single weapons, added to which was food also worth about US \$100. Additionally, the Italian government's micro-enterprise initiative offered US \$300-\$500 to each participant in the programme as seed money for development projects. Often, if the BED was negotiating with a large group, the "*final settlement would be cash for the weapons, food, and housing or construction material*".⁴⁰ Information on arms caches or other groups or individuals who had rearmed was also collected and the informants paid for assisting the BED.

During its two-year operation, this special force collected 142 000 weapons, either as a result of confiscation or buy-backs. According to one authority, "*78 000 weapons were confiscated by police and [a]rmy personnel, 54 000 weapons were bought back in rural areas and 10 000 in [the capital city of] Managua, in addition to the collection of over 250 000 pieces of munitions or ordnance*".⁴¹ All the weapons, both collected and confiscated, were publicly destroyed by fire in an open pit. The method was selected not only for its cost-effectiveness, but also for the psychological and symbolic impact such a process would have on the community.

As in all post-conflict situations, it is virtually impossible to know accurately the number of weapons in circulation following disarmament initiatives. While the combined efforts of the UN peace operation and the government's initiative collected a total of 159 833 weapons and other war *matériel*, it is not known how many weapons remain in circulation in the country today. However, the government's initiative was

important. It not only showed the will of the government to address a difficult issue and to target its intervention at what were seen to be the tools of the *recontras*, but was also an effort on its behalf to improve the condition of the lives of those who participated in the programme by offering not only cash but also food and money for the micro-enterprise initiatives. This type of approach has not been replicated in other post-conflict countries and it is uncertain whether it would meet with a similar level of perceived success in other situations.

Haiti

The weapons collection process in Haiti was undertaken as part of an international initiative to stabilise the situation in the country. In September 1991 the government of Haitian President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown in a military coup. In 1994 a Multinational Force was authorised under UN Security Council resolution 940 to establish a 'secure and stable' environment that would permit the implementation of the Governor's Island agreement allowing the return of President Aristide.

Under the command of a United States army general, the Multinational Force took responsibility for the following disarmament activities: disarmament of the government forces (*Forces Armées d'Haiti*); a voluntary weapons collection programme; confiscation of weapons found in vehicles at check points; disarmament of *attachés*; and the seizure of weapons caches.⁴²

The VWCP was run entirely by the United States army under the aegis of the Multinational Force. Started in September 1994, it continued to operate after the handover of control by the Multinational Force to the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIH), which had no disarmament mandate until March 1996, when the United States forces withdrew.

The objectives of the programme were to "*reduce the number of weapons, promote stability and provide monetary incentives to citizens who supported the programme*".⁴³ Funding was provided by the United States Department of Defence and, by September 1995, the total cost of the programme was US \$1 924 500. The VWCP operated from several fixed sites throughout the country, supplemented by mobile sites. Those participating at the fixed sites had advance notice of when the buy-backs would occur. However, in the rural areas, participants were given only a few days prior notice of the programme, and weapons seen after its conclusion in that region were confiscated by the United States army.⁴⁴

The army provided secure areas into which people brought their weapons. The programme was conducted under amnesty and no questions were asked of participants. Each weapon turned in was inspected for a firing pin. Those deemed functional were paid for, while non-functional weapons were confiscated without remuneration. The programme was run in a series of phases, each about two months long. The total number of weapons turned in between September 1994 and March 1995 was over 33 000, which included weapons bought as well as those seized.

The army conducted a large information campaign to let Haitians know about the programme and offered remuneration in the form of vouchers that were cashed in for local currency. Initial prices for weapons were below current black market prices and were subsequently revised upwards to stimulate participation.

By September 1995 the prices for weapons were as follows: handguns - US \$100; semi-automatic weapons and grenades - US \$200; fully automatic weapons - US \$400; and heavy- and large-calibre weapons US \$600. In January 1995 the amount paid had been double the September prices but, due in part to the presence of middlemen who came repeatedly to the collection sites and who were suspected of bringing weapons in from the Dominican Republic, the prices were reduced. Arms were also collected from caches, but informers were not paid for identifying these locations.

A wide variety of weapons was collected during the programme. These included: "*machine guns, assault rifles, submachine guns, rifles, shotguns, handguns, pistols, flare guns, mortars, howitzers, high explosives, tear gas grenades, and heavy weapons*".⁴⁵ Many of the weapons were in poor condition. These were shipped to the United States for destruction. Others, which were in better condition, were

left for use by the Haitian police.

The programme was considered successful by the United States army. Run efficiently, it was reassessed every two months to redefine operational aspects and the types of weapons being turned in. It also was a way for the Multinational Force to interact with and perhaps gain the confidence of the local population. A similar programme was run by the United States army in Panama in 1989 and may be used again in similar situations. Comparing this programme to those run by local communities or government-run programmes is not easy. While the United States programme in Haiti utilised many of the same processes that any VWCP would, for example, extensive publicity, amnesty and incentives, it was also run as a military operation with resources and infrastructure not necessarily available to other organisers.

El Salvador

El Salvador was, like Nicaragua, engaged in a civil war. This lasted eleven years, from 1981 to 1992, when a peace agreement was signed and a United Nations peacekeeping mission (ONUSAL) was deployed. Military observers from ONUSAL began to arrive in El Salvador in January 1992. Within their mandate was the demobilisation and disarmament of the guerrilla and government forces. By July 1993 approximately 40 000 weapons, explosives and other war *matériel* had been collected from both guerrilla forces and demobilised government soldiers. The collected weapons were destroyed. ONUSAL had to rely on inventories supplied by the warring factions to determine the number of weapons held and then whether or not the majority of these had been turned in. After the demobilisation and disarmament phase, however, it soon became clear that many military-style weapons had not been handed to ONUSAL and that these were appearing among both urban and rural populations. Estimates on the number of weapons in the country in the early to mid-1990s range from 200 000 to 300 000 military-style weapons (i.e., assault rifles, grenades and mortars) most of which were in the hands of civilians.⁴⁶ Unlike the Multinational Force in Haiti, which had a mandate from the UN Security Council allowing a broad interpretation of its activities and extending to voluntary disarmament of local citizens, ONUSAL had no such mandate. As such, other alternatives had to be found to reduce the number of weapons in civilian possession.

Initially, the government of El Salvador undertook a series of weapons collection programmes which were conducted at military bases around the country. However, apparently due to civilian mistrust of both the political and social situation in the country, the response to these programmes was minimal.

Within Salvadoran society there is a "*permissive political culture concerning the use of violence to settle political disputes, [which has] contributed to the widespread use of arms in El Salvador. It is notable that many private individuals, politicians and businessmen were allowed to keep military weapons in their possession as self-protection ... during the civil war.*"⁴⁷ These weapons were not collected after the peace treaty was signed and, during the subsequent disintegration of public security structures, there were no incentives to give them up. However, in an effort to curb the number of military-style weapons in the country, the government, in 1993, passed a law for the control of weapons, munitions, explosives and related artefacts. Neither this law nor the government-initiated buy-back programme brought the weapons in.

In 1995 a group of local businessmen and other individuals created the Patriotic Movement Against Crime in El Salvador (*El Movimiento Patriótica Contra la Delincuencia* - MPCD) to assist in combating crime in the country. In September 1996 the MPCD started a 'Goods for Guns' programme that ran in its first phase until December 1996 and in its second from March 1997 to October 1997.

The MPCD approached local government and religious and non-government organisations to support the programme. These included the Rotary Club of El Salvador, the Catholic Church, the Legislative Assembly, and the public safety and defence authorities. Fundamental to the success of the programme was the amending of legislation which prohibited citizens from carrying military-style weapons. A decree was passed in September 1996 which allowed people to carry specified weapons in public solely for the purpose of participating in the VWCP. The decree was subsequently amended to allow for a wider range of weapons to be transported. The programme was conducted under conditions of anonymity

which probably also increased participation over the earlier government-run buy-back programmes.

Funds were raised from local business and, after the programme had proved to be such an overwhelming success that existing funds ran out, the President of El Salvador donated US \$285 700. By December 1996 a total of US \$571 400 had been spent on the programme and more than 58 599 weapons, ammunition and explosives had been collected.

Description	Total Collected in 1996
Light Weapons	718
Heavy Weapons	1 340
Grenades	1 334
Grenade Launchers	18
Light Anti-tank Weapons	167
Detonating Wire	73
Detonators	422
TNT	105 lbs
C-4 Explosives	79 lbs
Mortars	2
Mines	15
RP-G7s	4
Magazines	1 589
Ammunition	52 693

There was wide-spread publicity for the programme which had the full support of local businesses, authorities and government officials. The response to the programme overwhelmed the organisers. Often promissory notes had to be given out instead of vouchers when funds were not available. It was decided in December 1996 to continue the programme in 1997, when more money could be raised. By the end of March 1997 an additional 936 weapons had been collected in two weekend sessions and plans were made for an additional six sessions throughout the year.

Vouchers were given to participants which could be redeemed for goods. The number of vouchers given depended on the type of weapon being turned in. Although eight collection sessions had been planned for 1996, due to funding limitations, only five were carried out. These were held over weekends to ensure the highest participation. The Catholic Church supported the programme and churches were used as collection sites in four cities.

Type of weapons	Prices (in El Salvadoran <i>colones</i>)
Light weapons (old or deteriorated)	C500 - C750
Light Weapons (serviceable)	C1 500
Heavy Weapons	C3 000
Light Anti-tank Weapons	C1 000
Grenades	C25
Grenade Launchers	C1 000
Detonators	C25

The national police were responsible for transporting the collected weapons from each collection site to a secure storage area. After the final collection session in December, all the weaponry was destroyed under the offices of the Ministry of Defence.

The success of the collection programme in El Salvador was beyond the organisers' expectations. It has raised public awareness of the issue, encouraged people to rid their homes of weapons they had been storing since the civil war, and has provided the impetus for the MPCD to lobby for the implementation of stricter gun control laws in El Salvador.

Australia

In September 1996, Australia initiated the largest weapons collection programme ever held. Lasting approximately twelve months, the programme had a budget of Aus \$500 million and, by the end of August 1997, it had collected over 505 000 weapons for Aus \$259,8 million.

The history of the Australian gun buy-back begins in April 1996 when a gunman in Port Arthur, Tasmania killed thirty-five people. The impact this incident had on Australian society was enormous. Within twelve days of the massacre Australia's federal, state and territorial governments had agreed to a bill that would ban all semi-automatic weapons in the country, effective from September 1997. The new law also required comprehensive firearm registration, requirements for possession other than self-defence, mandatory training for first-time owners, a twenty-eight day waiting period after obtaining a gun permit, and regulations on the storage of firearms and ammunition. This marks the first time that Australia has implemented a uniform firearms policy across the country. Prior to this, each state and territory drafted and enforced its own legislation.

The most visible part of the *National Firearms Program Implementation Act 1996* was the gun buy-back programme, which offered compensation to everyone who turned in a semi-automatic weapon. Handgun ownership has been strictly regulated since the 1920s, so the focus of the programme was on shotguns and rifles. The firearms specifically targeted were: self-loading centre-fire rifles, self-loading shotguns, pump-action shotguns and self-loading rim-fire rifles.

Each territory or state implemented its own legislation to carry out the buy-back, with federal co-ordination. This affected the duration of programmes, while prices were co-ordinated nationally. The funding for the buy-back was raised through a 0,2 per cent levy on Medicare for one year, which raised approximately Aus \$500 million. Most programmes had a duration of about twelve months and all ended on 30 September 1997, when the new legislation came into effect. Following this enactment, individuals found in possession of banned firearms are eligible for fines up to Aus \$12 000 and two years' imprisonment.

Compensation for weapons was based on two criteria: new (never fired) and used. The prices were taken from the average sales price listed in firearms dealers' catalogues in March 1996. Compensation ranged from Aus \$60 to Aus \$10 000. For non-military-style weapons valued over Aus \$2 500, participants had the option of accepting the listed price, having the firearm independently appraised or consigning the firearm for sale overseas. All collected weapons were destroyed, some *in situ*, others at designated destruction sites. First the barrel of the weapon was bent on an hydraulic press and then the weapons were ground up and used for scrap. Exceptions have been made for a few extremely rare firearms which have been donated to museums abroad.

Weapon type	Price range (in Aus \$)
.22 Rimfire self loading rifle (new)	\$149 - \$1 200
.22 Rimfire self loading rifle (used)	\$ 60 - \$1 000
Military-style self loading rifle (new)	\$450 - \$1 800
Military-style self loading rifle (used)	\$100 - \$2 490
Centre fire self loading rifle - non military (new)	\$480 - \$1 844
Centre fire self loading rifle - non military (used)	\$300 - \$2 250
Pump action shotguns (new)	\$351 - \$2 000
Pump action shotguns (used)	\$100 - \$1 437
Self loading shotguns (new)	\$550 - \$2 445
Self loading shotguns (used)	\$200 - \$2 000
Military-style self loading rifles (new)	\$3 000 - \$5 300
Military-style self loading rifles (used)	\$2 500 - \$5 500
Self loading shotguns (new)	\$10 000
Self loading shotguns (used)	\$2 500 - \$7 500

Reproduced from **The Australian Firearms Buyback Compensation Handbook**, Government Publishers, Canberra, 1996.

Sites for the programmes included town halls, police stations (in New South Wales) and, in remote areas, mobile collection centres. The buy-back was conducted on a 'no questions asked' basis with amnesty from prosecution, and both registered and unregistered guns were paid for. Participants were requested to bring their firearms unloaded and in a bag or covered to the collection centre. A Firearms Information Line operated for the duration of the programme to answer any queries.

The programme had strong public and government support and the authorities conducted a large media campaign to draw attention to it. During the last few weeks of the programme the government expected to spend Aus \$1.3 million, in a final media campaign to bring in the remaining firearm owners. It was estimated by government authorities that 75 per cent of gun owners had participated in the programme by the end of August 1997.⁴⁸ although this figure is difficult to quantify as there are no accurate statistics on firearm ownership in Australia.

Another important element of the *National Firearms Program Implementation Act 1996* was the national public education campaign which sought to improve peoples' awareness of the issue of firearms and the risks associated with the unsafe use and storage of firearms.

In assessing the programme, one government official noted two things that might have been done differently.⁴⁹ The first was to have garnered greater public support from the outset. The initial reaction from the pro-gun lobby in Australia was strong. An estimated 70 000 people demonstrated in Melbourne against the proposed ban, and politicians came under attack.⁵⁰ The other area identified as possibly benefiting from a different approach was the co-ordination between federal, state and territorial agencies. It is thought that the impact of the programme would have been greater had all the programmes commenced at the same time. It was also noted that it would have been preferable if all collection centres could have been away from police stations.

United States of America

The United States has one of the highest firearms ownership rates in the world: an estimated 192 million legal firearms, of which about 65 million are handguns, and an unknown number of illegal weapons. It also has some of the most complicated legislation on firearm possession and use, with the federal, state and local governments all able to enact laws.

There have been more weapons collection programmes in the United States than anywhere else in the world, and arguably they are more controversial there than anywhere else. More than eighty VWCPs are known to have taken place in the United States, with most being concentrated in urban areas.

Large programmes have been undertaken in St Louis, Missouri, Oakland, California and Boston, Massachusetts. Each has had its own approach, but, as in the cases discussed above, there are similarities between them. Each has raised funds from local businesses, individuals, corporations, or local government; provided incentives in exchange for a firearm; undertaken extensive media campaigns; mobilised community support and assistance; and chosen locations that are likely to encourage the highest participation. This section will focus mainly on the VWCP run in Oakland in 1995, but will also draw on some of the common points of contact between all programmes run in the United States.

Incentives used in the United States have ranged from crucifixes being handed out by a priest, to cash, concert tickets, sporting goods, visits to a psychiatrist and used computers. The varying rates of success programmes have had using these incentives (the priest had no one take up his offer) show the importance of selecting an incentive that meets the needs of the local community and will encourage participation.

The location of the VWCP is also extremely important. Most have been held in church or community

centre parking lots, locations that are easily secured, have high visibility and can be reached by public transportation. Most programmes do not use police stations as collection points, although the police are often involved at the collection sites.

Some programmes, such as the one in Oakland, California which exchanged firearms for used computers and computer lessons, are part of larger programmes designed to teach children and adults about responsible firearm use and ownership and alternatives to violence.

The Oakland programme was held for the first time in October 1995 at a local church. It was co-ordinated by the city of Oakland and the police department in conjunction with the local bar association, the Oakland Raiders football team, local law firms and individuals. Donations were collected totalling US \$10 000 which was used to purchase refurbished computers from a local company. The programme, known as 'Byte the Bullet', offered participants either computers, Raiders tickets or other prizes on a one-per-family basis.

Only working firearms were eligible for a prize and pellet guns did not qualify. The programme was conducted anonymously. Each participant was requested to bring his/her firearm unloaded in a box in the boot of a car. Once at the collection site the weapon was removed by a weapons specialist and rendered inoperable. By the time the programme ended five hundred people had participated. Three hundred were given promissory notes after the available incentives ran out, and the police department raised money to purchase more computers. Weapons collected ranged from pistols to assault rifles.

The programme was the "*first step in the most comprehensive gun prevention programme in the country*".⁵¹ Other elements of the programme included stricter enforcement of regulations on firearm possession and use, gun safety education programmes, a weapons destruction programme that required police officers to go to homes and offices to collect unwanted firearms and the creation of a Gun Tip Hotline to report illegal gun activity.⁵²

FACTORS IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A VWCP

Many factors are critical in designing a VWCP so that in the planning and staging it will fulfil the organisers' goals. This section will outline some of the most important elements in developing a VWCP, namely location, organisation, incentives, publicity, timing, identification of programme goals and objectives, firearm turn-in policies and implementation.

Location

As has been seen in the series of case studies of VWCPs, the sites for the programmes are often locations other than police stations. Especially in communities where the police are not trusted and/or for those programmes which hope to collect illegal weapons, alternate venues are preferred.

Often churches, other places of worship or community centres are used as collection sites. They provide a location which is well-known in the neighbourhood and seen as neutral. Some VWCPs, which are operated on a mobile basis, go to pre-determined locations which are announced beforehand, or, as in the case of Mozambique and Nicaragua, the organisers go to homes, community centres or areas where it is known that arms caches exist.

Prior to site selection, an analysis of the location should be conducted, which indicates the proximity of the site to schools, children, citizen traffic or areas where criminals might loiter.⁵³ In choosing a site, thought should also be given to the ease of access for community members participating in the programme (e.g., near to public transportation). There must also be a secure area in which collected firearms can be kept prior to being taken away for storage or destruction. Other recommendations include equipping each site with a container in which firearms can be disarmed, necessary supplies, voluntary surrender forms, inventory sheets and property tags for firearm identification.

Organisation

The planning of a VWCP is extremely important. Incomplete or insufficient organisation can seriously hamper the operation of the programme. Suggestions by organisations which have conducted VWCPs generally agree on a few key areas.

First, it is important to begin planning early. The longer the period leading up to the VWCP, the greater the possibility of identifying complications, securing funding and of organising volunteers and public security officers.

It is necessary to understand the current laws and regulations in the area in which the VWCP is to be conducted. In some countries or provinces providing an amnesty requires amending existing statutes. In others the carrying of firearms in public may be prohibited and regulations must be amended or suspended to allow people to participate in the programme.

Any immunity from prosecution to be permitted during the VWCP must also be evaluated in light of existing legislation. In New Jersey, USA, for example, the relevant statute grants limited immunity to the person surrendering the firearms under the following conditions:

- *"Prior written notice of intent to surrender the firearm, including the proposed date and time of surrender."*
- *The weapon is surrendered to the superintendent of the State Police or to the chief of police in the municipality in which the person surrendering the firearms resides.*
- *The person surrendering the firearm must not already be charged with, or under investigation for, the unlawful possession of the firearm to be surrendered."*⁵⁴

Second, the decision on incentives to be used and the amount of money to be raised, including from whom it will be raised, must also be decided upon early in the planning of a VWCP. The options for fund-raising are quite broad. Some programmes have used donations from professional sports teams, merchandise from local stores and food vouchers, while others have combined funding received from local government with that from international donors, or have levied a surcharge on existing tax or services.⁵⁵

The amount to be raised will depend largely on what type of incentive is to be offered. If in-kind (non-cash) incentives are to be used and donations of useable goods have been successful, the actual cash amount will largely be needed for promotion materials and the purchase of supplies. If, however, cash is to be used as the incentive, or to purchase non-cash vouchers or equipment, the amount raised will need to include an estimate of the number of weapons expected to be collected and the price range that is to be offered.

Third, potential sponsors of the programme should be identified and their support ascertained well in advance of the projected date. Sponsors should include local law enforcement agencies who will be responsible for securing firearms received and checking that they are not loaded and, if required by the programme organisers, functional. Police or other local security officers should also be responsible for the transport of the collected firearms to their final destination.

Other sponsors may include local politicians, civic organisations, community groups, religious leaders, corporations and local media. Each can assist in the organisation, fund-raising and publicising of the event. In the case of South Africa the certificate bearing the signature of President Nelson Mandela was given to each participant as a special incentive.

Fourth, the recruiting of volunteers and the identification of duties and responsibilities should also be confirmed early in the planning of a VWCP. Volunteers can be used to assist in publicising the event, handing out flyers and posting signs, as well as in raising funds or securing donations. On the day of the

programme they are necessary to assist participants in turning in their weapons, especially in the case of those who may be reticent to approach the police officer receiving the firearms. As has been noted, VWCPs organised by communities use volunteers or religious officials to receive the firearms from participants, after which the weapon is handed to a police officer to be disabled and safely stored.

Incentives

Incentives offered vary widely between programmes. The programmes described above included incentives ranging from cash and vouchers which could be redeemed for cash, to housing or construction materials, motor vehicles, wind-up radios, shoes, used computers and computer lessons, sporting tickets, food vouchers and numerous others. The decision regarding which type of incentive to offer will often depend on the circumstances under which the VWCP is to be conducted. Those organised by governments have tended to use cash or cash vouchers, while those organised by community groups and donor agencies tend to favour non-cash incentives.

The use of cash is often discouraged, as it has on occasion been abused by gun dealers turning in surplus stocks, or middle-men using the opportunity of a bordering country to engage in arms trafficking for the purpose of selling the weapons at the buy-back.

Often, the incentive used will be determined by the sponsors and the organisations making donations. Thought should also be given to the needs of the community. Those in developing countries, for example Nicaragua and Mozambique, benefit from incentives which are useful to the participants, while the buy-back in Australia was intended to reimburse owners for the cost of the weapon they were obliged to surrender.

If cash is used, careful consideration must be given to the amount offered. Organisers often decide that non-functional weapons should be accepted, but should not be reimbursed. Australian officials used two categories of weapons: used or new (new being those which had never been fired), basing their compensation on the average sales price listed in firearms dealers' catalogues in Australia on a certain date. In Haiti, the United States army initially offered prices higher than current black market prices. As the presence of middle-men bringing in multiple weapons and suspected of trafficking weapons from the neighbouring Dominican Republic was identified, however, the prices offered were halved. Compensation rates also vary depending on the type of weapon being turned-in (handgun versus long gun) and the calibre of the weapon.

In the case of the Nicaraguan programme in which an amount of US \$300 - \$500 was offered to participants for use as seed money in a development project, no long-term evaluation exists of whether or not the money was used for a development project and whether any projects which were implemented were a success.

Publicity

Publicity has been identified by VWCP planners as one of the most important factors in conducting a successful programme. Without publicity there would be no participants, without participants no programme. This holds especially true for those programmes where one of the primary objectives is to increase awareness of gun violence and mishaps which may occur due to improperly stored or secured firearms in a home.

All types of media, print, television and radio should be utilised, with the focus on that forum to which the majority of the people in the community have access. Enlisting the support of local radio personalities or television news anchors may also help to increase the profile of the programme.

Publicity material should clearly state the name, date, place and time of the programme, by whom it is organised, who are eligible participants, whether or not the programme is being conducted on a 'no questions asked' or amnesty basis, what are being offered as incentives, which weapons will be accepted (functional versus non-functional or toy weapons, types and calibres, etc.) and the conditions under

which the firearm must be transported to the site. Weapons should be carried unloaded and secure in a closed and fastened container (which can include a gym bag or backpack) or be transported in the boot of a vehicle. Some recommend that the weapon be handed over in a sealed transparent plastic bag to prevent any suspicion of misuse.

Duration and Timing

The duration of a VWCP is dependent on many factors, including the amount of funds raised, the size of the programme, the expectations of the organisers and logistical realities. Recent programmes have ranged from one day, as in South Africa and many local communities, to several weeks or months to one year, as in Australia.

The duration and timing of a VWCP should take into account when most people would be able to participate, and when the sites selected would be available. For these reasons, VWCPs in the United States have often been held on Saturdays, when church parking areas are usually empty, and therefore available, and many people do not have to work. This also tends to be a quiet time for local media, ensuring coverage of the event.

If the popularity of a programme exceeds expectations, the programme is often extended by the use of promissory notes, should the store of incentives have already been depleted. The programmes which have received the highest number of turned-in weapons have been those run over weeks or months rather than days. This approach has several advantages:

- It allows potential participants to judge the preliminary response to the programme and, if positive, may induce them to participate also.
- It permits more publicity and greater spreading by word of mouth about the programme.
- It shows the commitment of the organisers to the goals of the programme and a longer-term commitment to reducing weapons in the community. The VWCP conducted in Oakland, California was part of an eighteen-month gun reduction strategy being conducted by federal, state and local agencies. The exchange programme was developed as a kick-off for the total campaign and continued for the full duration to allow people to turn in weapons.⁵⁶

In the organisation of any event, it is important to consider local factors which may affect participation. In the case of weapons collection programmes this is particularly true. In planning these, organisers must be conscious of recent events which may hinder or improve the programme. Feelings regarding personal safety among the population may affect the turn-in negatively or positively. The same is true of the prevailing political situation. To have a programme which is run in adherence with local laws, the support of local government officials is necessary. Endorsement by elected or public officials can also reassure potential participants.

Thus the planning factors outlined will prove most useful to organisers when they are tailored to meet the needs of each particular programme design and not copied exactly from other, perhaps quite different, programmes.

CONCLUSION

The collection of weapons already circulating is one of the greatest challenges facing policy makers. While this is especially true of illegal weapons, it can also be the case in the collection of legal weapons. The vast number of these weapons has necessitated new approaches to gun control and arms control that are voluntary and involve the local communities. VWCPs are one way in which this collection can be undertaken.

The debate surrounding these programmes as a policy tool for collecting weapons will probably not subside. The same elements that attract support are the focus of criticism. The difficulty in obtaining measurable outcomes hinders any process of evaluation or assessment as to the utility of these programmes. However, in the absence of other alternatives, they seem to be likely to continue.

This monograph has not attempted to solve the debate over the use of VWCPs. It has sought rather to present an overview of programmes that have been undertaken and to examine some of the factors behind the development and implementation of these. It remains to be seen whether VWCPs within countries will develop into more established programmes or remain the current *ad hoc* measures they often are. In Australia, the buy-back programme was clearly a one-off approach to a one-time problem: the collection of semi-automatic rifles and shotguns. In other situations it is clear that a single collection programme will not achieve all the organisers wish for and will be met with public demand for an on-going programme. This has clearly been the case in El Salvador.

The third option is to use VWCPs as 'kick-off' events for longer-term, more comprehensive approaches to firearm-related issues, as was done in Oakland, California. It is this approach which appears the most likely to succeed. As has been seen in other problem areas, such as drug enforcement or arms smuggling, for instance, addressing only one aspect of the problem, drug users or arms traffickers, does not achieve the desired result. It seems that the need for a multifaceted approach to modern security problems, in which there is a multi-disciplinary study of the issue, is as necessary in addressing gun-related events.

The utility of VWCPs lies in that their approach to firearms incorporates multiple actors and organisations, drawing attention to issues that people give little thought to including firearms possession, whether the owner still needs or wants the firearm and, if the option were available, whether the owner would choose to dispose of the firearm. However, by their very nature, VWCPs leave many issues untouched and many questions unanswered. This is where other programmes become valuable: education, awareness and policy interventions, including enforcement of existing legislation and stricter penalties for non-compliance. However the utility of a voluntary weapons collection programme under the right circumstances and with the proper design should not be underestimated.

ENDNOTES

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