

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the Dialectics of Insecurity and Sustainable Development in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Much like in many climes, illicit small arms and light weapons proliferation is considered one of the significant contributors to security challenges in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study examines the recurring incidence of insecurity and its devastation on sustainable peace and economic development in Cross River State. The communal land crisis, sea piracy, oil bunkering, unemployment, porous borders, corruption, cultism, illegal arms dealers, drug trafficking, and militancy are the significant causes of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Cross River State. The paper utilized a mixed method of data collection. Data for analytical purposes are extracted through interviews and direct observations for the primary method, and documentary instruments such as journal articles, textbooks, internet materials, and security bulletins are used for data generation, and inductive analytical techniques for data analysis are obtained for the secondary method. The study recommends that government strengthen the institutions that fight against corruption and entrenchment of social justice; there is a need for the state to create a healthy economic environment with relevant social, economic, and physical infrastructure for businesses and industrial growth that will provide valuable jobs and quality education to her citizen, community policing need to encourage in most of the crime-prone areas, and there is also need for government to strengthen the formal security formations with modern equipment and retraining its staff to meet up the present security challenges. Lastly, the government needs to enact policies to integrate, reconstruct, and rehabilitate the conflict-prone communities with markets, schools, improved medical centers, etc. Doing these will make them surrender their arms and embrace sustainable peace and economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Economic development, insecurity, light weapons, peace, security, small arms.

Introduction

Much like in many climes, security no doubt appears to be one of the most debatable social phenomena in the world. The discourse on the security challenges largely stems from the fact that global efforts have devised a means to bring about sustainable peace and economic development through diplomacy and economic sections. However, the policies and strategies have created more security problems worldwide. Over the past decades, the recurrent decimals of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons have been assumed to be one of the significant contributors to global security challenges. These

activities have fueled global terrorism, kidnapping, cultism, drug abuse, herdsmen, bandits, sea piracy, armed robbery, organized crimes, oil bunkering, communal land crisis, and political instability, which have stalled global sustainable peace and development.

It is necessary to clarify the key concepts introduced in this study – “small arms,” “light weapons”, and “insecurity,” - to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the issues being discussed. This becomes even more imperative given that no universally acceptable definition of variables is under investigation so as to come out of this “conceptual dilemma.”

Small Arms: Renner (1997) describes small arms as dangerous weapons an individual could handle. To him, this includes all weapons ranging from revolvers and pistols to machine guns, light anti-tank weapons, shoulder–fire surface–to–air missiles, and more. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (1997) defines small arms as clubs, knives, machetes, revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns.

Light Weapons: Light weapons are classified as heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles, and portable launchers caliber less than 100mm. The United Nations General Assemblies (2005) defines light weapons as those designed to explode or launch a shot, bullet, or projectile by the action of an explosive. Diarra (2005) also maintains that light weapons include sub-machine guns, portable anti-tank launchers, and rocket machines that are capable of massive destruction.

Insecurity: Insecurity generally refers to a conditional situation where there is a threat to life, property, social liberty, fear, oppression, anxiety, tension, hunger, lack of confidence, and the absence of core social values in a society. Cole and Brett (2010) define insecurity as “a state of being not secure or lack of confidence.” They further describe it as a condition of living in fear, economic or social danger.

In Nigeria, the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in circulation first came into being as a result of the trans-Atlantic trade and colonial administration. It was later supported by other activities such as the residual guns used during World War II and the Nigerian Civil War, sea piracy, militias, herdsmen, bandits, insurgents from neighboring countries, local fabrications, dishonest government-accredited importers, and the engagement of Niger Delta avengers that operates in the oil-producing region have caused severe security threat to lives and properties worth millions of naira (Ajejo, 2005).

The geographical placement of Cross River State covers the eighteen local government areas of the three senatorial zones, which falls within the Niger Delta region that occupies a land mass of 20,156 sqm. It shares boundaries with Benue State to the North, Abia/Ebonyi States to the West, the Republic of Cameroun to the East, and Akwa–Ibom and the Atlantic Ocean to the South, quickly making it possible for them to house large caches of illicit small arms that are used for different criminal activities in the state. This study seeks to investigate how the proliferation of illicit arms has caused severe devastation to sustainable peace and economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem Klare (2014) notes that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) as uncontrolled and illegal transactions of small arms are widely used in various terrorist attacks across different continents. Le Brun (2016) and Gunaratna (2002) believed that SALW is the primary tool of terrorist violence. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has had and will continue to have devastating consequences in the Cross River State and the South-South region, Nigeria, and many other parts of the world. The proliferation of SALW is prevalent in the Cross River State, where achieving stability and peace remains elusive and a far-fetched reality

for most local government areas. The ever-increasing requirement for the SALW as the primary tools of violence, kidnapping, causing deaths and injuries to thousands of innocent civilians. Cross River state, geographically, falls within the tropical rainforest with a multi-cultural political entity where inter-communal violence land border crisis erupts often and often. The crisis is attributed to what Rotberg (2002) comments that failed states are deeply conflicted, dangerous, and bitterly contested by warring factions. The states face multi-faceted civil unrest, differing degrees of communal land border discontent, massive deterioration in the standard of living decay in infrastructure, and the greed of leaders overwhelming their socio-political responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings, forcing the people to carry arms and turn to their primordial affiliations for safety and protection.

Despite the ban on the use of illicit arms and the introduction of different amnesty initiatives for militias and different peace mediation between the warring communities in Cross River State, their contribution has been ineffective with rising fatalities, kidnapping continued inter-communal war, and all forms of organized armed crimes in the state. Every intervention effort seems to be undermined, hence the understated research question for investigation in this study: Does the proliferation of SALW promote insecurity and endanger sustainable peace and economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Objectives of the study The study has broad and specific objectives. The broad objective of the study is to examine the link between the proliferation of SALW and the dialectics of sustainable peace and economic development in the Cross River State. Specifically, the study investigated if the fragile nature of the state contributes to the ineffectiveness of the Cross River State government in protecting the lines and property of the citizens, promoting fundamental human rights and its territorial boundaries, and providing essential services. However, when the state is incapacitated, the result will be all forms of armed crimes in the state.

Significance of the Study The study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study highlights some critical issues associated with the state in managing SALW proliferation in the Cross River State, Nigeria. The study mentions the successes and challenges that different state governments face in amnesty initiatives to curtail the proliferation of SALW in Cross River State. However, the study's findings are believed to produce helpful information for stakeholders, government at all levels, and citizens. The result of the study modestly contributes to the existing debate on the proliferation of SALW and efforts made to mitigate or contain them. Practically, students can access the paper for further investigations, and policymakers and security agents can also refer to it in decision-making.

Literature Review

The aim of this review is to assess pertinent literature with respect to the dominant themes under investigation.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the Dialectics of Sustainable Peace and Economic Development Anders (2007) states that small arms and light weapons could be regarded as the weapons of choice for terrorists, insurgents, as well as crime syndicates, which have the potential to undermine stability and security by causing domestic violence and armed crime in developing countries of the world. Klare (2014) notes that uncontrolled and illegal transactions of small arms are widely used in various terrorist attacks across different countries and regions, such as Europe, Latin America,

Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, owing to their perceived advantages, being unsophisticated, small, cheap and portable to handle. Furthermore, Le Brun (2016) and Gunaratna (2002) believed that small arms and light weapons are the primary tools of terrorist violence. The scholars explain that most terrorists use firearms and explosive weapons, and by controlling their availability, the scale of terrorist violence could be reduced. Moreover, the continued access to illicit small arms and light weapons contributes to the development of terrorism and can also represent a crucial challenge to a national security problem (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2015).

The rising proliferation of small arms and light weapons has constituted one of the significant threats to global sustainable peace and security. In Nigeria, small arms and light weapons encouraged and sustained communal land conflicts, religious crises, kidnapping, armed robbery, Fulani herdsmen, bandits, Boko haram, and organized crimes (Chelule, 2014). This study viewed the use of small arms and light weapons by unauthorized persons and groups as a significant security threat (Stohl, 2005).

Bashir (2013) states that the illicit proliferation of small arms not only destroys human lives and their properties but also exacerbates ethnic conflicts and prevents peaceful co-existence among the people. The threat and misuse of small arms and light weapons can be significant challenges to sustainable peace and development, thwart the support of humanitarian and economic aid, contribute to refugees, and increase the population of internally displaced persons (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). More so, Banko (2016) posits that the illicit spread of small arms has a severe effect on the national security of various states, which causes threats to the lives of millions of citizens.

In Cross River State, the geographical placement of the state that makes them share boundaries with the Atlantic Ocean to the south, Cameroon Republic to the East, Benue State to the North, and Abia State to the West have contributed to the easy flows of thousands of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the state (Basseyy, 2017). Lamb and Dye (2009) state that the arms trade can be executed through the sea, land, transport agents, intermediaries, or brokers. To them, the trace of arms deals, whether legal or illegal, is very difficult to dictate and analyze in an international scene. Both advanced capitalist countries and emerging countries that produce small arms and light weapons find it challenging to provide information on arms transactions simply because of the nature of deals involved in the business.

Bourne and Berkol (2006) postulate that states have secretly negotiated deals and transfers between small arms and light weapons. To him, any arms deals and transfers that the officials do not approve of the recipient countries could be classified by that nation as interference in its domestic issues and illegal. They usually used concealment, smuggling, mislabeling, and false documentation to convey different kinds of illicit weapons in the state. These illicit small arms and light weapons in the state are also facilitated through the local supply of legitimate and illegitimate small arms by local manufacturers (Baker, 2015). The activities of sea piracy cultism, and Niger Delta avengers who traverse through the Atlantic Ocean and to the North, the herdsmen, and bandits who pass through the Mali, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger routes with their cattle are usually in possession of large quantities of arms and ammunition, as they come into the state to either feed or sell their livestock (Mutwiri, 2014). The recent rise in crime arms wave in Cross River State was a direct result of unemployment, economic underdevelopment, and massive systemic corruption in the state, which have subjected most of the idle youth to be quickly recruited into kidnapping, hijackers, militant groups, armed robbery, political thugs and sea piracy (Robert, 2008).

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. Rotberg (2002) comments that failed states are deeply conflicted, dangerous and bitterly contested by warring factions, the state faces multi-faceted civil unrest, differing degree of communal discontent, massive territorialization in the standard of living, decay in infrastructure and the greedy leaders overwhelms their socio-economic and political responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings forcing the people to turn to their ethnic formations for safety and protection.

Theoretical Framework The study is anchored on “failed state theory” in explaining how illicit small arms and light weapons proliferation has endangered the peace and sustainable economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The term “failed state” is often used to describe a state that has failed at some of its essential responsibilities as a sovereign government in both domestic and international affairs. A failed state has shattered social, economic, and political structures to perform averagely (Anyanwu, 2005). To him, such a state has the characteristics of failing in its social, political, and economic responsibilities of managing its people and geographical boundaries.

The advocates of failed state theory are of the opinion that a failing state is characterized by a weak and ineffective central government that has little practical control over much of its territorial boundaries, non-provision of basic social amenities to its citizens, widespread corruption, abject poverty among its people, ethnic bigotry, small arms and light weapons proliferation, land disputes, refugees and involuntary migration of large number of people, insecurity problems and sharp decline in economic growth and development (Anyanwu, 2005 and Amechi, 2017). To them, the failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political support for a breakdown of law and order, a process that is generally triggered and accompanied by anarchy forms of internal violence crisis in the state, which was as a result of a collapsed state institutions such as; the military, police force, immigration and judiciary that have aid and abating criminal activities in the state, such as Boko Haram, kidnapping, bandits, oil thefts, herdsmen, communal land crisis and organized crimes. These acts have caused severe destruction of lives and looting of assets worth millions of naira in Nigeria. The theory is adequate for the study because it explains how the failed state encourages the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its adverse effects on the security of lives and properties in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methodology

In carrying out this study, the research hypothesizes that the illicit small arms and light weapons proliferation is responsible for the high level of insecurity and economic underdevelopment in the state. In doing this, the paper relies heavily on both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Data for analytical purposes are extracted through interviews and direct observations for the primary method, and documentary instruments such as journal articles, textbooks, internet materials, and security bulletins are used for data generation, and inductive analytical techniques for data analysis are obtained for the secondary method. As pointed out in Biereenu–Nnabugwu (2006:379), the technique “is geared towards the development of explanatory model based on issues that emerge or find out what are the factors responsible for the deplorable state of security architecture in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Causes of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Cross River State, Nigeria

These activities were facilitated by the following factors in the Cross River State, such as:

Communal land crisis In Cross River State, land is considered the most valuable communal asset that is transferred from one generation to another. As such, any attempt to take over the land for one reason or another will result in the violent use of small arms and light weapons to defend their ancestral land. This constitutes one of the major reasons for the wide spread of arms in circulation, especially in the conflict-prone areas in Cross River State.

Porous borders in the state: The free flow of migrants from Cameroun, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Europe through our unguarded land and sea borders, allows the movement of small arms and criminals to enter the state without proper checks.

Militancy This word became more vocal in Nigeria when the Niger Delta Avengers took up arms against government exploitation and environmental pollution of their land and sea areas due to oil exploration and exploitation of masses.

Unemployment The recent increase in crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and sea piracy in the state was a result of unemployment, sharp economic decline, and inefficient and corrupt social institutions in the state. These people, who are mostly in the youthful age bracket, are easily recruited into kidnapers, armed robbers, oil thefts, and many others.

Illegal armed dealers Illegal importation of arms and ammunition has made the possession of arms by individuals and groups very easy. This makes it possible for groups such as Boko haram, militants, Ododua, Bakassi boys, MASSOB, Bandits, and Herdsmen to possess small arms and light weapons in the state.

Oil Bunkering in the state Cross River State fall among the Niger Delta States, which produce oil in large volume around the early 1999, suffers from the activities of illegal oil bunkering. This activity is promoted by the state of insecurity through the illicit arms proliferation in the state.

Danger of Small Arms Proliferation on Sustainable Peace and Economic Development

Danger on Political Stability The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has generally threatened global peace and security. The continued increase in the importation of illegal arms into the shores of Nigeria has serious negative implications and creates tension, which may trigger the country into another round of political instability. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, if care is not taken the massive level of illegal small arms possession in the hands of militias may see the country witnessing disintegration. The continued armed clashes with communities, bandits, Niger Delta avengers, Biafra force, and farmers/herdsmen crisis, which have killed and displaced thousands of people in Nigeria for the past two decades, this activity has seriously threatened the political survival of the country (Naziru, 2014). According to James (1924, P.43), political instability and conflict retards the political development of a nation. To him, political development is seen as an increase in national unity and political participation and a drastic decrease in conflict within a nation when there is respect for social values.

Danger on Economic Insecurity discourages meaningful economic investment in the state, as it makes investment unattractive to investors. This is because it increases the cost of doing business, either through direct loss of lives and properties or the cost of taking precautions against business risks and uncertainty. These costs could have a negative effect on investment, making economic growth and development difficult. The thick arrow connecting the insecurity environment and business investment means that insecurity can be a huge blockade to business investment (Ujah and Eboh, 2006).

Danger on Social The proliferation of small arms and light weapons not only destroys lives and properties but also exacerbates communal land disputes, terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and organized crimes perpetrated by individuals and groups through the use of illicit weapons in circulation (Bashir, 2014). This proliferation of arms was responsible for the massive killing of people, which forced most of the communities to migrate to other communities for safety as a result of the threat to their peace and security.

Discussion of Findings

The hypothesis clearly states that there is a contradicting relationship between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on insecurity and sustainable development in Cross River state, Nigeria. The study's findings have clearly shown that small arms proliferation is responsible for insecurity and economic underdevelopment of Cross River state, Nigeria. The collective view of the selected members of the eighteen (18) local government areas was employed. This finding supports Garuba (2013), who posits that looking at the challenges small arms and light weapons pose around the world makes one wonder if they are not real weapons of mass destruction. And from the condition of socio-political instability that has made its demand very high and the abuses that its availability facilitates, SALW has therefore proven to be a fundamental challenge to several states, Nigeria in particular. No doubt, Cross River State is one of the states hardest hit by SALW proliferation and use in Nigeria (Ngang, 2007).

Similarly, the findings also go with the view of Badmus (2010) that 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 proliferation of SALW is resulting from the experiences of many Nigerians 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. Furthermore, the high level of proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their use have endangered individual lives and communities, leading to massive deaths, injuries, and loss of property worth millions of Naira during conflict and even in the aftermath of the conflicts (Turkur et al., 2020, p. 4).

This finding is also supported by Rotberg's (2002) comments that failed states are deeply conflicted, dangerous, and bitterly contested by warring factions. The states face multi-faceted civil unrest, differing degrees of communal land border discontent, massive deterioration in the standard of living decay in infrastructure, and the greed of leaders overwhelms their socio-economic and political responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings, forcing the people to turn to their ethnic formations for safety and protection.

The Strategic Policy Interventions Use in Cross River State, Nigeria

The Role of the Inter-Governmental Bodies To overcome insecurity, there is a need for intelligence gathering and surveillance so that law enforcement institutions can be proactive and reasonable in predicting crime with near-perfect accuracy rather than being reactive. The government must not only continue to engage the security agents, but it must also recognize the need to devote attention to security intelligence, capacity building to

meet the global best practice standard, and acquisition of modern technological devices. (Ogunle, et al., 2011) have argued that for it to be effective, the government must ensure that the scheme is well managed, the cameras should be recording, with good quality images, and an incident caught on cameras should be followed up by the appropriate authorities, e.g. surveillance technique that aims to prevent crime by increasing the perceived risks of potential offenders in engaging in criminal activities.

The Role of Community Policing This is a new approach to the management of armed crimes and all forms of criminal behaviour in Cross River State. This crime-fighter attempted to curb the wide spread of small arms and light weapons in circulation and the rise in security in their different communities in the state. It is important to note that healthy security management can be significantly facilitated by the cooperation of communities' feelings as regards our collective responsibilities towards lasting peace in Nigeria; communities should strive to live peacefully with other communities. They should also be vigilant of strangers in their localities to ensure that criminals do not have easy access to their communities.

Lastly, in dealing with the issue of insecurity in the state, the security agents cannot be left to handle the matter alone, without looking at the root causes of the problem. Akpobibibo (2003) asserted that there is a need to reorder priorities and to seek a better understanding of the underlying causes and dynamics of the insecurity in the country with the aim of providing effective conflict prevention and management strategies. The formulation and effective implementation of policies and programs capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria are crucial, especially with regard to poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, injustice, corruption, porous borders, and small arms and light weapons proliferation. Therefore, for the insecurity issue to be managed, there is a need for the government's committed organs (legislative, executive, and judiciary) to have good leadership to deliver the mandate of the citizens.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Without any point of contradiction, the proliferation of SALW is a global phenomenon, especially in Third World countries. However, the ownership of SALW by non-state actors and its uses for organized crimes and conflict-prone areas is a matter of concern. The study examined the proliferation of SALW and the rising insecurity challenges that have stalled sustainable peace and economic development in Cross River state, Nigeria. The increasing insecurity in the state was associated with the proliferation of SALW, systematic corruption, land border disputes, oil bunkering, porous borders, militancy, cultism, and weak security agents to checkmate the rising security problem in the state. The responsibility of every good government is to seek and protect the lives and property of its citizens, promote and protect human rights, and provide essential services. However, when the state is ineffective, the government is forced to abandon its primary role of socio-economic provisioning for security, creating a militarized state again. In other words, the delivery of social services is grossly affected, and the government channels its resources and political energy towards security, thereby reducing its capacity to deliver good governance. The sustainability of socio-political and economic development in a post-militarized state where violence that has the potential to engulf the entire eighteen local government areas appears to be a common occurrence, as a result of the availability of SALW, has significantly placed a question on Cross River State's territorial integrity what

this translates to mean is that improving socio-economic and political conditions of its people is significantly under threat. The findings recommend that there is a need for good leadership that will bring good governance and transform the social, economic, and physical infrastructure for markets and industrial growth, as well as provide valuable jobs, education facilities, and medical services for all citizens.

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