

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Its Implication for West African Regional Security

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Abstract

One of the fundamental obstacles to peace and security in West Africa is the presence and continued proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The proliferation of small arms constitutes a major source of destruction to lives and properties and exacerbates inter-communal tensions leading to full-fledge conflicts. Most of the West African borders are porous, thus, making it easy for entry and exit of arms, drugs, as well as traffic of humans. More so, the high level of corruption in most of these countries compounds these security challenges especially face by states and the regional efforts at large. This study examines the impacts of small arms proliferation on the West African regional security; it assesses the efforts of the regional body in combating the menace with a view to proffer suggestions on how to address the threat. The study concludes that, the debilitating economy, failure of states to deliver the basic necessities of life, insecurity, and rising rates of unemployment, and above all corruption are some of the major internal factors that serve as obstacles to meaningful efforts at combating the problem in the region. It therefore posits that all hands must to be on deck at all levels to address the problem, considering the important role of the region to the continent, and to the sustainable development of global peace and security.

Keywords: Small Arms, Light Weapons, Disarmament, Insurgency, Proliferation

Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is adjudged as the most immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states worldwide, fuelling civil wars, organized criminal violence, insurgency and terrorist activities posing great obstacles to sustainable security and development. Many a times small insurgencies tend to developed into larger civil wars and possibly destabilize an entire region. This trend especially in Africa is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the states and their attendant failure to deliver in governance. Small arms and light weapons are often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or delay development projects, and hinder peace-keeping and peace-building efforts. When conflicts end or subside, small arms often remain in circulation, which may lead to additional violence and suffering since fighting can resume or conflicts may erupt in neighboring regions. In non-conflict areas small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in homicides, suicides, and accidents. And they are frequently the primary tools of terrorists bent on sowing chaos and discord (Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010).

A vast number of weapons are in public and private hands. According to the Small Arms Survey there are at least 875 million firearms in the world (Small Arms Survey, 2007). There are more than 1,200 companies in 90 countries that produce small arms (Small Arms Survey 2004) SALW kill between 500,000 and 750,000 people annually and are a “contributory factor to armed conflict, the displacement of people, organized crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development” (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2011, 1–2). It is equally responsible for fueling crime and sustain armed conflicts world over, facilitating terrorism and creating anarchy after civil wars.

Burundi, Ghana, Yemen, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Guinea are few of many countries that suffer from this menace (Malhotra, 2011.p.3).

The proliferation of these small arms and the new emergent trend in violence in the region put to question the efficacy and general commitment of the region in combating the menace. It was established that there are estimated 7 million SALW in the West African Sub-region of which 77,000 are in the hands of major West African insurgent groups. SALW have particularly fuelled conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo and the Sub-region is still struggling to survive ongoing conflicts in which small arms play a central and destabilizing role in Nigeria, Ghana. The growing proliferation in geometric progression poses a serious threat and challenge to the region, exacerbating human suffering, threaten peace, security, and sustainable development. This article examines the effects of small arms proliferation in West Africa and how the region wakes up or responds to the challenges basing primarily on existing scholarly works on SALW control.

Conceptual Definitions

The following provide operationalisation of some concepts as used in the research:

Small arms: These include, but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns.

Light weapons: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm. (Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, UN document A/52/298, 27 August 1997).

Methodology

The method adopted in the course of this research is content analysis using mainly secondary data. The secondary data include existing literature on the topic such as books, journals, conference papers, ECOWAS publications and news papers and other related documents.

Literature Review

Sources of Small Arms in the West African Sub-region

The proliferation of arms in West Africa could be attributed to a number of factors, prominent among them were: the surplus arms that were provided during the cold war by the two opposing super powers, these arms were pumped to serve proxy inter-state conflicts; Massive flow of weapons from central and Eastern Europe and the loosening control of arms industry as a result of the collapse of Soviet Union. Following the end of cold war, these arms in circulation lost their way into the hands of illegal arms dealers, security entrepreneurs, ethnic militia groups, private military companies, and local smugglers there by fueling on-going wars and facilitating the commencement of new ones in Africa. Also, the accelerated pace of globalization in the same period facilitated both legal and illegal cross-border transfers of these weapons, while a sudden upsurge in intra-state conflicts created an overwhelming demand for the SALW, thereby making them weapons of choice in majority of recent conflicts and in non-war settings such as sectarian violence (ethnic, religious and chieftaincy conflicts), suicides, murders, homicides and accidents.

More so, the intractable supplies from current and past conflict zones; other sources are stolen arms from the state security service, and leakage from government armories' in which corrupt law enforcement and military personnel selling their weapons; and growing domestic artisan production scattered across the sub-region, Senegal, Guinea, Ghana and Nigeria, which passes down established trade routes (Musa, 2002; Bah, 2004; Badmus, 2009).

An Overview of the Small Arms Proliferation and its Effects

The fundamental implication of small arms accumulation and circulation is in its tendency to pave ground for higher risk of armed violence. The supply of arms stimulates violence instead of dialogue and has many undesirable effects. For example, high levels of armed violence hinder development, causes diversion of local resources, misuse of public money or imposition of "Might is Right".

The interdependence of small arms control, security and development suggests that no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere which is conducive to the production and distribution of small arms. It prevents people from conducting business, leading to reduction in trade and foreign investment. In addition, SALW fuels the illicit trafficking of natural resources such as oil, minerals and timber.

In West Africa a civil war that started with several hundred insurgents in Liberia in 1989 later triggered fighting in neighboring Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Guinea. It took more than a decade of effort by the international community—principally through arms embargoes and peacekeeping operations—to stem the fighting. The fighting caused widespread death and destruction, triggered huge refugee flows, and undermined development throughout the region. The cost of the conflict in Liberia alone was enormous. By the time the war ended in 2003 the United States had spent more than \$430 million in Liberia, mostly on food aid. The regional peacekeeping operation, ECOMOG, cost more than \$4 billion. The United Nations observer mission, UNOMIL, cost some \$104 million from 1993 to September 1997. Also, U.N. mission, UNMIL, which peaked at approximately 15,000 personnel, cost several billion dollars from 2003 to 2007 (Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010).

Liberia's economy crumbled during the war. The civil war destroyed much of the remaining infrastructure and caused the flight of almost all Liberian human and financial capital. Between 1989 and 1995 real GDP declined to one-tenth its pre-war level and remained largely flat through 2004. During the war most formal economic activity ground to a halt, and life in much of the country was reduced to subsistence existence. Of the country's infrastructure, most of the road network was badly damaged, rail road connections were ruined, and the distribution of electricity and safe water was halted. The impact in the region has been similarly calamitous. The West Africa conflicts killed hundreds of thousands of people, cost the international community billions of dollars, and caused massive underdevelopment.

Nigeria has in the past decade witness increased violence and small arms circulation, its proliferation was attributed to the existence and stagnation of electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry and religious intolerance coupled with high level of poverty and unemployment. These key elements were viewed as basis upon which conflicts are fuel. Whereas, fractionalized political system, elite system, youth bulge, external support for local militia, and easy access of aggrieved groups to surplus small arms and light weapons serves as "triggers". However, of all the triggers, the issue of surplus arms is believed to be responsible for the violent conflicts in the West African sub-region. The phenomenon not only encouraged rebel movements to take up arms against their states, it also made peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention very difficult and even dangerous in the region.

This is especially nowhere explained better in the case of West Africa as Nigeria's Niger Deltas region where the deterioration of security is largely informed by the volume of small arms reaching and circulating in the region, the implication that seriously undermine Nigeria's national security in both human and economic terms. the escalation of violence, lost of lives and property and the unabated proliferation of small arms since 2003 have turn the country into a total hopelessness. Recently, on the 18th of September, 2013, This Day Newspaper reported that Nigerian Customs impounded a cargo from United State, which smuggled Arms concealed in house hold cargo. It arrived on the 16th /09/2013. Prior to this incidence on the 13th of April 2013 to be precise Daily trust News Paper reported that Nigeria Police detectives from Anambra and Delta States have uncovered arms factories in three communities in Delta State. Similarly, Daily Newswatch (Nigeria) 9 May 2013 has this headline: "Police Confirm 1 Million Illegal Guns in Nigeria":

Against the backdrop of mounting security challenges in Nigeria arising from the *Boko Haram* insurgency and ethno-religious crisis in the north as well as armed robbery and kidnapping in the south, it has been estimated that there are about one million illegally held guns in the country in civilian hands....."

Vanguard News Paper (Lagos, Nigeria) 17 March 2013 has this headline:

"39,880 Militants' Firearms, Ammunition Handed Over to Nigerian Army"

ENUGU — The 39,880 assorted firearms and ammunition recovered from former militants in the Niger Delta by the inter-agency taskforce set up by the Federal Government have been handed over to the 82 Division of the Nigerian Army. A breakdown of the arms handed over on Saturday at the 82 Division's parade ground included the following: 482 automatic arms, 20,132 ammunition, 295 magazines and 18,971 locally made guns. The General Officer Commanding the 82 Division... (GunPolicy.org)

Reports of this nature are enormous and endless in recent Nigeria's security predicament.

In Ghana local manufacturing of guns was identified as central in explaining the proliferation of illicit SALW. It represents the main source of proliferation of SALW in the country, in particular for pistols, shotguns and single-barrel guns. One striking feature of local gun production in Ghana is its relative sophistication; recent research has shown that gun-making, far from being obsolete, is increasingly elaborated and remains competitive in comparison to those circulating in the region. That Ghanaian blacksmiths all over the country have the potential to illegally produce over 200,000 weapons annually (Aning, 2003; 2005, p. 83). Increased rate of armed robberies and criminality, Ethnic conflicts, phenomenon of land guards, where youngsters whose function is to enforce the land claim(s) of their employer(s) against all rival claimants were manifest indicators of impact of small arms proliferation in Ghana. Of recent armed gangs are increasingly terrorizing wealthier suburbs of Accra, this is especially in residential areas, robberies of fuel station and Forex-bureaus, highway-robberies, and interpersonal and family disputes. According to the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms 56 percent of a total of 230,000 small arms manufactured in Ghana remains unlicensed, there are some 100,000 illicit weapons in circulation. Due to the demographic and urban changes in Ghana multiple ownerships over plots of land and cruel land fights has an issue of great concern, that despite strict intermission, guards are frequently deployed to protect territory, a development leading to shootings which regularly injure and kill people.

Studies indicates that people are very sensitive to electoral outcomes and that it is one of the biggest triggers of armed conflict in many countries in West Africa. Violence in Africa's elections affects between 19-25 percent of elections. The regularity with which electoral violence occurs suggests that underlying grievances or structural characteristics may be tied to the elections and fuel the violence (Bekoe, 2010) In recent past West Africa witness some of the worst moments of tension in Cote d'Ivoire, in (2010), Nigeria in (2003, 2007, and 2011 elections), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Niger, among others. In many of these conflicts, small arms remain the key instruments used to unleash violence on innocent people destroying thousands of lives and property, displacing millions of people. Jones & Hoetu, (2012) underscored that resort to violence serves as a basis for refusal to accept the outcome of declared election's results, sometimes, supporters of political parties resort to the use of small arms to protest against their dissatisfaction against the outcome of the votes – a development that resulted in a full blown armed conflict. These are indications that people may choose to express their frustration, suspicion and dissatisfaction with the outcome of the elections by resorting to the use of arms as it happened in Cote d'Ivoire in 2010.

Efforts at Combating the Menace by West African Sub-Region

The events that took place especially after the cold war, the outbreak of civil wars in the 1990s in many parts of the world including Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, all of which were fought primarily with small arms was one of the main motivations for the development of global and regional initiatives to curb the proliferation and illegal trade in SALW in the last two decades (Osman, 2010).

In 1993, the then Malian president Alpha Oumar Konare requested the then UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali send a UN mission to observe the effects of uncontrolled SALW proliferation in his country. By the late 1990s, SALW control became one of the most important security priorities of a large number of states (Garcia 2006, 18–19).

The search for a feasible and sustainable peace to the internal conflict in Mali led to the adoption in 1998 of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa. The broad aim of the Moratorium is to create an environment conducive to socio-economic development in the sub-region. The objectives of Moratorium regime are: It aims at preventing conflicts; post-conflict reconstructions; and stems the increasing wave of crime and banditry in the sub-region especially with the understanding that easy access and availability of small arms may lead to violent solutions to problems and their circulation within and across borders facilitates the formation of new armed groups and new conflicts; it also facilitates the use of untrained civilian militias, ill-disciplined fighters, and unaccountable mercenaries. Also, increase in socio-economic development in general and donor supported development projects in particular is the third objective of the Moratorium (Badmus, 2009).

An operational framework was put in place within the context of the Program for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa (PCASED) to facilitate implementation of measures associated with the moratorium.” (ECOWAS Moratorium 1999) PCASED is a regional project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that is executed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

PCASED predates the Moratorium, as it was originally intended to support the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Mission on the Proliferation of Light Weapons in the Sahel- Sahara sub-region. However, following the adoption of the Moratorium, the ECOWAS Heads of States and Government requested that PCASED become the central pillar in its implementation. Over the five-year period PCASED was expected to support the implementation of the moratorium in nine priority areas, these are: Establishing a culture of peace; Training programs for military, security, and police forces; Enhancing weapons controls at border posts; Establishing a database and regional arms register; Collecting and destroying surplus weapons; Facilitating dialogue with producer suppliers; Reviewing and harmonizing national legislation and administrative procedures; Mobilizing resources for PCASED objectives and activities; and Enlarging membership of the Moratorium (ECOWAS Plan of action, PCASED, 1999).

In order to assist PCASED a summit meeting of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held on 10 December 1999 in the Togolese capital, Lome, adopted a "Code of Conduct for the Implementation of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons." (ECOWAS Moratorium, 1999) the code of conduct outlines the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the moratorium. The moratorium has three main instruments: the Moratorium Declaration; the Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance on Security and Development (PCASED)—a UNDP support programme—approved in March 1999; lastly, a Code of Conduct, adopted on 10 December 1999, – constitute the main pillars of the ECOWAS strategy to curb the flow of illicit small arms in particular and disarmament in general.

Although PCASED face a lot of challenges however it was believed to be very instrumental in the implementation of the West African Moratorium, it was commended by the ECOWAS Authority concerning Natcoms, training of military and security personnel, enhancement of weapons controls at border post, particularly, Benin, Niger, Nigeria and Mali, and the enhanced coordination between PCASED and the ECOWAS Secretariat. More so, the report also gave credit to PCASED in the areas of arms collection and destruction programs, harmonization of legislations and regional arms register and dater base (Badmus, 2009). Not withstanding the commendation PCASED was flooded with a lot of difficulties among others budgetary and financial limitations and technical difficulties plagued its activities.

National Commissions (Natcoms)

National Commissions is one of the key initiatives of the Moratorium to deal with illicit weapons proliferation by member states. As contain in Article 4 of the Code of Conduct: "In order to promote and ensure co-ordination of concrete measures for effective implementation of the Moratorium at the national level, Member states shall establish National Commissions, made up of representatives of the relevant authorities and civil society." (Code of conduct, p.3), National commissions are meant to serve as a nucleus around which national and regional initiatives revolve. They are to formulate strategies, policies, and programs to counter the proliferation of small arms; Sensitize public on the need to turn in illegally held weapons to security forces; Update arms registers and transmission to ECOWAS Secretariat; Provides appropriate recommendations to ECOWAS Secretariat on exemptions to be granted to the Moratorium for weapons covered by the agreement; Mobilize resource for program expenditures; Liaise on a permanent basis with ECOWAS and PCASED Secretariats on issues relevant to the Moratorium as well as on the proliferation of SALW in general; Initiate and developed an exchange of information and experience with the other national commissions (Decision A/DEC13/12/99 "Establishing of National Commissions")

Creation of National commissions succeeded in yielding progress especially in terms of compliance by member nations, however, it could be noted that many of the Natcoms suffer from weak capacity and a lack of funds and political support. Moreover, on issues that pertain to the development of a credible regional arms register and database has not materialized; and harmonization of legislation has also been very slow. There has also been slow progress on a peacekeeping register, with a stand-off between PCASED and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 2003 giving an indication of the difficulties.

The regional body record progress in destroying surplus or seized illegal weapons in at least two thirds (ten) of the ECOWAS member states in which more than 85,000 small arms have been collected from armed groups and civilians since 1998.

The Moratorium was later transform into a convention in 2006 following the signing by ECOWAS member States of the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, which, inter alia, banned SALW transfers into, from, and through the territories of states parties in order to “prevent and combat excessive and destabilizing accumulation of [SALW] within ECOWAS” (ECOWAS Executive Secretariat 2006, Article 2.1, 3.1).

The transformation was aimed at shifting the focus from mere 'moral persuasion' in curtailing the spread of illicit weapons to 'enforcement' of the protocol. This, it seeks to achieve by enhancing the capacity of member States through their National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons, (NATCOM), for the effective control of SALW in their countries. ECOSAP is also engaging and building the capacity of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Sub-region for the same purpose through the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) headquartered in Ghana. ECOSAP is also in a strategic partnership with the Media, (through the West African Network of Journalists on Security and Development (WANJSD)) which it engages for the purpose of its advocacy and communication programmes in the fight against SALW.

ECOWAS provides a humanitarian justification for the convention as it links SALW transfers to international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) (ibid., Article 6; Garcia 2011, 122–23). ECOWAS set the stage for the Nairobi Declaration (2000) and Nairobi Protocol (2004) for the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions, and the Africa-wide Bamako Declaration (2000), which reinforced the positions of the majority of African states to strengthen SALW control (ibid., 116–17). The Bamako Declaration although politically binding was the result of a ministerial conference at the end of 2000, which recommended national action including the coordination of agencies working on small arms issues; destruction of surplus stocks and confiscated weapons; and conclusion of bilateral arrangements for small arms control along borders. The Bamako Declaration set a regional precedent for controlling arms transfer and strongly emphasizes the responsibility of arms supplier countries in preventing the diversion of weapons, among others. The declaration though politically binding had significantly impacted on both continentally and internationally, it spurred a number of sub-regional legally binding conventions and influenced aspect of the UN PoA (Kristen and Noel, 2008).

ECOWAS also work in collaboration with and look upon for guidance the United Nations (UN) Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects or United Nation Programme of Action (UN PoA). UN PoA thus provided the framework for the regional implementation of measures to curtail the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It has six identified areas as the basis for policy-making on SALW control: regulating trade; marking and tracing; brokering; destruction and reduction of surplus stocks; stockpile; security and information exchange and transparency (Edward Laurence and Rachel Stohl, 2002; in Sears, 2012, 40). It also recognizes the need for a multi-level approach to SALW control by calling on states to take action at the national, regional, and international levels. However, to date, implementation has been inconsistent both within and across states and requires continued will and political engagement. In spite of that, UN PoA has contributed to greater awareness, understanding and policymaking on SALW control and has led to the formation of other global initiatives, such as the UN Marking & Tracing Instrument and the promotion of the global arms trade treaty.

From the fore going, it could be argued that in terms of engagement the regional body is commended given the wider commitments to programmes and policies embarked upon and in collaboration with partner international and other regional bodies as well as other civil society organizations in policy formulation and codification. However, given the enormity, veracity, as well as complexity and dynamism the trend of small arms proliferation is today, necessitate a rethink, in the level of commitment to the course.

In spite of the existence of regional, continental and international instruments designed to curb the proliferation of SALWs, Africa features prominently in the global map of regions with a high circulation of arms. The proliferation is in geometric progression while the effort to convert it is going in arithmetic progression. As aptly argued Stohl & Hogendoorn, (2010), the fact that there are numerous international treaties regulating the production, proliferation and most particularly distribution of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) but no far-reaching, binding and universal agreements on conventional weapons including SALW only seem to make the situation worse. Some of the major challenges of illicit SALW control in Nigeria and most of the member countries in the region reside in addressing the conditions leading to the demand for illicit SALW, and in enhancing the National Committee's capacity to collect, document destroy, and campaign against SALW proliferation.

Adequate financing, staffing, and training of both National Committee and security officials are of particular relevance to this matter. Most problems arising from systemic failure led to the escalation of violence and to war in West Africa. Research indicates that on average African economy contracted by 15% or even more as a result of war, civil war or insurgency that bedeviled the region losing an average of around \$18 billion a year due to armed conflict. Below are some of the identified factors that were responsible for the explosion of small arms.

Challenges to Effective control of Small Arms in West Africa

There are several factors that contributed to the proliferation of small arms in the region, these includes the nature of SALW, internal factors, as well as structural factors. In the first place, there is a general lack of transparency around the arms trade. Most Sub-Saharan African states consider their arms policies to be secret, which makes them hard to assess. Similarly, arms dealers promote corruption by involving some African states in illegal activity. Insecurity in the region also makes it easy for small arms to enter illicit circulation through theft, leakage or re-sale. Secondly, small arms and light weapons by virtue of their several characteristics make them very attractive to paramilitary and irregular forces and even untrained civilians thereby assisting in their proliferation. Apart from governments increased their demand for SALW to counter political insurgency and suppress domestic opposition movements, a number of different factors account for their 'high desirability' on the region. Their simplicity makes them easy to operate even by people who have had very little or no military training. This explains their use by untrained combatants and even child soldiers as it was the case in many armed conflicts in West Africa Liberia, Sierra Leone, Code d'Ivoire and now Mali and Nigeria, among others. Small arms are plentiful, cheap and durable these weapons are highly desired and profitable commodity and are often sold with little domestic and international regulation by numerous weapons producers, from surplus military stockpiles, and by private arms dealers.

Other Structural Factors

Structural problems such as lack of organizational skills, the necessary infrastructure, funds, as well as forces of globalization make the control of SALWs very complex. Among other structural factors are:

Issues of Governance: The failure in governance to provide the needed security was a factor that compelled citizens to look for an alternative. Studies indicates that, lack confidence in security forces, understaffing or sometimes simply the inability of security agencies to carry out their duty effectively in many African countries informed the strong need by citizens to acquire arms in order to protect themselves and their property from armed violence.

A research conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 shows that, contrary to common assumptions, state security providers do not perform much better than the rebels. Across Côte d'Ivoire, the population lacks confidence in its security forces. The report indicate that, the deficiencies of the security forces combined with the level of insecurity have encouraged the emergence of a wide range of coping mechanisms, including community self-defence and vigilante groups, which in turn create new forms of insecurity (Small Arms Survey, 2011).

In Nigeria as observed Onuaha, (2011),

The crude nature of Nigerian politics is one key factor driving the process of SALWs proliferation. Politics in Nigeria – especially electoral politics – is defined and approached by politicians as a do-or-die affair, or warfare. The stake in Nigerian politics is incredibly high, making politicians desperate in the struggle to win elective positions. As a result, many of them recruit 'specialists of violence' – cultists, gangs and thugs – to attain and retain political power (Onuaha, 2012:53).

The failure to provide basics of life, effective and justly sharing of resources ensuring human security were also responsible for the explosion of small arms and escalation of violence. The mismanagement of public resources, as well as abuse of public trust resulted in far reaching and devastating impact ensuing rising poverty level, high unemployment and poor/failed delivery of basic services, not least security. Due to frustration and deprivation, many have taken to criminal activities such as piracy, armed robbery, kidnapping and militancy, which contribute to the demand side of arms penetration and circulation.

Corruption: The vicious cycle of low salaries and corruption creates breeding grounds for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among the civilian population. Customs officers are bribed by weapons dealers, while soldiers, police officers and security forces are known to have sold government weapons to criminals (Ayissi and Sall, 2005:68).

Porous Borders: another factor is that Africa by virtue of its size, the second largest continent in the world and population, the second most populated and given the level of its development experience persistent problem of border control. Also, due to the sheer size of some of its countries, for instance, Nigeria, has 770 km of shared land border with the Republic of Benin to the west, about 1500 km with Niger to the north, 1700 km with Cameroon to the east, 90 km with the Republic of Chad to the north-east and 850 km maritime border on the Atlantic Ocean. Out-stretched these tally up to 4910 km of borders which have to be controlled. Each of these entry points, along with the airports, has been used to smuggle arms into the country. One can imagine how tasking it is to effectively control these borders. It is also interesting to observe that all three largest sub-Saharan countries, namely Sudan (the continent's overall largest), the Congo DRC (3rd overall largest) and Chad (5th overall largest) have been experiencing instability and armed conflict for long. It may well be that their size and their porous borders make it easy for weapons to be smuggled inflaming and protracting violence (Ngang, 2007).

Globalization: The forces of globalization bring with it opportunities and challenges, the elimination of state enforced restrictions on exchanges across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of production and exchange that has emerge as a result further complicate the challenge of containing SALWs proliferation. The idea of globalization and its advocate for free market forces with minimum economic barriers and open trade for world development provides ground for illicit trade in arms by minimizing custom regulations and border control, trafficking of small arms becomes easier. Malhotra, (2011), stressed that, a miniscule percent of container ships have cargo checks, therefore making the arms movement smooth. Faking documents bribing officials and concealing arms as humanitarian aids are common practices.

Malhotra (2011) identified globalization factors that facilitate proliferation of illicit trade in arms:

- (a) Political and economic integration are coupled with lesser restrictions in migration and human movement. This helps the arms dealers to fortify their present business connections and tap new ones. Dealers migrate to various regions, motivated by business expansion or reduced operational risks.
- (b) Banking reforms and capital mobility have aided the black market to spread its trade internationally, utilizing every angle of the well linked financial market. This also gives rise to offshore markets and tax shelters. An illustration of banking innovation is E-money. Banks have introduced cards bearing microchips, which are able to store large sums of money. These cards are portable outside conventional channels or can be easily bartered among individuals.
- (c) The linkage of banks with the internet has posed a new challenge in combating illegitimate activities in the financial sector. E-banking has digitized money making it prone to criminality. Even though, it has numerous benefits for the world at large, it is misused for money laundering, credit card scams and check-kiting. Adding to this, economic integration among regions blesses arm brokers with more opportunities to shelter their money, by investing in different stock exchanges. Numerous other illegal practices are a by-product of a deregulated financial sector, but money laundering is at the apex. Money Laundering or 'cleansing of money' is an unlawful practice of concealing the point of origin, identity or destination of the funds, when performing a particular financial transaction. The criminals maneuver money across borders gaining from banks in countries with lax anti-laundering policies.
- (d) Profound expansion of commercial airline and freight industry (making transport cheaper and easier) are instrumental in increased penetration of arms in conflict zones. Global merger of airline companies, supply chains, shipping firms make it tough to supervise unlawful practices in air and water.
- (e) The growth of global communication in the past two decades has been unfathomable. This has enhanced the ability of arms dealers to communicate internationally through the web at a cheap rate.

Conclusion

Reading from the above, the challenges are enormous, effort at mitigating those challenges are indeed very demanding, beyond commitments of the member nations and the ECOWAS body but also civil society organizations, individuals, and the private hands, importantly, a gigantic stride is needed from national, regional and the international organization as a whole. Many countries don't go beyond the signing of a treaty or agreement. The policies, agreements suffer lack of implementation either due to lack of capacity or resources, political will or both; others detest the small arms agenda or see it as not top priority. The debilitating economy, failure of state to deliver the basic necessities of life, security, and rising rate of unemployment, and above all corruption are some of the major internal factors that are obstacles to any meaningful effort at combating proliferation of small arms in the region.

National governments need to demonstrate commitments not only in policy formulation, endorsement of agreements and codification, but also practical effort at implementation need be put in place, and to also, meet their primary responsibility to provide social and economic security and development for their citizens. It is the bases to addressing arms trade, by tackling the roots causes of armed violence namely, underdevelopment, insecurity, inequality and corruption. Others entail preventing arms transfers to regimes that violate UN arms embargoes and cause human rights violations as well as providing with aid programmes that improve the security of arms storage facilities.

States should lead the development of a legally binding arms trade treaty that would establish common international standards at the highest level on the export of conventional weapons, including small arms. The creation and implementation of a clear and coherent national policy on SALW proliferation control should be done through the organization of national conferences bringing together all different levels of society such as governmental representatives, community-based organizations, NGOs and decision-makers. A broad participation would enable the development of integrated and comprehensive policies in tackling SALW proliferation at various levels and through various approaches.

Civil Society are at the forefront of promoting localized peace building initiatives, initiating reconciliation processes, advocating for adherence to peace agreements and building capacities in peace education. There is therefore need to intensify their involvement in combating small arms. Especially, civil society need to be strengthened in educating and enlightening public on ECOWAS convention, the UNPoA, and the UN Firearms Protocol as their crucial role in the control of SALW. This can be achieved through the provision of necessary resources, ranging from equipment, finance and training, to stimulate their activities especially in advocacy strategies. Also, there is need to widen the scope of existing NGOs working on other thematic issues – such as human rights, children and youth, law enforcement, gender – to include illicit SALW, and to locate the phenomenon of illicit SALW proliferation within the broader governance agenda in West Africa.

Lastly, and importantly stricter measures need be taken on issues of corruption, corruption render fruitless most of the efforts put in place to combat small arms especially in West Africa. Workable solution must be sought for at the international level so that it would compel adherence at the regional and national levels just as it was the case with democratic system and military dictatorship.

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