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### **SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

### **PROLIFERACJA BRONI RĘCZNEJ STRZELECKIEJ I LEKKIEGO UZBROJENIA: IMPLIKACJE DLA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA I ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO ROZWOJU W NIGERII**

#### **Abstract**

*Throughout the world, violence, delinquency and fear undermine the basic right of individuals to live in peace and fully benefit from the healthy and sustainable community. More worrisome is the seemingly uncontrollable proliferations of small and light weapons which remained one of the major challenges for security and sustainable development in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the threats that small arms and light weapons proliferation portends on the Nigerian security and sustainable development. They study relied on secondary data and utilizes the content analysis for interpretation of data. This study is anchored on the state failure theory to underscore situations that warrant recourse to small arms and light weapons. The study concludes that the debilitating economy, failure of the state to provide the basic necessities of life, corruption, high rate of youth unemployment and sluggishness among the state's instrument of force viz: the Army, police etc., are some of the major factors that serve as challenges to meaningful efforts and policies at combating the menace in the country. This study therefore recommends among others that the government in all levels should embark on poverty alleviation programs and provide employment opportunities to unemployed youths. This will discourage youths from joining ethnic militias and other militant groups that pose threats to peace and security in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Small arms, light weapons, proliferation, insecurity, sustainable development*

#### **Streszczenie**

*Przemoc, przestępczość i strach na całym świecie podważają podstawowe prawo jednostek do życia w pokoju oraz w zdrowej i zrównoważonej społeczności. Bardziej niepokojące są pozornie niekontrolowana proliferacja broni ręcznej strzeleckiej i lekkiego uzbrojenia, która pozostała jednym z głównych wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa i zrównoważonego rozwoju w Nigerii. Na tym tle niniejsze badanie analizuje zagrożenia, jakie proliferacja*

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broni ręcznej strzeleckiej i lekkiego uzbrojenia stanowi dla bezpieczeństwa i zrównoważonego rozwoju Nigerii. Badacze oparli się na danych wtórnych i wykorzystują analizę treści do interpretacji danych. Badanie opiera się na teorii niepowodzenia państwa w celu podkreślenia sytuacji, które uzasadniają użycie broni ręcznej strzeleckiej i uzbrojenia lekkiego. W badaniu stwierdzono, że osłabiona gospodarka, niezdolność państwa do zapewnienia podstawowych potrzeb życiowych, korupcja, wysoki wskaźnik bezrobocia wśród młodzieży i opieszałość struktur siłowych, a mianowicie armii, policji itp., to tylko niektóre z głównych czynników, które stanowią wyzwanie dla znaczących wysiłków i polityk walki ze wspomnianym zagrożeniem w kraju. W niniejszym badaniu zaleca się zatem między innymi, aby rząd na wszystkich szczeblach rozpoczął programy zmniejszania ubóstwa i zapewnił możliwości zatrudnienia bezrobotnej młodzieży.

*To zniechęci młodzież do przyłączania się do bojówek etnicznych i innych grup bojowników, które stanowią zagrożenie dla pokoju i bezpieczeństwa w Nigerii.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** Broń ręczna strzelecka, lekkie uzbrojenie, proliferacja, niebezpieczeństwo, zrównoważony rozwój

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### **Statement of the problem in general outlook and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.**

In Nigeria today, the high rate of illegal procurement and the use of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is indexed by the intermittent seized of these weapons by the security and border control officers. This proliferation of SALWs is adjudged as the major security challenge to people, societies and states worldwide, fueling civil wars, insurgency, organized criminal violence, human trafficking and drugs, armed robbery, abduction and kidnapping, posing challenges to security and sustainable development in the country. The diffusion of SALWs in Nigeria is alarming and this trend is attributed to the weak and fragile nature of the state and her attendant failure to delivered good governance. Small arms and light weapons are often employed to forcefully displace civilians, prevent development activities, humanitarian assistance, peace-building and peace-keeping endeavor in all sense (Abiodun, Ayo-Adeyekun, Onafowora & Nwanenaya, 2018).

Throughout the world, violence, delinquency and fear undermine the basic right of individuals to live in peace and fully benefit from a healthy and sustainable community (Maurice, Lucie, Franz & Claude, 2001). These elements make no real distinction between prosperous and poor cities, and impose a considerable cost on the population, particularly through the increase in health and security expenditures and the deterioration of investments. No gainsaying that violence and fear directly threatens life in society, good governance and the sustainable development of the world's communities and neighborhoods. Worse still, the heightened outcome of violence in rural communities makes life damning. Experiences in Nigeria and other developing nations indicate that during occasions of

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violence in most rural communities, the response by state's instrument of force viz: the police, army, civil defense, etc, are often greeted with sluggishness, inefficiency and in some cases the unresponsiveness of police in rural areas as against the apt management of similar crises in urban areas.

Undoubtedly therefore, violence activities flourish more in rural areas where there absence of government structure. This is inevitable as in the case of Niger Delta region. Social vices like armed banditry, stealing, kidnapping, oil bunkering, vandalization, militancy, religious fundamentalism, cattle rustling amongst numerous others thrive more with little or no counter check by the government. Arms proliferation and the rising spate of small and light weapons is unarguably a regrettable feature of this setting, the presence of which makes causalities of violent attacks unprecedentedly high. It is also important to note that violent behavior does not necessarily begin with arms but it swells dramatically when arsenals are available, particularly in already volatile environments endemic with poverty, mistrust or injustice and absence of governmental structures (Usang, Ugwumba & Abang, 2014); Ogbu, Ereke, James & Yusuf, 2017).

Therefore, reducing the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons is now recognized as a significant component of sustainable development. Thus, the need to re-examine the effects of the small arms and light weapons proliferation on efforts at ensuring national security and sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is against this backdrop that this study examine the threats that small arms and light weapons proliferation portends on the Nigerian security and sustainable development.


## **Analysis of latest research where the solution of the problem was initiated.**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the failed state theory, underscoring situations that warrant recourse to arms. Often times, understands from the perspective of state failure. This becomes valid when claim to state as having the sole monopoly of violence is nullified by the increase in the possession of not small and light weapons but sophisticated weapons by individuals. For some, arms proliferation is orchestrated by the conviction that the state could longer guarantee the fundamental duty of ensuring the security, interest and welfare of its citizens when violent attacks become imminent and/or when the need to provide infrastructural needs of the people becomes inevitable. A failed state lacks the ability to minimize internal crises as it cannot formulate and implement public policies to provide and deliver effective services to its citizens. It is characterized by social, political and economic failures. Hence, such state has failed to provide physical security, productive economic environment and stable political system for its citizens (Peterside, 2018). Applying the above conceptions of failed state to this discourse, it is assumed that although, the Nigerian state has not totally failed, but it has not been able to cater to a reasonable extent for the fundamental duty upon which it was founded just like every other modern state. It thus presents itself as a breeding ground for proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SWLWs), these and much more have been the standards and still is the norm as witnessed in the country-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 the security agents to quell such situation has been a source of worry as the high number of casualties in such situations are always alarming and

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above all the inability of security agents to bring suspects or these found guilty to book. Hence, the theory of state failure gives a closer justification for small arms and light weapons proliferation in rural communities across the country.

## **Aims of paper. Methods**

### **Methodology**

This study adopted qualitative research design because data were collected from secondary sources such as books, journals articles, ECOWAS publication and newspapers. This research contributes to the improvement of security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Review**

This part of the study specifically looks into the review of certain concepts relevant to the discourse as follows:

#### **Proliferation**

The proliferation and misuse of small arms is a worldwide, progressively complex and multifaceted phenomenon that affects people of all religions. By virtue of their easy availability, low cost and manageability, small arms and light weapons have become the weapons of choice in most conflicts in the world today and have helped raised levels of armed violence even in areas at peace. According to Ogwuda (2018:71), proliferation refers to “rapid increase in the number or amount of something, growth, multiplication, spread, escalation, expansion or excessive spread. Proliferation when used within the context of small arms and light weapons means the rapid increase, multiplication or spread of biochemical, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction to countries not initially involved in developing them”.

#### **Small Arms**

Small arms refer to 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, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns, (Malam, 2014; Gofwan, Isaya& Ado, 2019).

#### **Light Weapons**


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 cannons, portable anti-tank cannons, non-recoil guns, portable anti-tank missile launchers and mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeters (ECOWAS, 2006).

#### **Insecurity**

Anything that can pose a threat to one’s existence or that harms or makes life un-pleasurable can be classified as insecurity. It also implies the absence of security. It is the direct opposite of security. It is the absence of safety of individuals, state or organization against criminal activities such as terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, thuggery, cultism, ethno-religious crises and gangsterism. According to Hasan (2005), insecurity may arise from the lack of secure housing tenure, which means living with the constant fear of eviction or it may reflect high levels of personal insecurity stemming from police harassment,

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abuse in the hands of bureaucracies or the breakdown of public safety in the neighborhood.

## **Exposition of main material of research with complete substantiation of obtained scientific results. Discussion**

### **Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Manifestations and Effects**


Small arms and light weapons were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during the illegitimate slave trade between them and African states. Subsequently, guns and other arms were used by European to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. The gunboat diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them (Edwards, Sean & Rachael, 2005). Characterized by low cost and wide availability, increasing lethality, simplicity and durability, portability, military, police and civilian uses, small arms proliferation has been particularly devastating in Africa, where machine guns, rifles, grenades, pistols and other small arms have killed and displaced many civilians across the continent. These weapons have been used in deadly conflicts in Sudan, Sierra Loan, Angola, Somalia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Nigeria and other African countries. They are frequently recycled from country to country, and their ownership is transferred among fighters, security forces and war profiteers (ACRL, 2010).

Nigeria is not just a transit and destination of small arms and light weapons. 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 stated that sixty (60) percent of all illicit arms used in the South-East were locally fabricated in the region (Sunday & Salau, 2017). Thus, the fall-out of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is very well documented in the literature. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace Disarmament in African in 2016 raised alarm on the level of proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in Nigeria to the tune of 350million (Etim, 2017). In January 2017, Nigeria Custom Service intercepted 661 pieces of pump-action rifles from China secretly concealed in steel doors and other merchandise goods. Also, 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. More so, on September 11 the same year, the Controller of the Nigerian Customs Service confirmed yet another seizure of 1100 pump-action rifle in Lagos. It has been estimated that about 640 million small arms and light weapons (SWLWs) are in circulation worldwide. 100 million are estimated to be in Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone and over 70 percent of the 8 million illegal weapons are in Nigeria (Peterside, 2018).

Abiodun, 2016 cited in Abiodun et al., (2018) noted that illegal arms transfers are easier in the periods of political transition and elections that are normally preceded by periods of violence as in the case of 2019 general elections. The politicians release arms to thus who assist them to rig and win elections at all costs and after the politicians must have won and sworn into office, they forget to retrieve the arms already circulated. Thereafter, the thugs and miscreants use the arms in their possession to unleashed terror on the state. In recent times, the proliferation of SWLWs in Nigeria has led to an increase in violent

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crimes, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crises, communal conflicts, social agitations, micro-nationalism, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, militancy, electoral violence, social upheavals, political violence, cross border smuggling, porous border, insecurity, economic crisis among others. The proliferation and use of SWLWs in ethno-religious clashes, armed robbery, militancy, insurgency, banditry, etc, have killed more than 50,000 Nigerians with Boko Haram accounting for 30,000 lives in it almost eleven years of emergence. Thus, it is axiomatic to posit that the increase inflow and usage of small and lethal weapons by civilians is fall-out of state fragility as argued before now. These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace, devastate economic livelihood of individuals, communities and institutionalization of a culture of violence and potential for food insecurity.

### **Implications of SALWs for Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SWLWs) around the world and particularly in Africa had over time developed at an alarming rate which has put the security and sustainable development of the entire continent in jeopardy. SWLWs proliferation has created a culture of violence and an upsurge of criminal activities that is threatening the peace, security and sustainable development in Nigeria. The development of illicit arms in conflicts prone areas aggravates their intensity and gruesomeness and their impacts are felt not only by the victims but by the society as a whole. Possession of firearms can provoke the temptation to commit heinous crimes such as rape, robbery, kidnapping, cultism and culpable homicide thereby increasing the scale of premeditated violence through the use of firearms (Gofwan et al., 2019).

The widespread availability and access to illicit arms often results in massive population displacement, uprooting millions of children and families from their homes and making children more susceptible to disease, violence, military recruitment and sexual assault. 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 person (IDPs). The destruction of properties and communities including deprivation of sources of income and right to family is resulting in considerable psychological trauma and creation of large number of refugees depend on humanitarian aid are all direct effects of conflicts and violence involving SWLWs (Giaba, 2013; Soetan, 2017). Civil war, communal violence, ethno-religious conflicts and social unrests involving the use of illicit weapons have directly inflicted deep human and material wounds on Nigeria. The impact of these conflicts on vulnerable groups such as children and women is particularly destructive. Also, illicit weapons typically have the potential to challenge the very existence of the state. Soetan (2017) noted that in a democratic policy like Nigeria, where resources tend to be scarce and state capacity relatively weak, illicit SWLWs provide ethnic warriors with the means and power in criminal activities and in the process severely undermine the rule of law. The proliferation of SWLWs threatens the consolidation of democracy and security in Nigeria which is necessary for sustainable development. For the past two decades, Nigeria has particularly been overwhelmed with violent conflicts as well as inter and intra-communal clashes, ethnic conflicts, inter-regional tensions, political conflicts, etc. For example, agitations from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Avenger, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), etc, and more recently the activities of the Boko Haram sect and Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers conflicts.

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Nigeria has become a huge market for local, regional and international arms dealers and syndicates; a primary destination of small arms and light weapons flows and centre of illegal trafficking (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). The foregoing challenge has become a continued cause for concern and worry in spite of concerted efforts at the regional and international levels to assuage it, culminating in the loss of many lives and destruction of properties in many African states. The government's inability to provide adequate security has culminated in people resorting to self-help by taking up arms and consequently driving the largest proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons (Ola, 2011). Thus, the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons no doubt threatens individual security, contributes to human rights violation, undermines social justice and weakens good governance, national security and sustainable development.

## **Conclusions**

This study has critically appraised instances of fatal hostilities from armed related violence orchestrated by unchecked proliferation of small arms and light weapons in both rural and urban Nigeria. There is no doubt that the accumulation of SALWs and their diffusion into the larger society pave way for high levels of armed violence, causes diversion of local resources, misuse of public funds, undermine security and sustainable development. Nigeria had in the past decades witness increased violence and small arms circulation. Today, its proliferation is attributed to the existence of electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry, and religious intolerance coupled with high levels of poverty and youth unemployment in the country. Although, Nigeria's problem with small arms and light weapons is not new, its increasing availability in the last two decades has helped stoke a wave of insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, human trafficking and drugs, armed robbery, herders/farmers crisis and other violence crimes. Thus, the overall effects of this are breakdown of law and order and undermining the rule of law in all its ramifications. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the following:

1. The government at all levels should embark on poverty alleviation programs and provide employment opportunities to unemployed youths. This will discourage the youths from joining ethnic militias and other militant groups that pose threat to peace and security in Nigeria.
2. A thorough overhauling of laws regulating the possession of arms in Nigeria should be embarked on by our law makers and the whistle blowing policy on corruption should be extended to the fight against small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria.
3. There is urgent need for interventions at the national, state and local levels to be strengthened and promote peaceful co-existence amongst the diverse ethno-religious and political groups in the country. This will go a long way to help minimize the outbreak and persistence of violent conflicts that stoke small arms proliferation.
4. There is need for effective collaboration with the international community and other relevant agencies. Nigeria as a state should endeavor to fulfill its duties under international instruments on small arms and light weapons. Also, there is need for an improved border management mechanism using modern and sophisticated detection equipment to discourage arms trafficking through the border and the customs service and other relevant

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agencies at the border points should develop effective protocols that would make the in-flow and outflow of illicit armed weapons a herculean task.

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