

Review

The role of small arms and light weapons proliferation in African conflicts

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Africa is transiting through a trying phase in the history of its evolution as a major world civilization. These trying challenges are characterized by the extremes of hunger, the conditions of massive refugee flow and internally displaced persons occasioned by the gruesome phenomenon of violent conflicts and wars. The paper sets out essentially to establish the connection between the massive flow of small arms and light weapons (SALW) since the end of the Cold War and the equally catastrophic revolutionary ferment that characterized the Arab Spring across the fertile crescent and the Maghreb. The paper is sustainably driven by core normative paradigms covering the vast area of illicit armaments and their orchestrating influence in igniting violence. To weave the perspectives captured herein, the paper depended almost exclusively on the content analysis of existing literary materials in the humanist and social science traditions. Findings confirm that indeed small arms and light weapons abound within our case studies (Nigeria and the CAR), a phenomenon that both ignites and sustains violent conflicts within these previously peaceful national territorial entities. By way of recommendation the paper advocates the strengthening of existing legal and political protocols and the fortification of the borders of these countries if they are to remain virile and relevant in the international socio-economic and political order.

Key words: Arms, conflicts, proliferation, war, insecurity, hunger, light weapon.

INTRODUCTION

The rhythm of international and African conflicts in the Post Cold War era has become increasingly fueled and sustained by the incidence(s) of the observable reality of the malignant scourge of the proliferation of Small Arms and Light weapons (SALW). Without any doubt, the end of the Cold War succeeded in bringing relief and optimism to people throughout the world. Former adversaries unanimously conceded on deliberately making major reductions in their conventional and nuclear arms

stockpiles. Globally too, leaders deliberately sought and found ways to cooperate on a range of international issues. As the extremely scary imagery of nuclear confrontation began to fade in the latter years of the decade of the 80s, many worked under the illusory assumptions that this spirit of cooperation might construct a structural framework, that with the end of superpower rivalry, nations of the world might find a new willingness to work together as a global community, to manage and

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resolve violent conflicts through peaceful negotiations and diplomacy. Yet events over the next decade proved this optimism premature, nowhere more so than in Africa.

Thus, from the 1990's legitimate government authorities and the institutional frameworks upon which these governments rest and receive legitimacy in the international system has become increasingly challenged by non-state actors and criminal gangs operating under different nomenclatures. From Mali and Libya in Central Sahara to the cancerous plague of the Boko Haram in the West Coast of Africa; from the newly birthed republic of South Sudan, to the Central African Republic's (CARs) Saleka and anti Balaka bloodshed, the challenge bears identical characteristic especially with regards the source of their livewire and existence which is easily located to SALW. This establishes the fact that the spread of SALW and the resulting armed conflicts it generates undermine good governance which determines to a large extent development initiatives in Africa more than in any other continent (Garcia, 2009)

Even though state actors are as guilty as non state actors in their arbitrary use of licit and illicit SALW especially in Africa, the thrust of our presentation will be focused and sustainably driven purely on discussing the negative influence of illicit small and light weapons and their impacts on livelihoods, social relations, the economy, international relations and national and regional peace and security. To achieve this objective, we will make specific case studies of the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria. The choice of these countries is deliberate; basically, it is because these nations and their institutions are ravaged by the activities of terrorists operating under the hallucinating influence of religious ideology as motivation to perpetuate their state weakening onslaughts. Both the Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Saleka and anti Balaka challenge of insecurity in the CAR have religious undertone using an operational strategy that is asymmetrical in character with non state actors playing major roles in determining national histories and destinies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

In this section, our discourse will be approached from a unique perspective that inclines towards the attempt to expound on the multidimensional approaches that give varied meanings to the concept 'small arms and light weapons'. Thus, according to the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunitions and other Related Material (ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2006)

Small arms are arms used by one person and which include notably firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or gas bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a

missile system or landmine: It also includes revolvers and pistols with automatic loading; rifles and carbines; machine guns; assault rifles; and light machine guns.

Light Weapons: are portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team and which include notably heavy machine guns; portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted; portable anti-aircraft cannons; portable anti-tank cannons, non-recoil guns; portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers; portable anti-aircraft missile launchers; mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeters.

Specifically, some of these SALW are;

The Tokarev TT pistols, Makarov PM pistols, AR-70 assault rifles (Beretta, Italy), Type 64 assault rifles (Japan), AKM-47 assault rifles (Kalashnikov), portable rocket propelled grenade RPG-7V1 Mukha "Fly", G3 assault rifles (Heckler and Koch, Germany), FNC (Fabrique Nationale Carbine, Belgium), 7.62mm PKMSN-2 machine guns (Kalashnikov), General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG), Light Machine Guns, Light machine guns (UK 59; Racht Czech), AK-47 under-barrel grenade launchers, RPG-42 hand grenades (Soviet), F-1 hand grenades (Soviet), Dynamite, explosives (nitropil, dynamite, plastic), and electronic remote detonation devices. More sophisticated weapons acquired by militia included those with features of night vision and increased targeting accuracy (Ikelegbe, 2014)

A glimpse at the destructive effect of arms flow to Africa

Irrespective of the source of arms, whether licit or illicit, arms do not portend anything positive in continental and national histories especially for a continent grappling with the negative index of extremely entrenched incidence of poverty; widening gaps in standards of living, lower incomes and consumption capacities, poor health services, low quality education and technology, lower peoples' self esteem, unstable political and economic systems and less freedom for the choice of goods and services (South Commission, 1983; Rajagopal, 2000). For instance, since the African continent staggeringly trudged out of the throes of a dehumanizing colonial experience in the 1960s, the African narrative has been characterized by the debilitating occurrences of violent conflicts and wars. A condition occasioned by the acquisition of arms by criminal non state actors and national governments. Resources that should be directed at infrastructure and sustainable growth and human development were, and are still increasingly channeled to arms purchase³. But Barman (2004) highlights the implications of the phenomenon most succinctly when he posited that small arms proliferation has the capacity for stimulating the following backlashes;

- Undermining development

- Weakening government ability to function.
- Hampering peace and provoking humanitarian disaster
- Threatening civil aviation
- Lead to detrimental long-term societal changes
- Facilitation of the production of craft weapons

In the period immediately after Nigeria's independence (during his first visit to the U.S.A.), Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa "asked the secretary of state, Dean Rusk for a jet fighter squadron of the latest type. In responding to the request, Rusk pointed out that the cost of such a squadron and its maintenance was so great that it might equal the cost of educating up to 5,000,000 Nigerians" (Mckay, 1963). Of course the fear of most independent African governments is not unfounded in the sense that the 'advent of new African states also possesses the possibility of irredentists movements and conflicts over international boundaries⁶. This misappropriation of resources to arms procurement has proven most disastrous to the development agenda of the countries of the South and inversely advantageous to the countries of the Northern hemisphere. A recent survey for instance has confirmed that the cost impact of conflicts on the continent's development was put at approximately US \$300 billion between 1990 and 2005 (Schnabel, 2008). This survey has been confirmed by such reputable international organizations as the Oxfam, the International Action Network of Small Arms and Safer World. This survey has also proven that the continent losses 15% of its annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to conflicts that are oiled and sustained by SALW, thereby threatening the possibility of Africa attaining the poverty-reduction scheme of the UN millennium Development Goals (MDG) (Ayissi and Poulton, 2006).

Thus, in the euphoria that greeted the emancipation narrative of post colonial Africa, the advocates of dependency theory, namely; Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin and Walter Rodney amongst many others, in their numerous treatises to the discourse regarding Africa's stagnant location in the international order have expressed the construction of their minds which ascribes Africa's underdevelopment to the slave trade and slavery that depopulated the continent's energetic youth population (Rodney, 1976; South Commission, 1983). Unfortunately, half a century of arms trade and gun running and the deployment of the same instruments in the execution of the debilitating warfare characterizing post colonial Africa has killed almost more than the trade in slave have done with regards to the forceful repatriation of the most productive of Africa's population thus, denying the continent of the much coveted benefits of socio-economic and political advancement.

The political economy of SALW and its implications on regional security

From the British Industrial Revolution in the 18th Century,

the world has experienced increase in production of goods and services which has ensured the creation of two distinct classes in the international economy-the upper class of industrial/landed property owners and the lower working class who eked-out their existence from the drudgery of industrial production that the economy of the industrial era provided--The repercussion of this evolving development at this particular point in human evolutionary history saw the emergence of men of means and wealth who indulged in conspicuous consumption and materialism and an equally impoverished human category (Ikelegbe, 2014). The life of indulgences engaged in by the rich spurred the poor who are now sequestered in urban ghettos to envy. This development has negatively impacted on crime wave bordering on robbery, kidnappings and the fraudulent exploitation of man by man at both the communal and international political economy levels in general (Rodney, 1976).

Within Africa, this reality became evident with the rising level of poverty that was occasioned by the integration of the continent into the orbit of the global colonial economy of the early 20th Century which was occasioned by the monetization of Africa's mining and agricultural production processes. It is necessary to establish that the colonial capitalist economic system pulled young and energetic youths from the rural economic setting, and through forced labour, initially introduced them to mining, cash crop production, and so on. Of course the money earned by this newly created urban working class was extorted in the equally newly introduced tax regimes and other forms of collections. The poverty that resulted from the activities of the colonial empire was real because the African actors within the system occupied the lowest rung of the colonial cadre with miserable income that hardly sustained the colonial employee (Rajagopal, 2000; Ikoku, 1976). It must be borne in mind that this lopsided colonial capitalist structure has over a Century of African history ensured the creation of a class of frustrated groups within society. A conspiracy of the deprivations suffered by these frustrated elements and the ready availability of SALW within the African continent have occasioned the rising levels of insecurity in the post colonial age.

In Nigeria, socio-economic upheavals since the civil war in the 1960s, almost immediately after independence, have increased the pervasiveness of poverty and hardships, while the boom in unearned oil income has accelerated the rise of a materialistic culture. Addressing the causal relationship between the poverty question and the inherent social malaise plaguing the Nigeria project, an analyst has driven the point home when he asserts that;

The answer is that Nigeria has become a predatory jungle in which, unlike in the animal kingdom, people devour their own kind; a society without a sense of community, or of public good. There is also a tendency for the attitude of political executives, from presidents to governors and chairmen of local government's councils (who live like oil Sheiks) to negatively influence the

behavior of those who voted them into office, but continue to subsist in squalor and degrading poverty. In sum, the prevailing societal values are principally a reflection of public morality as defined and debased by the ruling elite and people in public life in general (Akinola, 2014).

Thus, with the end of the colonial state and the persistence of a demeaning condition of livelihood as a result of official corruption and infrastructural decay, crime began to be seen as an avenue for breaking-off the York of this unpalatable human misery the poor category is going subjected to. Hence, with the massive inflow of small arms and light weapons into many parts of the continent, the incidences of high profile crime waves and criminality became entrenched. It is common to now hear young men pronounce the cliché “if the rich have smart cards to make purchases, I have my arm which is my smart card” (Dube, 2014: 11). By implication, the poor residents of rural ghettos use these acquired weapons to acquire materials that they feel could satiate their appetite for the things that modern consumerist culture provide as standard for determining prestige, self esteem, comfort and achievements in general (Smith, 1982).

On the place of envy, apart from SALW as motivator of criminality, Adam Smith, the thinker that fashioned the political economy thought, understood this provision perfectly. Smith argues that the fact that man seeks riches and avoids its inverse-poverty has very little to do with physical necessity. He maintains that “the wages of the meanest” laborer can supply the necessities of nature such as food and clothing, the comfort of a house and of a family and that much of the income, even of poor people is spent on things that are, strictly speaking, “conveniences, which may be regarded as superfluities”. Why then do men seek better conditions of life? The answer is easily located in the following brilliantly crafted wordings;

To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken noticed with sympathy, complacency, and with approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease or the pleasure which interest us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the objects of affection and approbation. The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally drew upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind is disposed to go along with him in all agreeable emotions with which the advantage of his situation so readily inspire in him.....The poor man on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of sight of mankind or, that if they take any notice of him, they have however, scarcely any fellow-feeling with the misery and the distress which he suffers..... (Smith, 1982)

This explains the motivation for criminality amongst the youth population. Now that they have discovered the ease with which SALW could be accessed, criminality has grown exponentially.

Contextualizing the nexus between SALW and regional insecurity: Nigeria

The different forms of security challenges plaguing Nigeria as a country are multiple. From those of armed robbery to kidnappings; from ethno-religious motivated violent conflicts to outright terrorism and insurgencies against the authority of the state. This reality has resulted in Nigeria churning out more than 3.3 million refugees since around the year 2010, making Nigeria the highest ‘producer of refugees in Africa and the third in the world after Syria and Colombia respectively (Voice of America, 2014). In addition, the same state of insecurity sourced in the various challenges as pointed above makes the country the fourth most violent country in the world (Aljazeera, 2014) These grim statistics have connection with the massive proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation. Recently, while commenting on the phenomenon of SALW in West and Central Africa and its scary implications, the Founder and Chancellor, Covenant University, Bishop David Oyedepo (2014) commented that;

War is a sucker. It has the capacity for sucking the resources of nations. Only those who do not know its cost implications propagate it. We must not allow war in Nigeria. We should not even think of it. Its consequences are unimaginable. War is a crime against humanity. It erodes dignity, destroys and devastates humankind. It is staring at us in the face but we must work assiduously at avoiding it.

Cogent as the above admonition is, every day, the country is increasingly plunged towards the precarious precipice. The senseless attacks on innocent citizens and core national institutions and infrastructure have continued to weaken the fabric of an organic national project. What were previously isolated and sporadic incidences of killings, raping and kidnappings of targeted victims has in recent times turned strategic and its consequences more and bloodier with each attack. The insurgency in the north east of the country has eventuated in the capitulation of human communities and villages that results in deaths in hundreds on each attack and the displacement of human populations, either as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or as refugees across the Niger, Cameroun and Chad borders.

Recently, it was reported that Boko Haram militants attacked three northeastern villages, killing approximately 200 people. The villages were all located in Borno State, which has seen almost daily violence from Boko Haram attacks in recent weeks. The militants were dressed as soldiers and they fired indiscriminately at civilians while setting fire to churches and houses. If the overall scenario is to be coherently articulated, it will be understood that the consistent strategic attacks on communities, the killing of this much number of people, the destruction

of invaluable goods and services across the three states under emergency rule (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) and the entire northern region points to the fact that indeed a violence of near apocalyptic dimension is ongoing across the vast northern prairie (International Peace and Security Institute, 2014). Of course as mentioned severally, this catastrophe, beyond inducing bloodsheds, has now reached the threshold in defining one of the most genocidal and precariously challenging humanitarian disasters in the history of Africa in the 21st century.

In spite of the bloody and highly destructive phenomenon of the insurgency, the Nigerian security machine has increasingly proven incapable of meeting up with its constitutionally enshrined responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of the Nigerian state and its people and resource endowments. This failure is easily located in the ready access these criminal gangs have to small arms and light weapons and this is because of the inability of the security sector to coordinate their activities towards a positive synergy with the civil population. On the matter in discourse, the issue is summarized thus;

Community-oriented policing can make a significant difference to decrease the danger posed by Boko Haram and other threats to the safety and security of the Nigerian people. The strength of these militant groups rests in part on the lack of partnership between law enforcement agencies such as police or border security units and the public. This absence of a connection means not only that citizens don't get the quality protection they need but also that there are no established communication channels through which the public can share information with the police. Information from the public -- about threats or criminal activity or from victims or witnesses -- is a fundamental asset of effective policing. Security results from a close partnership between the public and the police tasked with protecting them. Each is a co-guarantor of security; one cannot work effectively without the other (Nwosu, 2010).

Apart from the insurgency in the North East, there is equally the threat of the Niger Delta militancy in the South-South region of the country. Until the advent of the Umaru Yar-adua's presidency and his national amnesty policy, the greatest threat against the state by any armed group was the Niger Delta militant youth movements. In a move that was interpreted as an attempt by this youth militants to question the appropriation formula of the oil resource that is sourced from the Niger Delta, the youths embarked on high level economic sabotage of Nigeria's economic interest on/off shore (Nwosu, 2010: 12).

Thus, these active youths, highly motivated by the massive arms build-up over the years (since the end of the Cold War), and the now sophisticated arsenal depot and the intrinsic desire to 'emancipate' their under-privileged communities and polluted environments have decided to domesticate and operationalize violence as a means of registering their grievances against the state. The results were not limited to only strangulating the

economic base of the nation through drastic reduction in the daily oil production but also in militarizing the entire region of Niger Delta. Hence, it became a very lucrative enterprise among the youth militant groups in connivance with local communities that provide tacit support in terms of information, shelter and other logistical assistance. It further provided an opportunistic environment for trans-national organized criminal syndicates to sale these wares (SALWs) and in return criminally benefit from the abundant largesse of natural resources through provision of easy passage in the creeks to participate in illegal oil bunkering. Thus many expatriate workers, Nigerians, security agents serving on the Joint Task Force (JTF) and Militants died in these skirmishes accentuated by the availability and easy access to SALWs. Irrespective of the giant strides recorded through the Amnesty Programme, the maritime security in the region has remained challenging. This is attributed to the military capacity of unrepentant militants in terms of stockpiles of arms who mostly engage on oil theft for their own benefits. In the same view, the South-East zone of the country has equally being plagued with serious crisis of security arising from incidences of kidnapping for ransom. This crime is being strongly aided by the availability of illicit SALWs, which could easily move internally from one zone to the other in the country. Seizures by the security agencies operating in the zone attest to the high level of sophistication of the weaponry available of kidnapping gangs in South-East zone, and the nexus between arms availability and burgeoning kidnapping enterprise.

Central African Republic

The Central African Republic (CAR) has been a sovereign state since the 1960s and has experienced series of political turmoil including the traditional incidences of coups and counters coups that characterized the African and Latin American power equation in the last two decades. A major one—coup—was the one that occurred in March 2003, when François Bozizé seized power. The president at the time, Ange-Félix Patassé, had won multi-party elections in 1993 and 1999. The few presidential elections prior to that had largely fallen short of free and fair. Bozizé had achieved power in the same manner as two former Central African presidents: Jean-Bédel Bokassa and André Kolingba. Bokassa and Kolingba had one thing in common besides being former chiefs of staff of the Central African armed forces: they had both overthrown David Dacko (Campbell, 2006; Meredith, 2011).

It is instructive to mention that a common reason advanced for the execution of most coup d'état on the continent has been ascribed to the dual challenge of poverty and the development problematic that has characterized the evolutionary narrative of the continent since independence. To establish the connection between most African conflicts and the poverty index, the

development narrative –with specific regards to the CAR–has maintained that;

None of CAR's presidents who have been ousted in coups has been killed, and all have fared considerably better than those Central Africans not fortunate enough to serve as head of state. The landlocked country of 623,000 square km (somewhat larger than Portugal and Spain combined) remains substantially undeveloped. CAR's 3.9 million citizens, comprising some 80 ethnic groups, are among the poorest in the world, earning on average significantly less than a dollar a day. According to a 2003 UN report, CAR had the highest rate of maternal mortality during childbirth, an increasing HIV/AIDS rate, and a population that was largely unschooled (UN OCHA, 2003). The 2006 Human Development Index, which measures a series of socio-economic indicators from 177 countries, ranks CAR sixth from last (UNDP, 2006: 286). The pre-independence experience of the country certainly contributed to its present-day challenges. It fared particularly badly as a French colony and also from the Arab slave trade. As a part of Afrique Equatoriale Française (French Equatorial Africa, AEF), Ubangi-Shari, as CAR was known from 1910 to 1958, received less attention and resources than the other AEF territories, which are today known as the Republic of the Congo (RoC), Gabon, and Chad.

Over a sustained period of over half a Century, the CAR has remained firmly locked in the firm grip of socio-economic and political instability. For instance, during the remainder of the decades of the 1980s right into the early 1990s, the CAR continued in the infamous and traditional experiences of military overthrow of governments; thus, a significant number of attempted coups, suspected coup attempts, and relatively small-scale violence involving dissatisfied factions and the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA) (Pierre, 1992). 'The situation deteriorated sharply in 1996, however, when elements of the army mutinied. In all, there were three separate uprisings that year. The third mutiny culminated in the looting of the country's arms depot at the Kassaï barracks in Bangui (McFarlane and Malan, 1998: 48-58). In 1997, following the overthrow of Zairian (later the DRC) President Mobutu Sese Seko, thousands more weapons flooded into the Central African Republic (CAR)'.

Two rebel groups are at the center of the security problem in the Central Africa Republic; these are the *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR) in the northeast of the CAR, and *l'Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la République et la Démocratie* (APRD) that have location in the northwest. Although conflicts in Darfur and Chad have exacerbated the current political instability and its devastating implications on the country, the rebellion, in this case the overthrow of Françoise Bozize was ignited by the dire conditions of political, economic, and security

concerns that have deep roots in the established fragility of the state and its institutions.

At the peak of the rebellion, it was clear that President Francois Bozize's government had little authority outside the nation's capital city, Bangui while extreme poverty and a lack of both strong government institutions and economic development have contributed to declining support for the government among CAR citizens'. Some commentators have maintained that, there are some indications that the Government of Sudan (GOS) supports rebel forces in CAR. 'However, the Bozize government may overemphasize the role of Sudan in an effort to minimize the importance of CAR's internal problems and shift blame for the conflict to an external actor'. Other commentators that are considered moderates in their analysis have opined that, the GOS seems willing to ignore local Sudanese support to CAR rebels, such as the provision of safe havens, weapons, and logistical support (Meredith, 2011).

Unfortunately, this support by Chad and Sudan has completely altered the trend and dynamic of what was ordinarily a popular movement with the economy and marginalization as motivation to a highly destructive religious war between the Saleka and the Anti Balaka groups that are in the engagement on the basis of their religion. Of course, this same challenge has found its livewire in the illicit arms flow to the CAR (Meredith, 2011).

THE MECHANISM INSTITUTED TO REGULATE ARMS FLOW INTO AFRICA

The international political economy will ensure that the powerful nations of the earth that have the wherewithal and upon whom the moral burden to check arms proliferation and its gruesome implication on nations and their people will not show the needed commitment towards this. These strong countries like the US, China, Iran, the Russian Federation and Pakistan will always block the approval of measures dear to Africa in the sense of instituting the measures that will check arms proliferation³⁰. The implication of the above is that an international approach to arms control will not be achieved because most of the weapons used to execute African conflicts are not endogenous to the continent essentially due to limited capacity. This informs the basis for sourcing the weapons from established military industrial complexes with headquarters in Europe, America and Asia. This is more so when viewed from the point of view of the fact that the Kalashnikov rifles, 'the darling' of African conflicts which are supplied by the above mentioned continents find easy access into countries of Africa due to the porosity of contiguous national and international borders, poor regulation of the intra-regional circulation of arms left over from conflicts during the Cold War, conflicts throughout the 1990s and

afterwards and the unregulated activity of arms brokers.

This reality has necessitated the resolve to explore the possibility of using regional mechanism in checking the proliferation of SALW within the continent. Thus, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Eastern African States are aggressively moving towards a regional “approach to tackling the scourge of small arms proliferation and have thus enacted legally binding instruments in this regard³²”.

These sub regions have successfully constructed functionally active instruments variously aimed at achieving the common goal of preventing arms proliferation and by implication employed a strategy that also aims at violent conflict prevention. For instance within the East African sub region—the CAR, the Great Lakes Region (GLR), and the Horn of Africa (HoA), the agenda aims at reversing the proliferation of the SALW through the following legal and political mechanism;

- The negotiation of the politically binding Nairobi Declaration on Small Arms by the Ministers of foreign Affairs of the countries of the GLR and the HoA signed in 2000.
- The creation of the Nairobi secretariat on SALW to coordinate the action by each member country's national focal point on SALW in the GLR and the HoA.
- The third is the evolution of the Nairobi declaration into a parallel legally binding instrument, the Nairobi protocol for the prevention, Control, and Reduction of SALW in the GLR and the HoA, adopted in April, 2004.

As a result, the secretariat was elevated to the Regional Center on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.

With regards to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiative at arms control generally called the SADC protocol on Firearms, Ammunition and related materials; it basically aims at the creation of a regional control over trafficking and arms possession. A related organization within the SADC is the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO). This proactive organization was conceived in 1995 with the goal of tackling cross border criminal activity. However, the SARPCCO's operations specifically prioritize reduction in arms trafficking and their use in crime.

In addition, the SADC protocol has as major goal the “prevention, combating and the eradication of illicit arms—guns and ammunition-- manufacturing and other related materials, as well as their excessive and destabilizing uses, trafficking and possession” (Garcia, 2009). It further continues that:

The protocols also seek to regulate the import and export of legal small arms and thus curb the transit of these weapons into and within the region. In addition, it aims for

the harmonization of national legislations across member states on the manufacture and ownership of small arms and light weapons. Thus, the SADC protocols marks a significant development in the efforts of the states of Southern Africa to tackle the scourge of small arms and light weapons (Stott, 2001).

Despite the visionary thrust sustaining the creation of a legal and political framework with a view to eliminating the menace of SALW on the Southern African sub region, certain key encumbrances have reared their heads and limited the capacity of the SADC to achieve any reasonable success in this noble fight. Chief amongst these are the extant porosity of the borders delineating these countries; the dilemma of obsolete national legislation, the precariousness of regional peace processes; the lack of capacity on the parts of both government and the civil society to effectively monitor the legal and illegal movements of firearms and most importantly, the lack of data from which to assess the improvements that may result from the effective implementation of the SADC protocols (Garcia, 2009).

The commendable aspect of the existing protocols operational within the African geographical space is easily located in its inclusion of stockpile management. Specifically, the SADC protocol has strongly maintained in its provisions that “surplus, redundant or obsolete arms and ammunitions and other instruments of war and violent conflicts must be securely stored, destroyed or disposed of in a way that prevents them from entering into the illicit firearms market or flowing into the regions in conflict or to any other destination in a way that is not fully consistent with agreed criteria for restraint” (Garcia, 2009).

Conversely, the control of illicit SALWs proliferation in West Africa has remained a collective endeavor of the member states of ECOWAS since 1998 with the Declaration of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa by the Conference of Heads of State and Government in Abuja on 31 October 1998 (Agneketom, 2008: 13-29). The Moratorium, even though a non-legally binding instrument, was emphatic on total ban to importation and exportation of SALWs to the sub-region, with a high level of commitment by member states for compliance. This was demonstrated with the adoption on 10th December 1999 of a Code of Conduct for the operationalization and monitoring of the level of implementation of the Moratorium and Decision A/DEC.13/10/99 establishing the National Commissions at the member state level to combat SALWs proliferation. Instructively, Article 4 of the Code of Conduct assigned the National Commissions (NATCOMs) the responsibility of promoting, ensuring and coordinating concrete measures for effective implementation of the Moratorium. Therefore, it was expected to serve as the institutional platform that will assist competent national authorities in

devising, developing and implementing national policies to combat SALWs proliferation (Agneketom, 2008). At the same time, the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) was developed and carried out between 1999 and 2004 to support the implementation of the Moratorium. This process of building institutional capacity to combat the scourge in West Africa equally witnessed the establishment of the West African Action Network against Small Arms (WAANSA) in May 2002 as the civil society component to ensure a holistic framework. And within the ECOWAS Commission, the Small Arms Unit was established in September 2005 in line with the decision of the Council of Ministers adopted in 2003 in Accra, Ghana.

The adoption of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunitions and other Related Materials on 14 June, 2006 became the cornerstone for combating the menace of SALWs proliferation in the Sub-region and showcased the high level of political vision of the Heads of State and Government. The objectives of the Convention (ECOWAS Convention, 2006) are:

- To prevent and combat the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons within ECOWAS;
- To continue the efforts for the control of small arms and light weapons within ECOWAS;
- To consolidate the gains of the Declaration of the Moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms and its Code of Conduct;
- To promote trust between the Member States through concerted and transparent action on the control of small arms and light weapons within ECOWAS;
- To build institutional and operational capacities of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and the Member States in the efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, their ammunition and other related materials; and
- To provide the exchange of information and cooperation among the Member States.

The main thrust of the Convention that makes it exceptional from most of other international instruments on combating SALWs proliferation is its emphasis on prohibition of transfer of SALWs into, through and from the territories of member states (Article 3) The Convention allows for exemption for Member States to import SALWs to enable them meet legitimate national defence and security needs, although the granting of the exemptions requires adequate notice and approval of other member states and the ECOWAS Commission. It further enshrined a complete ban, without exception, transfer of SALWs to non-state actors that are not explicitly authorized by the importing Member State.

However, these various laudable initiatives that have been in place in the West Africa sub-region have not

deterred the influx of illicit SALWs and their indiscriminate use in violent conflicts and to commit human rights violation. In fact, the terrain continuously remains fertile for the proliferation of SALWs as a result of many factors including poor governance, porosity of borders, ineffective and inefficient institutions as well as corruption. As a result of the high level of insecurity and violent conflicts, sustained by the availability of SALWs, there is lack of progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in West Africa. Succinctly, Ayissi (2008) noted that this lack of progress on the MDGs is an emerging regional trend in West Africa as half of the states in the sub-region are either in post-conflict recovery phase or greatly weakened by creeping or endemic crisis situation. This assertion was further buttressed with the MDG.1-reducing extreme poverty by half, by 2015, of the proportion of the people who suffer from hunger in the world. In West Africa, where greater percentage of the population are poor and fall within that category of extreme poverty, it will require concerted efforts to promote agriculture in order to meet the MDG-1. Regrettably, one basic feature common in all the conflict zones in West Africa is the insecurity that grips much of the countryside and rural areas. Major roads that are used in transporting agricultural produce are also deliberately targeted, thereby destroying farming which predominantly occurs in the rural areas and a direct causative factor in food insecurity. Therefore, effective control of SALWs in the sub-region will not only reduce the spate and recycling of armed violence but will usher in a more secure environment, where development will be assured.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in the region. It has been established that one of the most important source(s) of illicit weapons apart from importation is from the national stockpiles; whether as stolen goods or racketeered by the custodians of these weapons due to high level of corruption. Sometimes these materials are 'hired' to interested parties willing to pay for the weapons. Again, this is possible because of the non existence of a functional data base to monitor the collected/retrieved excess arms and ammunition. This incapacity has encouraged the perpetration of this illicit activity. With regards the question of corruption in the arms procurement narrative, Ikelegbe (2014) during the recently concluded Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons organised open Forum has maintained that; "There may be complicity of senior state security officers in the smuggling of SALWs at the airports, ports, highways and borders. The compromising of military and police officers is responsible for the leakages of arms from state armories to illegal users".

Conclusion

The following conclusion is devoted to reflections on core issues that have prominently featured as central themes

in this essay. These include issues that bound on the relations between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the continent and the sub region in particular and the outbreak of violent conflagrations and wars. Pursuant to this, we equally made attempt at weaving the whole perspectives raised around the precarious phenomenon of poverty plaguing an already beleaguered people. By way of recommendations, the paper has unequivocally advocated the restoration of a sound legal regime that will ensure the construction of a sound criminal justice system that will criminalize criminality and give access to a justice order to the vulnerable in civil society, without which the incidences of SALW proliferation will continue with its attendant orchestration of violent conflicts. In addition, the paper advocates an increased accountability in public governance and trust between government and the citizens as they collectively strive towards the actualization of the social contract they had entered into. We believe if these recommendations are adapted and strictly adhered to, actors resident within the state will not have any justification to carry arms against the state and its non-belligerent people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific topics that will receive attention in this context are government transparency and accountability, decentralisation and participation of civil society, the role of traditional leaders and the media, protection and inclusion of minorities, and promoting dialogue between conflicting groups.

1. There is need for concerted and collective efforts among stakeholders at all levels of the society to curtail illicit SALWs proliferation. Hence, capacities of stakeholders should be enhanced to ensure effective implementation of result-oriented programs and formulation of evidence-based policies;
2. There is need for an improved border management mechanism using modern and sophisticated detection equipment to discourage arms trafficking through the borders. Also, effective strategies should be deployed to police the numerous unauthorized entry/exit routes on the continent, recognizing the need to enlist the support and cooperation of border communities;
3. There is need for a review of the Firearms Act with stringent penalties in order to address the current challenges associated with SALWs proliferation. The Executive Arm of government, with the support of other stakeholders which include the CSOs, should engage the Legislature to ensure that the review of the obsolete Firearms Act remains in the fore-front of legislative deliberation. In this respect, the CSOs could prevail on the legislature to make laws pertaining to the manufacture, importation, storage and even the possessions of firearms especially with specific regards to our frequently mentioned Small Arms and Light weapons;

4. There is need to domesticate into national laws, the international instruments that have been signed and ratified by these countries in order to make them conform with international best practices in tackling illicit SALWs proliferation;

5. There is need to establish and strengthen institutional frameworks for the control of illicit SALWs proliferation to ensure an effective, coordinated and consistent implementation of arms control programs on the continent;

6. There is need for all the Military, Security and LEAs to improve on stockpile management of arms in their possession using modern techniques. Furthermore, the agencies should be encouraged to maintain a functional and integrated electronic database of their stockpiles as a prelude to establishing a National Database on Firearms;

There is need to leverage on the various International Arms Control Instruments and international cooperation to ensure that seized weapons in armed conflict zones and crime scenes in the country are traced. This will assist in understanding important dynamics of SALWs proliferation especially trafficking routes, countries of origin and manufacturers of the arms, the brokers;

7. Finally, we advocate the rebuilding of public infrastructure/services and the promotion socio-economic development and the promotion of the mechanisms for peaceful settlement of conflict in society.

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