

## The Impacts of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on the Quest for National Security in Nigeria

Peterside Zainab Brown\*

Department of Political Science, Federal University, Lokoja, Nigeria

**\*Corresponding author**

*Peterside Zainab Brown*

**Article History**

*Received: 02.07.2018*

*Accepted: 18.07.2018*

*Published: 30.07.2018*

**DOI:**

10.21276/sjhss.2018.3.7.8



**Abstract:** The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is and has remained one of the major security challenges Nigeria, Africa and the World at large is currently facing. The thrust of this paper is on the impact of uncontrolled proliferation, stockpiling, trafficking, availability and usage of these arms on Nigeria's national security as it is believed to fuel alarming levels of armed crime, communal conflict, political instability, social unrest as well as making all the geo-political zones of the country to be flooded with small arms. The paper further argues that the inability of the Nigerian government and its law enforcement agencies to check the menace has led to a major challenge of security, as it was revealed that previous and current efforts at tackling the issue has not yielded much efforts as only a few number of seizures of illegal arms has been made hence the proliferation continues to sustain and exacerbates armed conflicts within the country. The study is anchored on the realist and failed state theories using secondary data, literature evidence, descriptive and historical methodology. Findings reveal that the impact of small arms and light weapons on the society is too grave and devastating to be treated with kid's glove as it leads to massive loss of lives and properties, erodes social capital, facilitate corruption and climate of impunity. The paper recommends that the government must rise up to the challenges of tackling the menace with all seriousness and commitment.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Small arms, Light weapons, Proliferation, National security.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between small arms and light weapons and insecurity has remained a contentious debate among scholars. While some have argued that small arms are the direct cause of insecurity others have maintained that small arms and light weapons are the main triggers of insecurity in the country. Regardless of this disagreement, scholars [1, 2] have generally agreed that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons poses serious challenges to national security. It was also agreed that the availability of small arms have direct influence on the escalation of insecurity. This was further brought to the fore in his famous year 2000 millennium report to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by the then Secretary General, Kofi Annan who asserted that: 'the death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of carnage, small arms indeed could well be described as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is not merely a security issues, it also constitute a threat to human right and development. The proliferation of small arms sustains and exacerbates armed conflicts. It endangers peace keepers and workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian laws. It threatens

legitimate but weak governments and it benefit terrorists as well as the perpetrators of organized crime [3]. The near permanent state of insecurity in Nigeria has created a mental view among the citizenry for arms acquisition as only few Nigerians believe in the ability of the state security agents to protect them and their properties. In the same way scholars and analysts strongly believe that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons poses serious challenges to peaceful co-existence in the society. The situation in the country is exacerbated by economic hardship and partisan politics. Weapons in circulation in Nigeria come from local fabrication, residue of guns used during the civil war, thefts from government armoury, dishonest government accredited importers, smuggling by unscrupulous citizens, ethnic militias, insurgents from within and neighbouring countries and importation by some multinational oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta region. Furthermore, today's conflicts now depend almost entirely on small arms and light weapons as they are widely deployed in acts of aggression and destruction. The lethal nature of these weapons together with their ready availability and ease of handling makes small arms a major problem in the task of ensuring the national security of any nation. This has given rise to old threats assuming new dimensions such as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW),

ethno-religious conflicts, herdsman-farmers conflicts, militancy, cultism, assassinations, kidnapping, human trafficking and new threats such as domestic terrorism which is evident in the emboldened nature of the Boko Haram today. Based on this, the problem has acquired greater international attention. Therefore, reducing the proliferation of illicit small arms is now recognized as a significant component of sustainable development. Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals that the UN adopted in September 2015 urges states to reduce illicit arms flows by 2030 [4]. Thus, the need to re-examine the issues of the impacts of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on efforts at ensuring national security in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The accessibility of small arms has made it an issue of choice as illicit arms transfer is not a particular country's problem, nor does the spread of deadly weapons stop at a particular national border. In the same vein, guns are no longer the preserves of military and police force but have fallen into the hands of criminal gangs, death squads, terrorists, ethnic militias and other criminally minded individuals around the globe. It has also contributed to the disruption of the pattern of daily life of the individual, community and society at large, as the proliferation of SALWs has played key roles in denying people their comfort of having peaceful co-existence.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is of strategic concern to most societies as the acquisition of SALW by non-state actors always facilitates violent conflict and in some instances renders the state powerless due to the efficacy of the non-state actors [5]. He further posited that 'the availability of these weapons is bolstered by the presence of existing and new stock of weapons in the global market' as armed brokers shift these illicit instruments of destruction to existing and emerging markets. Weapons proliferation is a signature of post-cold war African phenomenon that led to the difficult choice of weapons transfer in form of patron-client network that saw to the weaponizing of most parts of Africa, and this resultant weaponisation of the continent gradually led to state collapse as experienced in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, to mention a few [5].

Going down memory lane, the history of small arms is traceable to the 14<sup>th</sup> century when it first came into general use. According to Uwa and Anthony [6], small arms referred to canon held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch hole. Subsequently, a stock was added to the match lock leading to the emergence of the real first handgun. Indeed, guns were first introduced into Nigeria by the Europeans during the period of legitimate and illegitimate trade. Similarly, guns, other arms, ammunitions and other weapons were brought in and used to suppress African's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonization. The guns and arms that were used

later found its way into the hands of the indigenous people during the colonial period and were used primarily for hunting. As time went by, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power and later transformed into ceremonial weapons that were displayed during burials, ceremonies, customary festivals among the natives. Presently, guns have gone beyond ornaments of prestige, or hunting, safari and expedition, as they have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. In Nigeria, government's inability to carry out a holistic disarmament and arms destruction programme after the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) helped to fuel the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

There is no generally accepted definition of SALW hence it has been defined variously. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention sees 'small arms' as those arms used by one person, and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs, incendiary bombs or gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, missiles systems or landmines; 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 heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted portable anti-aircraft missile launchers; and mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimetres.

According to the United Nations Panel of Experts on Small Arms, small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. While light weapons on the other hand include heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles (sometimes mounted), portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems (sometimes mounted), and mortars of caliber less than 100 mm. Ammunition and explosives includes cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons mobile containers with missiles or shells for single-action anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, anti-personnel and anti-tank hand grenades, landmines and explosives. This paper adopts the definition of the UN panel.

The word security originates from the Latin word "Se-curus". "Se" means "without" and "curus" means "uneasiness". This implies that 'security' originally meant liberation from uneasiness, or a peaceful situation without any risks or threats. Thus security has a wider meaning including 'to feel safe', and 'to be protected', and it is used to describe a

situation without any risks or worries [8]. This state of being protected from any threat underscore the importance of putting in place actions and structures that can ensure the shelving of people away from any harm. Therefore, security has been and still is a subject that has attracted a rapidly growing interest and concerns among scholars of social sciences whereby a wide spectrum of issues on the subject has led to new breakthroughs and findings as the experience of the world recently has led to paradigm shift in security discourse.

The specific term 'national security' was first officially introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report. The report captured seven dimensions of the national security concept as: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. Out of the aforementioned, two main aspects of national security were identified in the report; that is safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression and protection from sudden disruptions in the pattern of daily life, whether in homes, jobs or communities. Thus the conceptualization of security from the national security perspective represents a paradigmatic shift from the orthodox security thinking, which privileges the protection of state powers over an approach that accounts for the complex social and economic relations of its citizens.

National security is seen as freedom from actual and potential threats to national life that may arise as a result of human actions or inactions, or from disaster such as flood, earthquake, famine, drought, disease and other natural calamitous events resulting in deaths, human suffering and material damage. The emphasis on national security stems from three fundamental convictions; the sanctity and inviolability of human life, the universality and dignity of human life, and the existential imperatives of the value for individual safety in a world full of multifarious threats. Thus national security is, therefore rooted in three basic instincts of self- preservation, self-extension and self-fulfillment. By contributing to the disruption of the pattern of daily life at the individual, community and societal levels, the proliferation of SALW plays important role in denying people entitlement to the three core national values that is central to the notion of national security. The United Nations Development Programme [8] posits that human security (an aspect of national security) refers to 'freedom from fear and freedom from want'...'safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life-whether in homes, in jobs or in communities'.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on the combination of the realist theory and the failed state theory. The realist theory traces the root of conflicts in society to flaws in human nature which is seen to be the selfish pursuit of personal interest defined as power. The theory which is rooted in classical political theory shares theological and biological doctrines which talks about an apparent weakness and individualism that is inherent in human nature. The realist theory sees the world as an arena of conflict and believes that there are genetic defects which make human beings to behave negatively [9]. It further stated that the imperfection in the world has its roots in forces that are inherent in human nature. Thus it can be correctly said that this theory explains why human beings will engage in negative acts that promotes the free flow of small arms and light weapons in to their society as these acts of criminality is inherent in humans.

According to Anyanwu [10], a failed state is a term that refers to nation-states that have failed at some of its basic conditions and responsibilities as a sovereign government. In other words, a failed state is one that has feeble and flawed institutions like the police and judiciary as this invariably leads to a partial or complete breakdown of law and order, poor performance by the executive as well as the legislature in addition to the bureaucracy, and the armed forces that must have lost their capacity and professional independence. It also suffers from crumbling infrastructures, faltering utility supplies in all sectors, deteriorating basic human-development indicators such as high infant mortality and illiteracy rates, while at the same time creating a perfect environment for corruption and negative growth rates to thrive and flourish. A failed state lacks the ability to minimize internal conflict as it cannot formulate and implement public policies to provide and deliver effective services to its citizenry. It is characterized by social, political and economic failures, hence such states are no longer able to provide physical security, productive economic environment and stable political system for its citizens. These and much more have been the standard and still is the norm as witnessed in Nigeria – the wanton destruction of lives and properties by unknown gunmen or herdsmen, the inability of the police and other security agents to act proactively, the inability of security agencies to quell such situation has always been a source of worry as the high number of casualties in such situations are always alarming and above all the inability of security agents to bring suspects or those found guilty to book as has been noted overly. All and many more are present thus indicating that Nigeria is a failing state and that this theory best applies to the study.

### **THE PROLIFERATION OF SALW IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria is not just a transit and destination of SALW. It is also a fabricator of these small arms. This was revealed by the Presidential Committee on small arms and light weapons in 2015 when it was asserted that 60 per cent of all illicit arms used in the South-East were locally fabricated in the region [11]. In fact, the fall-out of the proliferation of SALW is very well documented in literature. For instance, crimes, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, micro-nationalism, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social upheavals, ethnic tensions, cross border smuggling, porous borders, black marketeering, local manufacturing, privatization of security, insecurity, poverty, economic crisis, mass unemployment, among others. It has also been further estimated that about 640 million SALW are in circulation world-wide. 100 million are estimated to be in Africa, with about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone and over 70 per cent of the 8 million illegal weapons are in Nigeria.

In the same vein, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace Disarmament in Africa in 2016 raised alarm on the level of proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in Nigeria to the tune of 350 million [12]. This were seen by many as lack of verifiable accurate statistical data, while others strongly believed that the porous nature of the nation's borders had helped to facilitate the illicit and nefarious activities by smugglers, but the recent discoveries that some of these weapons could actually pass through the nation's prime port –Lagos was rather rattling as the following incidences are affirmative pointers. In January 2017, Nigerians were shaken by the breaking news that the Nigerian Customs Service had intercepted 661 pieces of pump-action rifles from China secretly concealed in steel doors and other merchandise goods.

Similarly, in May 2017, another seizure of a container with 440 arms and ammunitions disguised and declared as 'Plaster of Paris' by an importer were intercepted, and this consignment originated from Turkey. On September 11 same year, the Comptroller of the Nigerian Customs Service confirmed yet another seizure of 1100 pump-action rifles in Lagos, bringing to 2201 the total number of intercepted pump-action rifles within the past few months. Although, all the officers and importers found culpable have been arrested for investigation and further prosecution in a court of law, it sure sends shivers down the spines of many Nigerians especially for a nation that is currently polarized along ethnic divide with threats and counter threats from virtually all the geo-political zones. With Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, Militancy in the South-South, Herdsmen attacks in the North-Central and the agitation for secession in the South-East. This

calls for the country's security architecture to be well positioned and battle ready to square up with any possible break-down of law and order in any part.

The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes, armed robbery, militancy, insurgency etc., have claimed the lives of over 30,000 Nigerians with Boko Haram accounting for over 20,000 lives in its almost nine years of emergence (NTA News). The majority of casualties of militancy, ethno-religious crises, and herdsmen attacks in Nigeria were SALW victims with many sustaining permanent disabilities. Indeed, injuries due to SALW have increased in both urban and rural areas in the country thus leading to increase in homicides-SALWs related deaths. The best known weapon put to use in such conflicts is the AK-47 automatic rifle as various reports from security agents have indicated. The problems associated with the proliferation of SALWs is multiplied by the inability of the police to address the recurrence of violent crimes, ensure law and order and provide adequate security to the populace. As it stands today, none of the nation's security agents currently possesses the training, resources or personnel to perform their duties effectively due to the lengthy and porous nature of the Nigerian border. For instance, the Comptroller General of Nigerian Immigration Services revealed that they have discovered hundreds of illegal routes in Nigeria that link some neighbouring African countries. Nigeria's borders are known to be massive with hundreds of footpaths crisscrossing to neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger with links to Mali, Libya and Sudan. From conservative estimate by the locals, there are well over 250 footpaths from Damaturu/Maiduguri axis that link or lead direct to Cameroon, Chad or Niger [13]. Additionally, the waterways serve as havens for arms trafficking through ships and speed boats on high sea and the use of canoes in the creeks. The exchange of stolen crude oil for arms and ammunitions is a well-known 'trading activity' nurtured and protected by militants or sea pirates and their collaborators with the possible connivance of some unscrupulous law enforcement agents in the Niger Delta. This is one of the major sources of arms and ammunitions that has kept the militants afloat for years now and has also served as a source of supply to the South-East and South-Western parts of the country [13].

The issues of proliferation of light weapons are well documented in literature, and so also the fall out of SALW are awash in our media on a daily bases. For instance, the entire country and indeed the international community were in deep shock at the volume of arms and ammunitions that were mopped up from the Niger Delta region during the surrendering exercise following the granting of amnesty. Weapons recovered included 2,760 assorted guns, 28,745 ammunitions of different caliber, 18 gun-boats, 763 dynamite sticks, 1090 dynamite caps, 3155 magazines, and several other

military accessories, such as dynamite cables, bulletproof jackets and jack-knives. It is strongly believed that the militants only submitted a fraction of their arms. In 2010, the Nigerian Customs Service seized 13 containers loaded with rocket grenades shipped in from the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the same vein, the Nigerian Customs Services said recently that it had seized arms and ammunitions imported into the country from the United States and Europe on 17 different occasions at various points of entry between 2012 and 2016. In October, 2016, another round of heavy weaponry was harvested in Rivers State when 22,430 militants, agitators, criminals, cultists and sundry characters embraced the amnesty offer of the state government and surrendered 1,000 fire arms, 7661 rounds of ammunition, and 147 explosives (Channels News).

Recent events in Plateau state- North Central geo-political zone rightly point to the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria where unknown gunmen opened fire on villagers who were returning from a local market at about 7:30pm and killed 11 people instantly leaving many injured on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November last year (Sahara reporters). In a similar vein, the spokesperson of the Special Task Force (STF), Salisu Mustapha confirmed that another attack was carried out on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the same month which killed 20 people leaving scores dead.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2017, 6 policemen were reported killed by herdsmen in Adamawa state where they were deployed to maintain peace following an earlier attack between farmers and herdsmen (Channels News).

In the month of April, several lives were lost in Kogi state following attacks by yet to be identified gunmen in Kpanche community of Bassa local government area of Kogi state. As recently as Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> of May, gunmen killed 38 people in two separate attacks in Sanga local government area in Kaduna state (Premium Times). These and many related incidences across the country are qualitative evidence of the fall out of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria, as has been descriptively captured to prove the method of its daily occurrence from one geo-political zone to another.

### **IMPACTS OF PROLIFERATION OF SALW**

Nigeria's problem with SALWs is not entirely new but has increased over the years as it has helped stoke ethno-religious conflicts, farmers/herders conflict, armed robbery, thuggery and other violent crimes and has fueled violence in different parts of the country. These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace, devastate economic livelihoods of individuals and communities leading to recurrent

violent conflicts that has led to the loss of thousands of lives and properties worth millions of naira, hence the impacts can be viewed as follows:

- Institutionalization of a culture of violence – the proliferation and misuse of SALWs has helped to popularize the culture of violence and destabilized our society by creating a favourable environment for criminals and contraband to flourish..... violence caused by small arms tend to undermine good governance, jeopardizes fundamental human rights, and hinders economic development by exacerbating armed conflicts through promotion of violent culture thereby threatening national peace in our country [14]. In addition, the massive quantities of small arms in circulation have been primary contributors to world-wide epidemic of ethnic, sectarian and criminal violence [1]. Although weapons themselves do not cause conflicts, but their proliferation and easy availability, is what exacerbate the degree of violence by increasing the lethality and duration of hostilities and encourages violent rather than peaceful resolutions of differences [8]. This was further observed by Hartung when he asserted that 'guns don't kill people, but societies awash in guns are far more likely to resolve their differences in a violent manner, or in ways that can quickly spiral out of control. Once this happens, the federal government can neither stop the killing nor heal societal wounds inflicted by militias, warlords, criminal gangs and other agents of death'. This explains the persistent reprisal attacks which has given birth to the culture of violence been witnessed across the country. This impact has showed a very strong relationship between small arms, their misuse, and levels of armed criminality because of the strong conviction that small arms availability, ownership, and portability are linked to a greater incidence of violent death, thus implying that more firearms equal more violence.
- Forced displacement of the population – this impact of small arms and light weapon is very conspicuous in the society as people are displaced internally and externally as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and as refugees respectively. The United Nations Humanitarian Centre for Refugees acknowledged that armed conflict is the key driving force behind most refugee flows [2]. It is also worth mentioning that in many recent and current internal conflicts, combatants deliberately attack and displace local populations as a way of gaining control over land and resources. For instance, the Boko Haram conflict, Herders/Farmers crisis as well as the various ethno-religious violence are all examples of armed conflicts that led to the displacement of large numbers of civilians as IDPs spread across both urban and rural parts of the country and also generated an equally large numbers of refugees

spreading into neighbouring countries of Cameroun and Niger republic. It has been proven further, that small arms and light weapons have been used to violate civilian camps, as some of the IDPs and Refugees camps have been targeted and many have equally lost their lives thereby creating and spreading insecurity in the camps.

- Increased number of firearms related deaths and injuries in our society. The proliferation of SALW has also led to higher combat and civilian casualties during conflicts as well as deaths from rising criminal activities. Thus Annan posited that 'small arms are widely used in conflicts in which a high proportion of casualties are civilians and in which violence has been perpetrated in gross violation of international law. This has led to millions of deaths, injuries and suffering and insecurity around the world .....Although, the accumulation of such weapons by themselves do not cause conflicts, the situation of their usage, their easy availability tends to exacerbate and increase the lethality of the conflicts and obstruct assistance efforts [3].
- Distortion of economic activities – it has been argued convincingly that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has impacted negatively on economic development by discouraging investments, and had led to misallocation of economic resources to security instead of development as funds meant for development projects are wasted on security as against development. President Buhari recently approved the use of \$1million dollars for security purposes, while education, health services and general developmental efforts continues to suffer. The impact of Nigeria's proliferation of SALW on human security is also massive in financial losses suffered due to the various conflicts across the nation as the governments tend to spend more on security during the crises and the aftermath. For instance, the federal government was said to have assisted the Bauchi state government with N135 million to help resettle about 30,000 IDPs from Plateau state after the 2010 Jos crisis [6]. These scarce resources would have served better in the provision of basic services that promote human security and human development. Aside the huge cost to governments, individual losses of properties and family members aggravates poverty further and inflicts deep fractures of kinship and family structures as many children have been left without parents, wives without husbands and vice versa. In addition, schools are forced to close down, teachers and pupils sent fleeing the area as well as doctors and nurses who cannot work in a dangerous environment. It is against this background that the UNDP established a special organization known as the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery

(CPR) to tackle the problem of SALWs. According to the UNDP [15].

Where guns dominate, development suffers, schools close, shops close, commerce stops, and the local economy grinds to a halt. Buildings are destroyed, bridges are blown up, and whatever development there has been is gone. Private investment dries up and development organizations can't operate any longer. Even after the shootings stops, there is no security. People can't return to their homes or live a normal life.....

- Militarization of the polity – the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria resulted in the militarization of society as the inability of the security agents to protect the citizens has led to self-help effort where individuals acquire arms to protect themselves thus leading to a militarized society. This was corroborated by Renner when he opined that the influx of firearms is not the cause of conflict but that the abundance of arms at every level of society means that there will be an increase in inter-communal tensions and that hostility will lead to an increased likelihood of armed violence and bloodshed in such society. This therefore goes a long way in confirming that proliferation of SALW has always led to higher combat and civilian casualties during conflicts as well as deaths from rising criminal activities in any society where SALW hold sway. This has played out overly as ethno-religious conflicts, unknown gunmen attacks, and armed robbery incidences across the country has become a familiar display of militarization in Nigeria thanks to the proliferation of fire arms.
- Engendering of mutual suspicion leading to national disintegration – the proliferation of SALW have been identified as major factor that engenders mutual suspicion in our society as it can easily violate the security of individuals, communities and the nation at large due to its capacity to trigger suspicion. It also has been noted that the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of SALW and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many geo-political zones of the country has led to an increased level of mutual suspicion in our society as it pitches one ethnic nationality against the other and if allowed to fester for too long can lead to national disintegration. As pointed out by the United Nations, Nigeria has never been more divided as it stands currently under the present dispensation and if mutual suspicion is allowed to grow and fester, the result might be a break-up of the nation.
- Mostly felt in developing countries –this is a major critical impact of small arms as it is mostly felt in developing countries. A few examples will illustrate this point. In Nigeria the activities of cattle rustlers, militants, farmers/ herders clash,

kidnappings/ abductions are a daily occurrence that are affecting our lives negatively. Furthermore, the introduction of small arms and light weapons into the aforementioned has turned in to a much deadlier and dangerous outcome. It has been noted that all reported violent deaths and injuries resulting from criminal acts were majorly committed with small arms and light weapons. Thus while the developing world suffers most of the human toll, developed countries are also not an exception, a case in point was witnessed in the United States of America where a 17 years old student shot dead nine students and a teacher while injuring another ten of his colleague in a Texas High school on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 bringing to 22 school shooting incidents in 2018 alone (BBC News). Similarly, another major impact linked to this is that there is a very strong relationship between small arms, their misuse, and levels of armed criminality. It is viewed that small arms availability, ownership, and portability are linked to a greater incidence of violent death, thus implying that more firearms will certainly equal more violence. All the same, the proliferation of SALW are said to be partly responsible for the rise in criminal activities such as armed robberies, hijacking, terrorism, stealing of livestock, drug trafficking, and smuggling. Armed robbery and other indices of crime in both developed and developing countries are estimated to have increased since the early 70s. In Nigeria in particular, the proliferation of SALW is said to be largely responsible for electoral violent conflicts that had bedeviled us since the return of democracy in this fourth republic.

- The problem of child soldiers – the proliferation of small arms and light weapon is largely responsible for the problem of child soldiering in conflict areas. Children are particularly and uniquely vulnerable to the proliferation of SALW since they have fewer defences to armed attacks and are also susceptible to kidnapping. Psychologically, early exposure to violence numbs people’s sensitivity to it. This could be a major influence on a child’s decision to become a combatant or use a weapon in later life. The effect of this on an entire generation of young people can have great influence on the development of a nation [16]. Although the recruitment and use of children for combat is outlawed, but evidence abound in literature of the continuous existence of child soldiers in conflict zones. Children under 15 years of age are very active as fighters, cooks, spies and sex slaves. In the North-East, many of the suicide bombers that carry out attacks are mostly children some as young as 10 years. Many of these children are abducted, others joined voluntarily in order to survive or avenge atrocities committed against their family or community while others are handed over

to the Boko Haram group by their parents who share their ideology as their own contribution to their cause.

- Potential for food insecurity – the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have remained a major threat to food security. With conflict comes a total collapse of basic needs of individuals as access to food is threatened because of the farmer’s inability to farm and the trader’s inability to engage in buying and selling. A typical example is the occupation of the North-East zone where farmers in and around the Chibok community could not continue farming activities, similarly, fishermen could not continue their fishing activities in the Lake Chad area due to the activities of the Boko Haram group. This scenario also played out in the Herders/Farmers conflict in Benue state that prides itself as the ‘food basket of the nation’ because of its fertile land and massive food production activities but today all that is history as agricultural production has been abandoned due to incessant attacks on farmers by herders leading to a fall in food production and subsequent rise in prices of staple foods like rice, yams, cassava etc.

#### CONCLUSION

The study so far revealed that there is a growing market for SALW in Nigeria and the government ought to intervene more decisively to stem this ugly trend since proliferation of small arms and light weapons is increasingly and dangerously becoming a transnational organized crime in the world thus a grave threat to security and development. The recurrent detection, recovery, and seizure of cache of arms and ammunitions by various security agencies further buttressed the point. The vastness of the nation’s borders in the face of these challenges bring to the fore the need for a rethink on the management and security of the nation’s borders and seaports –without which effective check or fight against arms trafficking and proliferation will remain an optical illusion. While an assessment of the number of illicit SALW in Nigeria is difficult to make but the number of these illicit firearms in circulation is quite significant. A general increase in insecurity seems to correlate with an increase in the levels of seizures. As it stands today, Nigeria currently lacks a central registry of firearms and a comprehensive and modern licensing system; this should be made our key priority for easy record checks.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is true that efforts have been made variously to mop up illegal weapons and also reduce violent crimes in the country. The current problems of small arms and light weapons requires a multi-faceted approach that will involve all and sundry like the private sectors and non-governmental organizations and the international community at large. The country must first put in place a comprehensive security policy to

address the problems of insecurity of lives and properties and this should include the issue of SALW proliferation. The National Assembly's long-standing inability to adopt firearms related legislation must be surmounted to make for easy differentiation between legal and illegal firearms in the country – and by extension to monitor illicit arms flows as ensuring long-pending legislative measures will go a long way in reducing proliferation of arms in circulation.

The federal government must as a matter of urgency address the issue of herders –farmers conflict which has reached a tipping point in the country presently. It must muster the political will to get to the root-sources of the massive and sophisticated arms in the hands of the Fulani-herdsmen who in most cases are the carriers and operators of arms they cannot afford to purchase or own as unmasking the suppliers and sponsors will help to demystify the mass killers operating under whatever guise and if possible bring them to justice, as this will go a long way in reducing the number of small arms related deaths in the country.

There is the need to strengthen the nation's land and maritime borders if the issue of SALW are to be curtailed. The government must strive for an improve and increase cooperation among the relevant security agencies within the country in areas of information gathering and sharing as this will go a long way in tracking and reducing the number of arms being trafficked as well as those in circulation.

There has to be increased cooperation between Nigeria and her neighbours especially those countries that borders us geographically. The federal government must ensure and engage in collaborative efforts that will help to address to some extent the inflow of SALW in to country. Without these, the size and make up of illicit arms flow in Nigeria will remain difficult to monitor and reduce to the detriment of national security and Nigerian citizen's safety.

The federal government must acquire and make available innovative technology such as radars and alarm systems which are major ways advance nations monitor and secure their borders. Some radars can be used as primary detection sensor for long range remote surveillance platforms. The ability to detect slow moving targets even in complex mountainous, thickly forested terrains and large open areas will go a long way in checking illicit movement of arms. Radars like Blighter is ideal for surveillance of both land and low air zone simultaneously.

There should be a regular conduct and comprehensive verification exercise to ensure that government arms are not been stolen from its armoury as was a case in point when some unscrupulous military

officers stole arms from government armoury and sold off to some Niger Delta militants in the past.

The federal government should as a matter of urgency recruit adequate number of personnel into its various security agencies to meet the global best practice obtainable and also give adequate training to such personnel to enable them withstand the current security challenges of our time, and where necessary, a holistic overhaul of the nation's security architecture is a *sin qua non* in our quest for national security.

Finally, the international community must do more to address the terrible and long-lasting human costs of the widespread availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons in a comprehensive manner as the safety and well-being of millions of people around the world depend on this.

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