Socio-Political and Economic Development under Threat: The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria

By

Toyin Cotties Adetiba
Research Article

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Toyin Cotties Adetiba

Faculty of Management and Commerce, University of Fort Hare, Private Bag X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa.

Corresponding Author’s E-mail: toyinwunmi2000@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

All over the world the extensive availability and use of SALW are associated with insecurity, as well as the primary source of deaths and injuries in wars and internal conflicts. Large accumulations and free flows of SALW in Nigeria have destabilized political processes, intensified and prolonged insurgency and contributed to banditry, crime and violence. They are more widely traded and held, both legally and illegally, by non-state groups, bandits, criminals and ordinary citizens, hence their availability for every sort of violent conflict, communal hostilities, criminal activity and violence. Its availability no doubt has become a threat to established socio-political and economic mechanisms for development.

Keywords: Small arms, Light weapons, Insurgence, Development, Militias

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria no doubt is an inimitable country where thousands of people who are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious co-exist. However, competition for the control of socio-political and economic authorities among the various ethnic groups has led to series of violence and civil unrests. Nigeria is a country with exceptional problems not experienced by many independent African states, if not the whole world. Significantly, the problem is how to achieve solidarity in the action and in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities, with each trying to exert forces on the central issue of one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity; where the desired justice will reign in all spheres of life (Balogun and Otti, 2007).

Fundamentally, conflict naturally is inevitable in ethnically divided country like Nigeria if not well managed. This assumption is premised on the fact that conflict in such societies emanate from groups competition for scarce socio-economic resources as well as political authorities. Put in another word conflict is intrinsic to all societies and associations due to the perpetual competition for economic and political power within such groups. Conflict is therefore an inevitable aspect of human interactions, an unavoidable attendant of several choices and decisions. In essence, once there is human interaction conflict is inevitable.

Since the end of the civil war of 1967-1970, many groups have fought each other over boundary adjustment, location of local government headquarters, marginalization, resource control etc. In some cases ethnic nationalities have fought each other in the name of hatred for each other, most especially in some semi-cosmopolitan societies, for example the Zango-Kataf and the Hausas in Kaduna state, the Aguleri-Umuleri/Umosa-Anam in Anambra state, the Hausa-Yoruba groups in Ogun state etc. All these have contributed to the very low socio-political and economic development of the country.

Relatively, Nigeria has made a relative gains since the emergence of democratic political system. Nigeria however still has a long way to go in terms of achieving functional socio-political and economic stability, peace and sustainable democratic development. Of all challenges facing socio-political and economic development is the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). According to Ibrahim (2003), the easy availability of SALW is a threat to Nigeria’s nascent democracy.

Since returning to democratic governance over a decade ago, Nigeria’s socio-economic development has been wreaked by ethnic and religious violence. According to Badmus (2010) there have been clashes in the Niger Delta region of the country between armed youths, protesting lack of adequate access to the wealth generated from their area, and security drafted there to keep the peace. The emergence of Boko-Haram since 2009 in the northern
part of Nigeria has had a debilitating effect on the socio-political and economic development of the area on one hand, and on the other hand, the entire country. The proliferation of SALW is resulting from experiences of many Nigerian killed, maimed, displaced or harassed during ethnic, religious, political or other violent clashes, who have lost confidence in the ability of the state to protect them, hence the possession of small arms and light weapons by people for self-protection.

Although no primary field research was carried out, some primary sources included interviews with Nigerian citizens in South Africa; some of whom have not spent close to five months in the country. Therefore using secondary data collection method – published and unpublished records; the rest of this paper is structured as follows: section two explains small arms and light weapons, the third section looked at the factors that reinforces the proliferation of SALW while section four conclude the work.

2. What are Small Arms and Light Weapons?

Fundamentally, there is yet to be an internationally accepted definition of small arms and light weapons. For the purposes of this work, small arms and light weapons are portable weapons made or modified to military specifications for use as lethal instruments of war. Small arms are broadly categorized as those weapons intended for use by individual members of armed or security forces, they are weapons designed for personal use (Wezeman, 2003). They include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and local pistols, Dane guns, hand grenades and light machine guns. Light weapons on the other hand are broadly categorized as those weapons intended for use by several members of armed or security forces serving as a crew. They include heavy machine guns; hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers; portable anti-aircraft guns; portable anti-tank guns; recoiless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems; and mortars of calibers less than 100 mm (Ngang, 2007). Some of these can be concealed in small bags and can be operated by anybody even without formal training. This explains their frequent use by untrained non-conventional armed groups in Nigeria.

Significantly, they require little or no maintenance as they are rugged and can remain operational for very long years. The long lifespan of SALW makes them a constant threat to the society in which they are. Due to the fact that the production of SALW does not necessarily involve sophisticated or hi-tech capacity and also because they are produced for military, police and civilian usage, there are a lot of producers and suppliers all over the world. Thus making SALW very inexpensive to procure, especially as much of them are being recycled from conflict to conflict. As the definition goes, they can be smuggled and transported quite easily from one place to another and difficult to monitor; which makes its proliferation easier. Though many SALW are quite simplistic in nature, their lethality has increased making it possible for a single combatant to constitute a big threat to an entire society. All the above characteristics of small and light arms mean that the factors driving the flow, accumulation and use of these weapons are peculiarly complex, involving a wide range of actors and social or transnational processes argued Green (1999).

The myriads of non-state armed groups that have sprung up in Nigeria since 1999 have used SALW to infact militarize the society with its subsequent impact on socio-political and economic development of the country. This demonstrates what happened when the state is unable or unwilling to control SALW possessions and provide political goods to large sections of the population. This is perceived by Ibrahim (2003) as gradually shifting the position of absolute stability to one of uncertainty and fear; which has become a thunderbolt that will likely jolt every patriotic Nigerian.

Garuba (2003) posits that a look at the challenges SALW poses around the world makes one wonders if they are not the real weapons of mass destruction. And from the condition – socio-political instability – that has made its demand very high and abuses that its availability facilitate, SALW have therefore prove to be a fundamental challenge to several nations, Nigeria in particular. No doubt Nigeria is one of the countries hardest hit by SALW proliferation and use in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ngang, 2007). It should however be noted that SALW itself does not in any means cause conflict, but their potential to fuel underlying tensions deepens as seen in prolong conflict, raising the number of casualties and as a threat to the sustainability of socio-political and economic development.

To understand the complexity of the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria, it is necessary to quickly examine the socio-political and economic conditions that have shaped the nation over the years. Nigeria is relatively large geographically, with different religious, cultural and ethnic groups and also generates significant wealth through the exportation of crude oil. Relatively this description of Nigeria will give room for free flow of SALW coupled with domestic production by Defense Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) as well as those manufactured by the local people, which has been a negligible source of proliferation.

Historically, Nigeria has had a militaristic with violent internal conflicts. A politically significant period was the civil war that lasted for almost 30 months (1967-1970). After the war, there was no concrete plan on the part of the federal government under Retired General Yakubu Gowon towards arms collection, since that time there has been
widespread of weapon possession. Nigeria has also been affected by its geographical location. With several neighbors, there are inadequate resources for effective monitoring. Thus any SALW produced externally easily found its way to Nigeria without any legal consequences.

The internal environment, which has high rates of poverty in spite of the enormous wealth the nation generate from oil exploration and exportation, is plagued by constant violence where SALW is freely used resulting in a militant youth and unemployed population. Scholars have come to agree that the use of SALW by the civilian population has led to a culture that practices and maintains violence. The resultant effect of which is on the socio-political and economic development of the country. Significantly there is little or no information available on how SALW are acquired; thus making it difficult for Nigeria government to curtail its spread. It should be made clear here that external programming to address proliferation of SALW is limited and tends to focus on reconciliation and conflict prevention rather than SALW specifically; hence the increase sophistication of organized crime as well as hostage taking in the Niger Delta area and high sophisticated sectarian attacks in the North. This has signaled the emergence of shadowy groups in the country after a gap of several years. (Aljazeera News, 2012). One pertinent question that readily comes to mind is what could be the possible reasons for the spread of SALW in Nigeria?

3. Factors that reinforces the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria

Many factors have contributed to the development of gun culture in Nigeria polity where more individuals and groups as well as politicians are appealing to the instrumentality of SALW in order to achieve their socio-political and economic goals (John et al., 2007). The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has many causes; these include among others, trafficking in, and local manufacture of, theft of weapons belonging to individuals or the authorities. Nigeria society no doubt has become militarized as socio-cultural relationships among the various groups in the country have broken down over decades.

To address this problem is a bit cumbersome but very important, especially when considering any programme of prevention. The closeness of Nigeria to conflict zones of West Africa states, its porous borders with Benin Republic in the West, Niger and Chad in the North, Cameroon in the East, makes Nigeria a major destination for SALW. Of much importance is the increase in the number of ethnically based militant group often in wider scope and often receive support from their kinsmen who either import or manufactured them illegally. This is coupled with those brought from peace keeping operations and the police either selling or leasing their weapons, and those stolen from legal owners sometimes end up in black markets where civilians buy them for personal use.

The above implies that SALW flows to the country and its eventual usage in insurgencies are largely determined by the structures on ground. For example porous border both in the North, West and the Niger Delta regions where there is access to international water ways are tell-tale signs of the permissive Nigerian system that condones non-state actors dealing and trafficking in arms (Ogundare and Elijah, 2010), hence the free flow of SALW in Nigeria. In essence the availability and accumulations of SALW by a group or individual are easily translated to accessibility through Border States in conflicts, more so access to SALW is determined by the resources of the recipient actors to act as patron. In contrast to the above, the growing bodies of evidence of availability of SALW and its usage in civil unrests and conflicts across the country shows that the way in which both state and non-state actors acquire SALW are different.

But what explains the contradiction between underdevelopment and the proliferation of SALW particularly in the context of 1999 till date vis-à-vis political corruption and socio-political and economic injustices against one another? An understanding of this show that people arm themselves not only because of their unwarrantable situation but also because of exploitation, injustices and politics of exclusion. Therefore the proliferation of SALW and the upsurge of insurgencies in Nigeria would not be appreciated without explaining some of the reasons behind the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria.

3.1 Long military rule

The complexity of small arms proliferation in Nigeria can be linked to historical socio-political and economic processes that have shaped the country since the flag independence of 1960. On the 15th of January 1966, the first military coup in Nigeria brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to power but his tenure was short lived six months into his government through another coup that eventually brought General Yakubu Gowon to power in July 1966. The expansion of the old Nigeria four regions into twelve in 1967 sparked off the Nigeria civil war that lasted for more than thirty months (1967-1970). During the civil war, heavy weapons were not only used but also small arms.

The civil war arguably commences the militarization of Nigeria society. In essence the proliferation of SALW did escalated during and after the war, both arms dealers, some state personnel and corrupt state officials all contributed to blossoming small arms market linking neighboring states as well as those in the Niger Delta area through the sea.
Put in another words during the civil war large numbers of SALW passed into general circulation, hence the militarization of Nigeria society (John et al. 2007).

The legacy bequeathed to Nigeria by the thirty month civil war was a protracted military rule, though there was a period of interregnum from October 1979-December 1983 after which the military continued until return to civil rule in 1999. The continuous stay of the military in power arguably led to entrenchment of what scholars referred to as military national psyche and a culture of violence. Therefore, what was virtually believed to be in place at that time was that political power only flows through the barrels of gun. For example the government of General Sanni Abacha was characterized by brutal repression in order to maintain a grip on power. Nigeria society in response to military oppression resulted to violence; the result of which is the uncontrollable proliferation of SALW. Its effect on socio-political and economic development in Nigeria has never been positive but negative.

The corrupt nature of the military and its politicization inadvertently destroyed its reputation as a corrective regime. It is often acknowledged that corruption destroy professionalism, the military became highly politicized while abuse of political offices and direct theft of public funds took place among senior officers and their subordinates within the ranks to criminal activities involving hire and sales of firearms comments International Alert (n.d). Since the return to civil rule in 1999, civil-military relations have not been what it should be. It has gotten to a situation where the population sees the armed forces as coercive and highly corrupt. To maintain order they frequently use SALW. A major outcome of this development is dynamic violent insurgencies in the country. The situation is so precarious that people who would not have dreamt of possession of small arms now have positive orientation towards arms possession for physical protection and eventual assault on their political opponents.

3.2 Political (Electoral) Violence

Nigeria’s democracy is today facing a stiff test of its time. Significantly, the importance of democracy to Nigeria cannot be overemphasized, not only will it boost the country’s democratic value and credentials in the committee of nations but will also strengthened the framework for addressing and possibly resolving the various ethn-religious and civil unrests threatening its socio-political and economic development. Nigeria’s political situation appears very problematic with lack of institutionalized peaceful and orderly system of power transfer. Nigeria’s political history is bedeviled with lack of faith in the impartiality and transparency of the electoral system due to widespread of political corruption.

Significantly, elections are considered to be very important in every democratic state. It is very important not on the political level alone but also in the distribution of socio-economic resources. However, the long period of military rule in the country has gravely influenced concentration of socio-political and economic power at the center, hence the concentration of the nation’s resources in the hand of a few. As such, Hazen and Hormer (2007) refer to Nigeria politics as politics of allocation through which electoral victory in intimately tied to access to the state as an avenue for wealth creation, accumulation and conferment of status.

It has been argued that politics is highly competitive everywhere elections are keenly contested. This explains the increasingly militarized nature of politics, the use of violence as an electoral tool, and the inculcation of a culture of violence in the society heightened by armed violence, and its proliferation like Nigeria. The transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance has occurred in parallel with the upsurge in armed violence in Nigeria argued Ginifer and Ismail (2005). In essence the militarized nature of politics combined with the prevalence of armed group all over the country has provided an easy leverage between politics and violence. The International Alert, monitoring the implementation of small arms control in Nigeria, observes that armed groups are in some cases hired by politicians for both offensive and defensive purposes, either to intimidate their political opponents or to protect themselves against attacks by the supposed opponents. In Nigeria various political parties through their recruited armed gangs employ violence against each other. This has made people to believe that the electoral victory belongs to the best party with the best armed group. However, these groups have taken the advantage of the opportunities presented by being hired hands, and has developed their own bases of economic support thereby freeing themselves from their political patrons.

Politics everywhere is about healthy political competition. But in Nigeria the political system expressly allows the patronage system to hold sway, making elections a do or die affair that have since resulted into violent clashes where SALW are freely used; motivated by the quest for political as well as economic power and its advantages. Politicians use the elections as a time to manipulate the existing ethnic schism in an effort to solicit for support. They use every opportunity to sort out past political discord with other party members as well as opposition candidates in their favor, and of course by whatever means available. This trend percolates the entire Nigerian state where political elites mobilize the pool of unemployed youths, often along ethnic, religious and party affiliations, as a vital political resource. This underscore the great value attached to the utility of violence in politics, with political and electoral success often indexed to the capacity to threaten or unleash violence (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:8).
The arming of youths or political thugs to win political office has thus led to a larger problem of the proliferation of small arms and the entrenchment of armed groups within the polity. Onigbinde (2008) comments that politicians who provide these groups with guns promise them jobs especially during elections so that the latter can incite violence and assist them in winning the elections, but after the elections these groups keep the guns and weapons when promises of jobs are unfulfilled. Significantly these ammunitions make them stronger and as well result to organized criminal activities to make money.

The political processes in Nigeria to some extent lack a peaceful mechanism for settlement of political disputes. Thus violence that arises from the proliferation and use of SALW during elections to settle electoral dispute is a serious and severe challenge to socio-political and economic development in the country. Succinctly, those who considered themselves to have been cheated in the electoral process have little or no confidence in the system. What this translates to mean is that it has led many law abiding individuals and politicians and their supporter alike to take the law into their own hands, often violently through the use of SALW.

3.3 Politicization of ethno-religious differences

Nigeria is geographically a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural political entity where ethno-religious violence erupts often and often. Nigeria’s population of about 160m people is practically divided between Muslims and Christians, and many of them get along. But relations have deteriorated in recent years, partly because of unpredictable disputes. Clashes are increasingly common and religious ghettos are forming in mixed cities (The Economist, 2012). Therefore in a country like Nigeria, it has become very easy for the members of the two major religions – Christianity and Islam – to recruit members as religious combatant who makes crises spread rapidly, most especially where one religion is dominant but with ethno-political dimensions added to it. The sophistication of weapons used in these crises has made them increasingly deadly. Without mincing words this has encouraged the populace to acquire firearms unlawfully on a large scale either for the purpose of protection or revenge. Within the last three decades, particularly from 1999 till date, Nigeria has experienced series of dangerous scene of ethno-religious conflicts which have occurred between ethnic groups and religious groups.

This scenario is not only dangerous to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria but also worrisome because since the beginning of the present political dispensation, Nigeria has witnessed the outbreak of many ethno-religious conflicts. Examples of such conflicts in recent times include Yoruba/Hausa community clash in Shagamu, Ogun state; the intermittent clashes in Kano, Kano state; Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi state; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam both in Plateau state; Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Mile 12 and Ild Araba in Lagos state; Zango-Kataf in Kaduna state; (Imobighe, 2003). These and other ethno-religious crises have undermined prospects for socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. Of importance is the threat of Boko Haram – an Islamic extremist; violence linked to this group’s insurgency in northern and central Nigeria, have left more than 2,800 people dead since 2009, who not only have paralyses economic activity in the north but a threat to the survival of Nigeria’s fragile unity.

What this means is that Nigeria has suffered from more increase of internal tensions. Ethno-religious groups in their quest for political power and control over “lucrative” socio-political and economic resources unleash terror on each other; this has become a common phenomenon in Nigeria political system, the product of which is the fuelling of corruption as well as political patronage, the end result of which is dangerous conflicts where SALW are used. It should be noted from the foregoing that the basis of which ethno-religious prejudices are made is within the confinement of common group consciousness and also exclusiveness, hence the politicization of ethno-religious differences in the polity.

Briefly, ethno-religious hatred is one of the most commonly offered explanations for violent conflict in post-cold war era. The primordial’s view is that conflict of this nature is unavoidable simply because of deep-seated cultural practices and hatred. What this indicates is that the behavior of a group as expressed can be understood as an end in itself, a result of a prior affective arousal or emotional need (Seol, 2008). It argues that the explosion of conflict after the cold war occurred because the lid was taken off the ancient hatreds when authoritarian regimes in the developing world lost the backing of their superpower patrons. Another school of thought that seems offer better explanation to Nigeria’s ethno-religious problem is that they are created given the antecedents of Nigeria’s colonial experience where the Christian missionaries were not allowed to operate in the Muslim north in an attempt to protect the cultural and religious values of the Hausas but to the advantage of colonial government. Hence the explanation that ethnicity is a construct of some group of people driven by socio-political and economic competition, a socio-political and economic construct meant for specific interest; an adjustable political instrument to serve a particular objective and a more convenient basis for mobilization (Young, 1986; Balch, 2008; Seol, 2008). Therefore there is nothing inherently conflictual about religious differences and groups’ identity in Nigeria before colonialism, rather a relatively neutral organizing principle under certain condition of identity has turned religious and ethnic differences into a powerful tool in Nigeria for mobilizing violence where small arms are freely used.

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The politicization of ethno-religious differences in Nigeria is characterized by the politics of dominance where ethno-religious ties remain a powerful force in the lives of most Nigerians, hence the accessibility of politicians to the people of the same religious affiliation who are mostly used in all the unstructured and unpredictable violence associated with ethno-religious crisis in the country. One can significantly state here that Nigeria politics is characterized by crisis, civil strife through the proliferation of small arms to settle political scores. In a situation where the winning power guarantees access to socio-political and economic wealth, ethno-religious sentiments is whipped up thereby dividing the population along ethnic and religious lines.

From the above, the Nigeria federation which by the amalgamation of 1914 is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society has become more ethno-religious than constitutional, where there is free flow of SALW. This has led to tragic consequences not only for socio-political and economic development in the country but for majority of casualties who are losing their lives, their health, their families, homes and their livelihoods (Keil, 2008). Beyond the huge economic cost, social crisis, ethno-religious differences has spillover effects which have added flames to the already turbulent and weaponized polity and a culture of violence through the various ethnic militias.

3.4 Growth of Ethnic Militias

The most central and perhaps the most important political good that needs and must be delivered by every state is the provision of security. What this translates to is that the citizens depend on the state for security. Rotheberg (2002) comments that failed states are deeply conflicted, dangerous and bitterly contested by warring factions, the state faces multi-faceted civil unrest, differing degrees of communal discontent, massive deterioration in the standard of living, decay in infrastructure and the greed leaders overwhelms their socio-political responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings; forcing the people to turn to their ethnic affiliations for safety and protection.

In a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria, conflict is driven by the fear of socio-political and economic domination, which stimulates and fuel hostilities between and among the various groups in the country coupled with avarice that easily pushes for antagonism, particularly when discoveries of resource wealth drives that greed. The socio-political and economic situations betray and disempowered the people thus producing violence. Significantly, the failure of the state to contain ethno-communal conflicts has resulted to the formation of ethnic militias in Nigeria which has since been a threat to the sustainability of democratic governance, which actually is seen as a vehicle to development. What this translates to is that the presence of ethnic militias in Nigeria is a threat to development.

According to Adejumosin cited in Hazen and Horner, 2007), ethnic militias are youth groups formed to promote and protect the socio-political and economic interest of a specific group. They are groups of armed individuals operating across and beyond state borders (Yacubu, 2005). Ethnic militias in the context of this work are not rebel movements; they are not seeking to take over the reins of political power; though they sometimes operates like the terrorist groups, but they serve as pressure group on the government. They belief in fighting mass misgivings over perceived political marginalization, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructure and state welfare programmes as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state security system, Anifowose cited in (Agbu, 2004). They are trained (not formal) and well organized paramilitary groups who are well familiar with the use of SALW. These groups in Nigeria include Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Boko Haram Sect, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and many other groups operating undercover.

Significantly, the explosion of armed ethnic militias as well as some community defense groups since the beginning of the present political dispensation has played a very important role in the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria. Apart from their presumably role of protecting their ethnic groups, they are as well driven by the political class who also double as their patron and supply them with SALW. Human beings are likely to get angry, and when they get angry, the most satisfying inherent response is to strike out at the source of frustration (Agbu, 2004). Some of these groups sometimes undertake independent act of violence to show their displeasure to socio-political and economic injustices within the polity and eventually capture the attention of any politician who may need their services. What this translates to is that in a situation of almost and absolute state of impunity, a strong market for violence has developed. Thus the unconstitutional rate at which these militias grow in Nigeria is a function of the dysfunctional and unstructured socio-political system in the country, hence the uncontrolled accessibility to SALW and undeniably “arms against humanity” Soyinka cited in (The Punch Newspaper, 2012).

As said earlier, these militia groups are not armed by ordinary citizens. Some influential members of the society who through their political position, wealth and economically benefitting from it, sustain the proliferation of SALW apart from those from local dealers. In essence the proliferation of SALW vis-à-vis ethnic militias in Nigeria is not only political but also has economic motivation; as expected, this is detrimental to the socio-political and economic development of the country.

From the above it could be said that inequalities and injustices emanating from unequal distribution socio-political and economic resources as well as unstable democratic system are some of the causes of the proliferation...
of SALW, the back of which the various militias in the polity ride in collaboration with their patrons. Without any point of contradiction, the aftermath of this is a series of setback for development, absence of socio-political peace and perhaps a sense of hopelessness within the polity. Put in another word, it has taken its toll on socio-political and economic development, and stands as an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of fundamental human rights where many have been denied the right to life through the use of SALW, and therefore an effusion of rising expectations that have generally remained unsatisfied accompanied the advent of the present polity in Nigeria.

### 3.5 Unemployment and poverty

Many factors determine how exactly the availability of SALW has been considered as a very important factor that influences the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. Unemployment and poverty is somehow considered to be a major issue in the proliferation of SALW because of its negative impact on the sustainability of development in Nigeria. Arguably, unemployment and poverty is considered to be at the base of the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria. There are many jobless, poor and disgruntled able-bodied young men and women alike who are readily available to be trained and armed to presumably defend the interest of their groups.

The high rate of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria is a contradiction of its status as one of the major exporters of crude oil and the fact that Nigeria is one of the poorest nations in the world. According to the International Alert group, the standard of living in Nigerians is the 36th lowest in the world in terms of human development indicators. For example, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria produces over 80% of total revenue that accrue to the country but the rate of poverty in the area as a result of years of neglect and environmental degradation is a sharp contradiction of the volume of wealth that comes from the area. As noted by Onigbinde (2008), poor resource management on the part of the government where corrupt and repressive government kept amassing wealth from oil proceeds led the group to seek for redress of injustices and inequalities. The resultant effect of this is the upsurge of militarized and militant poor, unemployed youths which has been associated with conflicts in the region as a result of their knowledge and easy accessibility to SALW.

John et al. (2007) comments that poverty and enormous economic disparity between the rich and the poor within the country have been identified as the driving force behind the use of SALW. What this translates to mean is that though Nigeria is a leading producer of crude oil, only a few have benefited from it. In essence the socio-economic disparity in the polity has mid-wife the enormous increase in insurgencies and crime which has indirectly turn out to be a safety haven for the teeming poor and unemployed youths who seem to be earning a living through it. The precarious high rate of poverty, unemployment and lack of fair distribution and management of the nation’s resources as well as the absence of genuine democratic values for people to express their concerns in the country has made it to be of necessity to join one form of ethnically based social group within which they can struggle for their own share of the resources.

In Nigeria the lower socio-economic group spread across the country as a result of poverty, unemployment as well as illiteracy, therefore they are readily available to be drafted into odd jobs which include political thuggery. The majority of these “political soldiers” directly comes from these poorly managed human resources. Large numbers of them are found in the urban centers, they are known as “Area boys” in Lagos and Warri. According to International Crisis Group (2007), they are referred to as “Ofio boys” in Port Harcourt, “Omo Ita” renegades in Ife, Osun state, “Agaba boys” in Calabar, “Yandaba” in Kano state. Arguably they are readily available for use by the politicians who recruits and equipped them with small arms to fight their political opponents. Their recruitment to these politicians is regarded as a form of employment, and they are meagerly remunerated not to better their lots but to buy drugs that will make them to perform. What this translates to is that these illiterate unemployed young men and women are a ready pool where political extremists recruit them to pursue their selfish socio-political ambitions.

One peculiar group in the northern part of the country whose activities and mode of operation is peculiar and well linked with the proliferation of small arms are the Almajiris. These are mostly young, poor and unemployed men mostly found in northern cities like Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Katsina etc. Their mode of operation is anomic; they do not possess a particular pattern of operation. Since the northerners are predominantly Muslim, it makes it easier for the politicians who offer them money for their destructive services to mobilize them along religious line. They are not only armed with dangerous traditional weapons such as bows and arrows, machetes but armed with sophisticated small arm and light weapons; hence the number of casualties recorded in some of the violence. For example over 500 lives were lost in the crisis that greeted the last presidential election of 2011 where these groups were used (Agenzia Fides, 2011).

One fundamental truth that needs to be told here is that if the Nigeria government would recognize the need to take care of the poor unemployed youths, the better the future of sustainable socio-political and economic development of the country. Presently the society seems to be more militaristic judging from the number of SALW in circulation, the effect of which is its threat to socio-political and economic development of the country.
3.6 Domestic agitation for resource control

For many countries resources such as oil, diamonds, gold etc. are essential commodities on the international market to keep the economy of the producing country going and satisfy human needs (Onigbinde, 2008). It has been argued that the major problem facing Nigeria is mis-governance. Ezirim (2011) opines that governance relates to decisions that define expectations and verify performance in terms of accurate account of accruals from resources, which consist either of a separate process or of a specific part of management or leadership. In essence governance involves the use of socio-political, economic and administrative authority as well as resource of a given state for its sustainability. On the other hand mis-governance involves the misappropriation of resources by government or inability of the government to ensure equitable distribution of resource gains.

One factor that has always led to ceaseless insurgency in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria where SALW is uncontrollably used is the way in which oil resource is managed. Poor resource management has very huge implications for socio-political and economic developments of the country as it create stagnation and breeds violence. The long years of neglects by the government no doubts has mid -wife what Nigeria government often called youth restiveness among various groups, evident in the clashes between the government and the various militias vying for the control of resources in the area. Garuba (2003) notes that the unfettered and unlimited access of the Niger Delta youth militias to stockpiles of highly sophisticated and sturdy weapons; largely small arms suggests their backing by networks of powerful and relatively rich elements. What this suggests is that there is a synergetic linkage between agitation for resource control and the proliferation of SALW.

Just as corruption has become part of Nigeria constitution that is not written down, militancy has become a force to be reckoned with in Nigeria as many are products of some political juggernaut creating them to incite violence, threaten their political opponents. The activity of these political godfathers who sponsor and fund such groups in addition to international arms dealer has increased socio-political and economic instability in the region. It should be noted that the possession of small arms does not actually cause violence but has helped to sustain it. The outbreak of insurgency in the Niger Delta region and other part of the country which coincided with the arrival of democratic governance in 1999 is considered to be a threat to socio-political and economic development of the country. The use of military to diffuse the flames of these insurgencies inversely making the people to resentfully resist the military, has not help and in most cases innocent people are caught between a predatory state and ruthless militants rendering life solitary, short and the place environmentally and economically devastated and eventually increase the quantity of SALW.

The socio-political and economic misadventure in Nigeria has impacted the sustainability of its development. To some extent this aspect of Nigeria society are a cause for concern because of its effect on national security. Significantly the proliferation of SALW in not limited to socio-political and economic decline, poverty and unemployment but also the profits from illicit trade in SALW across the country.

3.7 Profitability and its socio-economic utility

The higher the demand for a particular product the higher the supply; which consistently affect the upward movement of the profits margin. How the product is used to some extent does not have anything to do with the producer/manufacturer. Thus the economic profitability of SALW underpins its extensive proliferation and culture of violence in Nigeria. The trade in SALW is a symptom but not always the cause of violence. The constant application or usage of small arms only increases the intensity and sustainability of insurgence. The proliferation of small arms in Nigeria is characterized by a substantial trade in simple weapons that can be handled by virtually anybody than other types of conventional arms. The trade in small arms in Nigeria has a significant impact on the socio-political and economic climate in Nigeria thus enhancing the culture of violence across the country.

Arguably, the quest for easy profits has encouraged the growth in the arms market in Nigeria. Those engaged in the production locally have made profits from the business which to them is rewarding. One political factor that has aided the growth of this business in Nigeria is the unstructured and unstable socio-political environments. According to Yacubu (2005:58) in price terms, in Nigeria, a double-barrelled shotgun cost between 50,000 and 65,000 naira; a single-barrelled shotgun between 25,000 and 30,000 naira; the price of pistols ranges between 3,000 and 7,000 naira, depending on the model, the seller and the place of sale. Considering the huge profits made from small arms, one might expect the business to continue to thrive.

The argument here is that the increase availability of small arms, some of which come through porous borders and their diffusion to non-state actors is as a result of its trade, thus exacerbating the intensity of violence in the country. Capitalizing on the precarious socio-political situation in the country and motivated by profits, corrupt political leaders some time engage in this business. This has impacted the socio-political and economic development of the country.
In a shift from the above there are several other factors that have contributed to the proliferation of small arms cum profiteering which has aided the business to thrive in Nigeria, though it’s on a small scale but it is worth mentioning. One of such factor is cultural practices. In some part of Nigeria to be precise the south west, some type of weapons are used for traditional ceremonies such as coronations and sometimes while welcoming their illustrious sons and daughters back home. In Ekiti, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun and part of Edo state, Dane guns are used for such occasions. According to Yacubu (2005), some communities use dynamite and other modern explosives on these occasions. What this translates to mean is that attachment of cultural practices to weapons has encouraged the use and proliferation of locally manufactured small arms, most importantly rural communities where culture and traditions still enjoy great respect. Hence the difficulty in combating arms proliferation.

The rise in insecurity in Nigeria also fuels demand for small arms. Individuals use arms as a means of personal defense. One major source of such arm is through the illegal market. For example it can be through the police and military officers who are by one way or the other poorly paid. Most Nigerians living in areas prone to violence seem to be in a permanent state of fear, hence their quest to possess small arms for one thing- “protection”, thus deepening gun culture in Nigeria.

One serious but pathetic dimension to the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria is growth of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The mainstream of who are children of wealthy politicians whose parents has inculcated gun culture. Others who are not children of politicians are sponsored by the patrons who use them for their own selfish end. According to International Alert (n.d), in addition to the terror which they unleash on campuses, they are also known to maintain ties with gangs of armed robbers and other criminals. Thus they represent a major threat to lives and investment, and a glaring manifestation of the criminal dimensions of SALW proliferation in Nigeria.

The loss of governmental control of the economy and the inability of the state to rescue its populace from poverty, insecurity, political corruption and poverty has apparently fractured the basis of socio-political and economic development, hence the reliance of the populace on small arms to achieve their goals.

4. CONCLUSION

Without any point of contradiction arms proliferation is a global phenomenon, especially after the cold war. In other words the proliferation of SALW is not limited to a particular region or continent but a global affair. However, the acquisition of SALW by non-state actors and its use in conflict prone area is a matter of concern. The long military rule and its attendant effect on civil-military relation in Nigeria and the inability of the government to deliver socio-political goods has inadvertently impact the upward demand for SALW, hence a threat to socio-political and economic development.

As earlier stated the possession of small arms does not itself cause violence but intensify and prolong violence. In such a way it has indirectly integrated into economic values of local manufacturers who sell it locally either legally or otherwise and those that receives and engage it in predatory violence against one another. Put in another word, the easy accessibility and availability of SALW has become a catalyst to insurgencies in the polity.

It is of interest to note that the long year of peaceful co-existence and inter-socio-economic ties among Nigerians has been eroded as a result of fear which has given way to violence between Christian and Muslims particularly in the northern part of the country. The most recent is the activities of the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect who has since 2009 been unleashing terror on the people living in that part of the country with casualties already above two thousand. As reported by The Economist (September 29, 2012 edition), the insurgency has done great economic damage, Foreign and domestic investors have fled the area, the GDP of northern Nigeria is reckoned to have shrunk by around 30% since 2010. In some places public services have ceased because frightened civil servants no longer turn up for work. The gap between the already poor north and the wealthy south is widening fast. Not that alone, the culture of bitterness, mistrust and suspicion which has widened and fractured the gap between the various ethnic groups in the country, has not only give room for the use of SALW but also allow it to create an atmosphere of fear which often deprive the populace to resume socio-economic and cultural activities.

The responsibility of every good government is to seek and protect the lives and property of its citizen, promote and protect the fundamental human rights, as well as provide essential services. But when the state is incapacitated, the government is forced to abandon its fundamental role of socio-economic provisioning for security which again creates a militarized society. In other words the delivery of social services is grossly affected and government channels its resources and political energy towards security, thereby reducing its capacity to deliver political goods. The sustainability of socio-political and economic development in post-military Nigeria where violence that has the potential to engulf the entire country appears to be a common occurrence as a result of the availability of SALW; has significantly placed a question on Nigeria’s territorial integrity. What this translates to mean is that improving socio-political and economic conditions of its people is significantly under threat.
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