

Small Arms And Light Weapons Proliferation In Nigeria: Implication For National Security And Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract

The paper examined the phenomenon of small and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria and its implications for national security and development. It reflected on the dialectical relationship between security and development and argued that the wide spread circulation of small arms and light weapons had exacerbated the already deteriorating security situation in Nigeria. The paper posited that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Nigerian polity fuels unnecessary communal conflicts, causes political instability, prevents the delivery of humanitarian and economic aid, contributes to refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs) populations, and ultimately undermines national security and development. To curb this menace, the paper suggested that the factors that create the demand for small arms and light weapons and the sources of their illegal supply should be critically looked into with a view to addressing them.

Keywords: *small arms, light weapons, proliferation, national security, development.*

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I. Introduction

While small arms and light weapons do not of course cause conflicts, they soon become part of the conflict equation by fueling and exacerbating underlying tensions, generating more insecurity and adding to the number of casualties (Ero and Udinga Muru-Mba, 2004:224).

The above assertion underscores the far-reaching negative implications of proliferation of small arms in our society, especially in this era of multiple security threats facing the Nigerian state. Globally, national governments have been fighting to manage the issue of illicit and indiscriminate proliferation of small and light weapons. Indeed, the scope and nature of security and other issues of concern facing states seem to have received renewed attention, especially since the end of the Second World War.

Nigeria has, in the past decades experienced an increase in violent criminal activities occasioned by the circulation of small arms within the polity. The proliferation of these illicit arms and ammunition has been attributed to electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry and religious intolerance, coupled with high level of poverty and unemployment (Bashir, 2014).

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons is considered as one of the most immediate security challenges to individuals, societies and states worldwide fueling civil wars, organized criminal violence, insurgency and terrorist activities. These security breaches pose great obstacles to sustainable security and development, as often times small insurgencies tend to develop into larger civil wars and possibly destabilize the entire nation. This trend, especially in Nigeria and indeed the entire African continent, is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the state and its attendant failure to deliver good governance. Again, as has been observed by Bashir (2014:1), small arms and light weapons are often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or decay development projects, and hinder peacekeeping and peace-building efforts. The practice is usually that when conflicts end, small arms often remain in circulation, which may lead to additional violence and suffering since fighting can resume or conflicts may erupt in neighbouring regions.

In conflict areas, some arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in homicides, suicides and accidents. They are frequently the primary tools of terrorists bent on sowing chaos and discords (Stohl and Hogendoom, 2010, cited in Bashir 2014:260).

This paper is subdivided into five broad sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section deals with conceptual analysis, while section three gives a general overview of scholarly perspectives on small arms and light weapons proliferation, and their sources in Nigeria. Section four examines the implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons for Nigeria's national security and development, while section five concludes the paper with suggested measures for curbing the menace of illicit small arms and light weapons in the Nigerian polity.

II. Related Work/Literature Review

There seems not to be a universally acceptable definition of small arms and light weapons in recent literature. However, small arms and light weapons (SALW) have been conceptualized in different international and regional instruments, and also in national status. A common observation emanating from the different definitions is that the term "small arms and light weapon" covers a wide spectrum of weapons, their ammunition and their spare parts (United Nations document, 1997). The ECOWAS convention on small arms and light weapons, their ammunition and other related materials (2006), which is the West African sub-regional benchmark for regulating small arms and light weapons, provides the following definitions.

Small arms:

These refer to arms designed for personal use and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding or a gas bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system or a mine. (i) revolvers and pistols with automatic loading (ii) rifles and carbines (iii) machine guns (iv) assault rifles (v) light machine guns.

Light weapons:

Light arms refer to the following portable arms designed to be used by several people working together in a team: (i) heavy machine guns (ii) portable grenade launcher, mobile or mounted (iii) portable anti-aircraft cannons, (iv) portable antitank cannons, non-recoil guns (v) portable antitank missile launchers or rocket launchers (vi) mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeter (vii) cartridges munitions for small caliber weapons, (viii) projectiles and missiles for small arms (ix) mobile containers with missiles or projectiles for anti-aircraft or antitank simple action systems.

Other related materials

Literally, small arms and light weapons (SALW) range from clubs, knives and machetes to weapons just below the UN register of conventional arms; but the specific weapons broadly categorized as SALW, under the official definitions, contained in international instruments have specific attributes, which on the whole, make them highly favoured for irregular warfare and criminality. They are widely available, low in cost, extremely lethal, simple to use, durable, very portable, easily concealed and possess legitimate military police and civilian uses (making them present in virtually every society) (Chuma-Okoro. 2011:260).

Socio-economic development:

The essence and substance of socio-economic development can be better appreciated by conceptualizing and understanding development generally. The term "development" is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon (Abunimye et al, 2022:51) it is seen as a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological and social realities among others (Amucheazi 1980:41). As pointed out by Ettah (2012:35), development must be appropriately differentiated from economic growth, measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or per capita income. Almond and Powell (1966), argued that "growth is conceivable when the political system can articulate and aggregate public interests, allocate resources and, maintain law and order through well-functioning structures" Development, on the other hand, writes Ettah (2012:36), "the sustained elevation of a community and social structure towards a higher or more civilized existence" As pointed out by Seers (1972:20), development entails the conditions for the realization of the human personality, it therefore involves the process of change in state of affairs which moves from lower to higher levels. Umo (2007), maintained that development connotes the provision of basic needs that ensure better living conditions, such as health facilities, clothing, shelter, food and basic education. The absence of these needs therefore indicate a complete absence of development and prevalence of poverty. "The goal development is to improve the quality of life of the citizenry, especially in developing countries. Better school, a higher level of health, and wellbeing, less hunger, greater social independence, and a richer cultural life are all factors that contribute to a higher quality of life"(World Bank). Imhonopi and Urim (2013:16), conclude that

development connotes the ability of a nation or country to improve the living standards of its people by providing social amenities such as safe portable water, good qualitative education, healthcare services, good roads, housing etc. sustainable economic development therefore, implies the judicious utilization of resources for the benefit of present and future generations. “it is the maintenance and sustenance of a high real growth rate of the economy to achieve the development or economic objectives” (World Bank, 1997:4).

National security:

The imperative of enhancing national security architecture for sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. In the last one and a half decade, Nigeria has come under renewed multiple security threats ranging from incessant terrorist attacks, kidnapping for ransom, religious intolerance and violence, ethnic nationalism, crude oil theft, poverty and hunger, unstable power supply, near absence of infrastructural development, and general dearth of transformational leadership, etc.

Broadly speaking the term “security” connotes care and safety. It represents a state of being protected from danger or anxiety. According to Agba & Aide (2020:22) security refers to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and safeguarding of human life and resources. It also includes the absence of danger or crises to human dignity, all of which enhance development and progress of human society, freedom from threats, fear and apprehension.

Fagbohum, (2011) noted that national security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through of economy, diplomacy, power projection and political power. Commenting on Abubakar (2013) printed out that national security is the podium of democracy that loses security imperative; it has lost real substance. Corroborating Abubarka’s position above and further emphasizing the relationship between (2013), maintained that national security means sustainable development whereby a nation enjoys freedom from poverty, ignorance, disease and other forms of vulnerability. National security is thus a comprehensive effort of the state toward mobilizing power and resources for the safe guide of its territorial of its people. National security, according to Okorafor et al. (2012), is the sum of the efforts, energy, intelligence, commitment and the use of institutions (and their products) to enforce and ensure adequate protection of national interests, people and properties of a nation. Socio-economic development cannot in an atmosphere that is not secure and supportive of trade and investment. National security, therefore, precedes any meaningful socio-economic development. Writing on the essence of national security and socio-economic development, Babangida (2012), referred to defence of a nation’s citizens and territorial integrity, of which is a part, but also the promotion of the economic wellbeing and prosperity of the nation in a safe and secure environment that promotes the obtainment of national interests and those of foreign partners”

National security is thus, the protection of national survival (Brennam 1961:172), the desire capacity for self-defense (Ray, 1987:82), the amassment of military armament, personnel and expenditure. National security is more than territorial defense and should focus on the physical, social and psychological equality of life of a society and its members both in the domestic setting and global system. Thus, socio-economic and cultural aspects, problems of development and modernization, are some of the important aspects of national security consideration.

Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Conceptual Discourse

In Nigeria, and indeed the entire African continent, the sources of SALW proliferation are many and varied (Abdel-Fatau, 2011). However, while international efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons tend to concentrate on the manufacture and supply of new weapons, a major source of SALW remains the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s by the defunct Soviet Union, the USA and their allies to fan proxy intra-state and interstate wars. These left over weapons have found their way through clandestine networks involving rogue arms brokers, private military companies, shady airline companies and local smugglers to exacerbate on-going conflicts and facilitate the commencement of new ones in the continent (Abdel-Fatau, 2011:14). Imogighe (1989:16), has identified two major factors as responsible for the ease of transferring SALW within Africa. The first is that borders inherited by Africans are badly demarcated; hence, they are easily crossed. He further stressed that these boundaries inherited by African states were arbitrarily drawn by European imperialists who colonized almost the entire continent. Corrugating the above position, Diarra (2005:35), posited that the most profound principal cause of the increased proliferation of SALW is the unregulated movement of people across the states of Africa. Generally, most African states have porous borders which make the movement of people and goods across national boundaries very easy. This ease of movement across national boundaries makes trafficking in small arms and light weapons across Nigeria’s borders with Niger Republic, Chad and the Camerouns equally easy, hence the widespread circulation of illicit arms in the polity. The second factor identified by Imogighe, is the portable and small nature of the arms, which makes them easy to conceal. The point to note here is that the proliferation of these illicit arms and ammunitions exacerbates conflicts, spark refugee flows, undermines the rule of law and has promoted a new

culture of armed violence and lawlessness. Again, Abdel Fatau (2011:42), is at pains to point out that small arms and light weapons (SALW) have found their way into the hands of civilian from official sources due to a combination of factors, including the breakdown of state structure, tax controls over national armories and poor service conditions for security personnel. In the words of Langumba (2010:15), “the widespread availability of small arms to abusive actors poses a threat of unprecedented magnitude to West Africa, far greater than that of HIV/AIDs in terms of its socio-economic and human consequences”.

Historical Perspectives on Small Arms And Light Weapons Proliferation In Nigeria

Extant literature has shown that gun possession by civilians in Nigeria predates the colonial era. Guns were said to have been introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans (Chuma-Okoro, 2011:276); Okeke, V. O. S, & Oji, R. O., 2014:421). Because colonial imperialism was aimed at exploiting the vast economic resources of Africa, guns became the instrument by which force was applied to suppress Africans’ resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. For instance, the popular gun boat diplomacy was employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them. Indeed, as noted by Chuma-Okoro (2011:276), these arms or guns possibly found their ways into the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism, subsequently were used for traditional hunting in the rural communities. With the passage of time therefore, guns and gun powder became associated with power and strength and thus became instruments of domestic traditional display during funerals, burial ceremonies and customary festivals, among natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeur, and for deterring aggressors and invaders.

Today, guns are not only seen as ornaments of prestige or just for hunting safari and expedition, they have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma-Okoro, 2011:277). Furthermore, it has been argued that the failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. It is therefore estimated that, the number of arms and light weapons in circulation in Nigeria both those in lawful possession of members of the armed forces and the police and those (majority) in the hands of civilians, range from 5-12 million (Onuoha, 2006:346).

Sources Of Small And Light Weapons In Nigeria

The sources of SALW in Africa, according to Abdel-fatau, (2011:72) are many and varied. In Nigeria for instance, the sources according to Edeko (2011:83) are international, regional and sub-regional. After the end of the cold war, the deregulation of former state arms industries in eastern and central Europe led to an aggressive search for new arms markets in the developing world. Through the activities of states, arms brokers and mercenaries, thousands of weapons have been transferred into Nigeria and are used by state security forces, the security personnel of oil companies and insurgent groups (Onuoha, 2006). Some of the commonest weapons traded in Nigeria Onuoha further points out include semi-automatic rifles, short guns, machine guns and shoulder-fired rockets at prices ranging from around US\$570 for a short gun, or US\$850 for a kalashriko rifle, US\$2,150 for a shoulder rifle rocket.

Furthermore, insurgents have been known to steal or purchase small arms from Nigerian armed forces personnel. Sometimes, these personnel double as arms dealers. However, the reason from official sources include: the breakdown of state structures, lax control over national armories and poor service condition of state security personnel.

III. Methods And Materials

The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons is responsible for the high level insecurity and economic underdevelopment in Nigeria today. In carrying out the research the paper utilized both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Primary sources of data were obtained from interview and personal observation of the deteriorating security dilemma in Nigeria. The secondary sources comprised documentary materials such as journals, articles, textbooks, internet material, as well as security bulletins. The data obtained were analyzed using the inductive analytical technique, which Bierrenu-Nnabugwu (2006:379), argues is geared towards the development of explanatory models based on issues or seeks to find casual explanations for the phenomenon under study.

IV. Result And Discussion

Implications Of the Proliferation Of Small Arms And Light Weapons For Nigeria’s National Security And Development

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often seen as one of the major security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The growing prevalence of communal conflict,

political instability brought about by trafficking and wide availability of these weapons pose a threat not only to national security but to sustainable development.

The fundamental implication of small and light weapons accumulation and circulation for the Nigerian state is in its tendency to provide ground for higher risks of armed violence. Stohl and Hogendoorm (2009:112), maintained that African countries have experienced direct, and indirect and consequential impacts of weapons proliferation. They argued that thousands of people, civilians and combatants, are killed or injured every year on the continent, yet, even when death or injury is avoided, small arms proliferation and misuse can dramatically impact a community, country or religion's landscapes. The threat and use of small arms undermines development, prevents the delivery of humanitarian and economic aid, and contribute to refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) populations.

The widespread circulation of arms stimulates violence instead of dialogue and has many undesirable effects for example, high level of armed violence, hinder development, causes diversion of local resources, misuse of public money or imposition of "might is right" Bashir, (2014:91). Indeed, no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere which is conducive to the production, circulation and indiscriminate use of small arms. This is because there is a relationship among small arms control, security and development. The crises and chaos generated by small arms and light weapons proliferation prevent people from conducting businesses, leading to a reduction in trade and foreign direct investments. Furthermore, SALW fuel illicit sale of natural resources such as oil, minerals and timber. Describing the enormous impact of conflicts precipitated by the widespread availability and utilization of SALW on the African continent, Stohl and Hogendoorn (2010:54) again lamented that conflict cause widespread death and destruction, trigger huge refugee flows, and undermine development throughout the region. Using Nigeria as a case in point, they observed that by the time the conflicts in that country ended in 2003, the United States had spent more than \$430 million mostly on food aid. The regional peace keeping initiative, ECOMOG, gulped more than \$4 billion. The United Nations Observer Mission (UNOMIL), equally gulped some \$104 million from 1993 to September, 1997.

The precarious security situation in the Niger Delta can be attributed to the proliferation and circulation of small arms and light weapons in the region. The implication of this is that Nigeria's national security, in both human and economic terms, has been adversely affected. The escalation of violence, loss of lives and property and unabated proliferation of small arms since 2003 have turn the country into a total hopelessness (Bashir, 2014:121). Nigeria's experience in the Niger Delta region due to armed militancy against the federal government and oil multinational companies is a grim one. The activities of emancipatory armed groups in the Niger Delta such as the Niger Delta people's volunteer force (NDPVF), movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta strike force (NDSF), to mention just a few have over the past two decades, tasked the Nigerian armed forces and slow down socio-economic activities in the region. These have put additional strains on our national resources in terms of providing security for the population and oil companies operating in the region. Again, the vandalization of oil installations, resulting in oil spills, has adversely affected federally collected revenue and degrades arable farmlands and aquatic lives in the Niger Delta region.

Furthermore, illicit arms and ammunition create insecurity which makes investments unattractive to investors. This is because it increases the cost of doing business, either through direct loss of lives and properties or the cost of taking precautions against business risks and uncertainty. These costs could have a negative effect on investment, making economic growth and development difficult (Sunday et al, 2024:28).

V. Conclusion And Future Scope

The paper focused on the problems of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their implication for Nigeria's national security and development. The paper argued that development cannot occur in an atmosphere congenial to the proliferation and circulation of illicit SALW. The paper maintained that SALW proliferation has far-reaching adverse implications for national security and development. For instance, it was shown that the widespread circulation of illicit arms stimulates violence. This also hinders development, causes the diversion of local resources and the misuse of public funds.

Considering the rate at which illicit small arms and light weapons proliferation spread, the paper concluded by drawing the attention of the federal government, and other partners to the need to frontally address the sources from which these illicit arms and ammunition proliferate. This is to ensure that the volume of arms, ammunition and light weapons in the hands of militant and emancipatory groups in Nigeria poses no severe threats to its sovereignty and internal peace and security. To stem the tide of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Nigerian polity, pragmatic and actionable measures as suggested below, should be exerted.

First, the federal government should direct its efforts not only to preventing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons but also towards checking the excessive accumulation of arms beyond national need.

This is because excessive procurement of arms and ammunition for security agencies creates room for some quantum of such arms to get into the hands of illicit arms dealers, who also sell them to criminals and militant groups.

Second, the regulatory authorities that grant gun possession licenses to private individuals should make the criteria for qualification to bear arms stricter. This can be done by reviewing the minimum age of 17 years for possession of firearms upwards because of the tendency of youngsters to use arms indiscriminately, either to intimidate or rob people.

Furthermore, the federal government should strengthen the customs service so that it can effectively police our borders with neighbouring Francophone countries, especially Chad, Niger and the Camerouns, where our international borders are porous. These are avenues through which illicit arms and ammunition get into the country.

Finally, the factors that give rise to the sprouting of emancipatory groups such as those in the Niger Delta and the indigenous peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Odua People's Congress (OPC), and religious fundamentalist groups in the north of the country, like Boko haram, should be addressed. This is because these groups are the ones that illegally acquire firearms through our porous borders to enable them to arm themselves towards projecting their interest. If not in use by group members, such arms and ammunition find their way into the hands of armed robbers, kidnappers and herdsmen, who use them and cause insecurity in the country.

Data Availability

Not applicable

Conflict of Interest

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