

COUNTING THE LOSSES: THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF SALW PROLIFERATION, WHO GAINS WITH DISARMAMENT

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Introduction

Most present-day conflicts are fought mainly with small arms. They are broadly used in inter-State conflict and they are the weapons of choice in civil wars and for terrorism, organized crime and gang warfare. Small arms are cheap, light, and easy to handle, transport and conceal. A build-up of small arms alone does not create conflict, but their excessive accumulation and wide availability often aggravate tension, often leading to more lethal and longer lasting violence.

This paper therefore, focuses on the impact of illicit proliferation of SALW on the economic, political and socio-cultural life of the people of Nigeria without losing sight of societal losses and gains of disarmament. Attempt is made to answer the following questions:

- What are the impacts of SALW proliferation on National development?
- What are the societal losses that have accrued from SALW proliferation?
- How has the joy of a society that experienced disarmament be in a peaceful atmosphere?

Conceptualization of terms

SALW Proliferation: Small arms and light weapon proliferation is the increase in number of illicit items. According to UN (1995) and ECOWAS Convention (1998) are light machine guns, assault rifles, revolvers, self-loading pistols, grenade launchers, sub-machine guns, exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or gas bomb, rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system and landmine; carbines and light machine guns. The light weapons, on the other hand are: heavy machine guns; portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted; portable anti-aircraft cannons; portable anti-tank cannons, non-recoil guns; portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launcher; portable anti-aircraft missile launcher; mortars with a caliber of less than 100mm among others. These weapons are responsible for the majority of battle related conflicts and deaths.

Economic, Political, Socio-Cultural Impacts: Economic, Political and socio-cultural impacts relates to the effect of SALW proliferation on the lives of the people when expressed in terms of their economy, politics, including their general way of life.

SALW Disarmament: This is the act of reducing the size of small arms/light weapons among ethnic combatants.

Impacts On National Development and Disarmament

Development involves progression, movement, and advancement towards something better. It is improvement on the material and non-material aspects of life. It involves action, reaction, and motion. A developing community is thus a community in motion, a people in search of self-improvement and a group concerned with and committed to, its advancement through its own effort.

Emphatically, development is all about people living a happier life. Any meaningful development must cut across sections of the people's economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of their national life in a positive dimension.

In the light of the above explanation, small arms and light weapon proliferation in Nigeria has greatly impacted on national development, which in effect affects the people and society at large.

1.3 million Children have been forced to flee their homes from conflict in North East Nigeria. Hundreds are facing starvation every day. Many are struggling in temporary camps where disease and hunger are rife.

Conflict in North East Nigeria has led to the active targeting of education. Millions of children are now deprived of the chance to go to school. In Borno state, 3 in 5 schools are closed and over 19,000 teachers have been displaced from their classrooms.

There is drastic reduction in food production as a result of insecurity occasioned by constant clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers. Farming activities have come under threat in the middle belt and southern regions owing to the menace of Fulani herdsmen who have terrorized communities in recent times. The violence has reduced the movement of cattle and foodstuff to markets in the southern part of the country, as the Hausa/ Fulani traders are wary of traveling down to the region for fear of reprisal attacks. Many farmers in the South had abandoned their farmlands for security reasons, traders from the North have cut down on the quantity of cattle, rice, beans and vegetables they move down to the South for sale.

The point been made is that SALW proliferation is grossly under-developing Nigeria in so far as it negatively affect the indices/indicators of development.

Disarmament is the effort made to make society to be free of illicit arms, which in turn drive away fear, suppression, intimidation and violence in any given society. An armed free society enjoy social civility and encourage development. It also advance technology and enhance the economy of the state. The level of opening up in turn empower many youths and the jobless who craves to engage in meaningful ventures and exists in society driven by development. The people, general society and mostly the future generation gains in the advancement of the state. Peace and tranquillity cultured in the atmosphere of development and progressions become the general gain of all.

Societal Losses and Implications

The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes and armed robbery have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians, an average of 1000 people per year since 1999. The majority of casualties about 66% in Kano riot of 2004 were SALW victims sustaining permanent disabilities. Injuries due to SALW have increased as much as ten-fold in urban Nigeria because most homicides are committed using SALW (John, Mohammed, Pinto and Nkanta, 2007; Nte, 2011).

Arms build-up has fuelled violence in different parts of Nigeria – especially communal clashes and ethno-religious conflicts. Between 1999 and April 2010, Nigeria recorded at least 187 ethnoreligious conflicts, leading to the death of several thousands of people. These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace and devastated the economic livelihoods of individuals and communities.

As a result of recurrent violent conflicts, Nigeria is faced with the Herculean task of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Between 2000 and 2002, for instance, an estimated 1,713,306 persons were displaced by ethno-religious conflicts and, by June 2013, some 1.6 million Nigerians are estimated to have been internally displaced. The January 2010 crisis in Jos displaced over 40,000 persons. Situations of internal displacement undermine human security at individual and community levels. IDPs are usually vulnerable to violent crimes like robbery and rape, and are prone to contracting contagious diseases, due to poor sanitary conditions at the (re)settlement centres.

The impact of Nigeria's SALWs problem on human security is also evident in financial losses induced by conflicts. About 10 major ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 and 2004 cost the Nigerian government over 400 million naira (US\$2.86 million). Besides, the amount of money that governments spend on security during such crises and their

aftermath are huge. In the aftermath of the Jos crisis in early 2010, the federal government assisted the Bauchi State government with ₦135 million (US\$900 000) to help resettle or integrate about 30,000 IDPs from neighbouring Plateau State seeking refuge in Bauchi State.

Since Boko Haram emerged from the shadows about four years ago, once armed militarily, one of the first obvious economic concerns was the almost immediate drop in foreign direct investment (FDI), with the concern being whether the government had the wherewithal to deal with the serious insurrection and stave off the many decades of political instability the country has faced. According to the World Investment Report (WIR) 2013, FDI flows into Nigeria dropped by 21% in just one year from \$8.9 billion in 2011 to \$7 billion in 2012. The loss of \$1.9 billion for a country in desperate need of money such as Nigeria is a staggering blow.

Beyond the cost to government, individuals lose property and family members. The loss of property compounds the problem of poverty and deprivation of the affected population. Through the death of family members, arms induced conflicts lead to a deep fracturing of kinship and family structures – many children have been left without parents, husbands without wives, and vice versa. When a family unit is dismantled, children suffer and their future wellbeing is often bleak, as they are denied good parental care. Many end up as social miscreants who contribute to violent crimes. The worrisome situation is that these losses have exacerbated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For instance if the youths of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Niger Delta and South East among others consciously or unconsciously indulge in small arms acquisition that might have encouraged them to engage in violence and or conflict, the tendency that many might die premature, maimed and or become disable for life becomes the obvious. At the end such arm carried had not only help in aiding underdevelopment of the people, the community and society as a whole but had terribly thrown up and created several problem to the society. It suffices this study also to make the following recommendations:

- The Nigerian government should encapsulate, strengthen institutions and processes of governance to enhance social provisioning for its citizens, who are becoming increasingly frustrated over governance failure, thereby resorting to violent crimes that increase demand for SALW and it must also extend to an aggressive job creation programme for Nigeria's teeming and idle youths who are as a result become hopeless.
- The National Orientation Agency should partner with credible civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media to mount enlightenment and orientation programmes on the practice of security situation awareness or security

consciousness critical to crime prevention. This will enable people to appreciate the importance of monitoring developments around them and to report unwholesome activities (arms trafficking) to security agencies.

- Robust funding and provision of equipment for security agencies, including security posts at the nation's entry points: land, sea and airports.
- Conduct of regular and comprehensive verification exercises to ensure that government arms are not being stolen.
- Nigerian government should continue with the amnesty programme instituted by the government of late president Shehu Musa Y'aradua at the Niger Delta.

References

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