

**THE SMUGGLE AND PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS
AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW) WITHIN THE WEST
AFRICAN SUB-REGION. A CONTEMPORARY APPRAISAL**

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ABSTRACT

The global scenario of smuggling of arms and light weapons has made states, authors, professionals, academicians, businessmen and the society to offer different perceptions, opinions and interpretations to the smuggling of arms and the light weapons. Smuggling of arms and light weapons across the borders is a catalyst to the development of ethnic militia and armed conflicts in the sub-region. It promotes availability of illegal arms and light weapons, it flourishes and increases levels of community violence and promotes criminal activities such as armed robbery, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, assassinations. The study examined the challenges and effects of smuggling small arms and light weapons in West Africa sub-region and, by extension Nigeria. The study is anchored on secondary data. The findings revealed that porous Nigeria's borders, corrupt practices by the security agencies, inadequate manpower, poor logistics support, inadequate provision of basic amenities are some of the factors that promotes the smuggling of arms and light weapons in Nigeria. Again, political instability in the neighboring countries and high level of poverty aid smuggling of small arms and light weapons. The study among other things recommended that border cooperation among countries in West Africa and the need for government to improve welfare packages of security so as to enable them perform their duty optimally in order to suppress



smuggling of small arms and light weapons across the borders are germane amongst others factors.

Key words: Border, Cooperation, Small Arms and Light Weapons.

INTRODUCTION

Managing the Smuggling of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has become one of the most urgent security and developmental challenges in Africa in recent time. The uncontrolled proliferation and widespread availability of arms is a development that is affecting virtually every African country and poses threats to domestic and regional security in the West African region. According to Ogba (2005) "The problems posed by arms smuggling are complex and multidimensional in character. They are entangled with other broad security and societal issues such as criminal activity and links to terrorism. It also has serious implications on human rights and humanitarian activities"

Border security has come to assume heightened importance in the international system as the rate of criminal activities have also increased in scale, especially since the wake of globalization (Adejo, 2005). It has become easy for transitional crimes to be conducted such as the moving of money, people and goods across the world because of advancement in information and communication technology. The world is now a 'global village' with its own peculiarities as well as problems. Globalization has allowed criminals to move across the borders unhindered and even continue with illicit businesses with impunity as this affects the socio-economic development and security of lives and property. Nigeria is no exception in this growing phenomenon, hence this brings about the increasingly need for security and protection of the country's borders. Perhaps, it is the belief that social, economic and political developments are the function of peace and security. In the West African sub-region, Nigeria is one of the countries battling with smuggling of small arms and light weapons. This has posed a serious threat to national security



ranging from theft to kidnapping, terrorism and many more (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

It is evident that Nigeria has a lot of security responsibilities at the borders as government facing insurgency readily get access to weapons and logistics in international market as insurgents cannot successfully operate without the active support of the neighboring countries. Insurgents may have close relatives living across the border who provide arms and safe havens, as this enhances cross border activities to be a national security threat for government. Incidentally, all efforts put in place by the government such as the establishment of institutional frameworks to curb this menace at the borders have not yielded positive results. Recent developments posit that Boko Haram (BH), has established connections with other terrorist groups and violent extremists in North, West, and East Africa. The 2,000 miles of border that Nigeria shares with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon host almost 1,500 illegal or unmonitored crossing routes (Adejo, 2005).

Terrorist groups, like BH, take advantage of corrupt border guard operators and the porosity of the frontiers. Cross border activities, such as arms smuggling and transnational attacks are resulting in the death of civilians. Thousands of Nigerians have been killed and many more will die in the hands of terrorists and other criminal elements due to the influx of weapons in the country, as smugglers continue their trading activities.

Movements of guns, supplies, and young soldiers across the borders (as a result of the terrorists' successful recruiting operations in neighboring countries among the youth) have become an everyday occurrence in Nigeria. Onuoha (2015) posits that several illegal routes lead in and out of Nigeria. In the Adamawa state alone, there are about 25 illegal routes into Nigeria from bordering countries. Terrorists and smugglers take advantage of the lack of willingness to close down these roads. As a consequence, small arms and light weapons (SALWs) are trafficked easily into Nigeria (Ojudu, 2007).

However, smuggling arms into Nigeria is not as simple a task as it seems to be. Terrorists such as Boko Haram (BH) still



needs to be inventive in the methods of concealing its cross-border activities, especially regarding movements of weapons. Reportedly, weapons are often transported by nomadic shepherds or herders in various kinds of bags, which are usually attached to cattle and carried across the borders. Alternatively, arms have been smuggled by cross-border merchants who were hiding them inside their trucks among other legal types of goods. On some other occasions, BH's members used women to carry weapons and explosive devices hidden under their cloaks. These are some examples that show how BH exploits and possibly manipulates civilians to flout the letter of the law (Osita, 2010). To this end, the study navigates on how cross border cooperation can be used as a tool for preventing the smuggling of light arms and small weapons in West Africa with specific case of Nigeria's border.

Cross border cooperation is the collaboration between adjacent areas across border. It must be considered that Africa has some main priorities other than cross border cooperation (CBC). However, the specific transnational relevance of African cross border cooperation makes it a promising tool to promote African development and particularly the fight against smuggling of arms and light weapons, insurgency as well as promote peace, security and good governance in the West African region (Asiwaju, 1990).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of relative state autonomy depicts the level or degree of detachment or aloofness of the state in the discharge of its duties such as mediating inter-class and intra-class struggles. Thus, this theory presupposes that in any state or political society, there are two levels of contradiction, namely primary contradiction and secondary contradiction. Primary contradiction is inter-class struggle or depicts class struggle between two antagonistic classes such as the ruling class and the ruled class or the bourgeois class and the proletariat (i.e. the working class). Whilst, secondary contradiction is the intra-class struggle, denoting class conflicts within the ruling-class or between different segments of the ruling-class. Marx and Engels demonstrate this intractable



phenomenon of class struggle when they declare in the preface of their book, *The Communist Manifesto* that “the history of all the hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx & Engels, 1977). The exponents of the theory hold that a state can exhibit either low or high relative autonomy. Nigeria exhibit low relative autonomy in all spheres as exemplified in managing the smuggling of small arms and light weapons, which has contributed in the security problem in the country.

A state exhibits high autonomy when there is high commodification of capital or excessive penetration of capital into the economy such that the bourgeois class indulges in accumulation of capital through direct exploitation of the working class or appropriation of surplus value when they enter into social relationships of production (i.e. private capitalism). Here, the state is not interventionist, in other words, it does not intervene in the domestic economy like participating in the productive activities (i.e. public/state enterprises) or controlling or nationalizing means of production. The role of state here, therefore, is to regulate. As such, the state is relatively an impartial umpire meditating inter-class and intra-class struggles through harmonization and reconciliation of class interests. The developed capitalist states of the West are, therefore, considered to exemplify this high relative autonomy, and as a result, exhibit high level of human rights observance and protection (Ake, 1976; Alavi, 1972).

Conversely, a state exhibits low autonomy when there is low commodification of capital or low penetration of (private) capital into the economy in such a way that the ruling class is constantly engage in primitive accumulation of capital through embezzlement of public fund. The state becomes the only avenue for capital accumulation. The state is thus, interventionist for engaging in productive activities of means of productive activities (i.e. public corporation) by nationalization of major means of production. This state does not limit itself to regulatory rule and is hence compromised, such that instead of rising above class struggle it is deeply immersed in it (Ake, 1981; 1985).

The Nigerian state like other developing state exhibits a low level of the autonomy of the state as a result of low



commodification of capital. Under the electric mixture of mixed economy, Nigeria experiences the phenomenon of lack of penetration of (private) capital into the economy creating a parasitic petty bourgeois class whose major source of accumulation of capital is the state. Hence, the Nigerian state becomes the only avenue for (primitive) accumulation of capital through which the governing class (i.e. petty bourgeoisie) produces and reproduces their dominance. The implication of the low autonomy of the Nigerian state is that it is immersed in the class struggle rather than rising above it leading to intense struggle for the control of the state for primitive accumulation and marginalization of everything (Ake, 2001).

According to Patrick (2007) the term “failed state” is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some of basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government. A failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. Common characteristics of a failing state is when a central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline.

Thurer (1999) notes that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Not only are the functions of government suspended, but its assets are destroyed or looted; and experienced officials are killed or flee the country. According to Thurer (1999) failed states are:

States in which institutions and law and order have totally or partially collapsed under the pressure and amidst the confusion of erupting violence, yet which subsist as a ghostly presence in the world map. The term “failed state” should be understood to mean disintegrated or collapsed state.



The Fund for Peace propose the following attributes or characteristics of a failed state in order to make it more precise (a) loss of physical control of its territory, or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force (b) erosion of authority to make collective decision (c) an inability to provide reasonable public services and (d) an inability to interact with other states as full member of the international community. Anyanwu (2005) states that by a failed state we mean a state that is unable to meet the needs and aspirations of its masses. A failed state as opposed to capable state is a state which has failed to provide for its citizen such basics needs like adequate security, food, water, electricity, health care, good roads, etc. Nigeria is by all indications or indices a failed state - a state where nothing works. Even those ones that work in other countries once adopted in Nigeria refused to work. This explains the high level of insecurity as a result of arms smuggling in West African region. The theory of relative state autonomy is very apt in this regard, because states in international system have their autonomy and control. It therefore presupposes that Nigeria and other West African countries should be able to manage the smuggling of small arms and light weapons through cross-border cooperation so as to reduce the problem of insecurity in the sub-region.

Conceptual Discourse: Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation is a complex integration process that can be broken down into three dimensions, according to whether the analysis is focused on the border regions' potential for co-operation, the current structure of cross-border governance networks or political decision-makers' vision of cross-border co-operation.

Since the 1960s, the 32 000 kilometres of land borders that delineate West Africa, from Dakar to N'Djamena have never been as central to the implementation of development policies as they are in recent times. Long seen as artificial barriers inherited from decolonisation, these borders now lie at the heart of policies designed to encourage regional trade and combat political instability. Cross-border dynamics represent a fundamental



dimension of trade flows, subverting the laws of nation states, as in illegal trafficking and terrorism, which exploit the highly porous borders for the purpose of trading arms, drugs and migrants or carrying out attacks in neighbouring countries.

This rediscovery of the peripheries of the nation state has fostered the proliferation of institutional initiatives that aim to cultivate co-operation between countries, regions and municipalities while ensuring the protection and promoting the interests and rights of the people living in border regions. Ever since the landmark speech on cross-border areas by the President of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré, in 2002, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have both launched programmes specifically dedicated to borders. In 2011, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) initiated a pilot operation with the first of the border control posts located in Sinkansé (Burkina Faso-Togo border) between member states. More recently, the adoption in 2014 of the Niamey Convention on cross-border co-operation represented a significant step forward in terms of acknowledging the need for special legislation to develop cross-border activities. Despite these regional initiatives, the effective functioning of cross-border co-operation still remains largely unknown across West Africa: a great quantity of research has covered the legislative and institutional principles of co-operation (SWAC/OECD, 2007; AEBR, 2012; Enda Diapol, 2007), but the structure of the governance networks connecting the organisations and individuals involved in cross-border projects have not, until now, been discussed in any systematic analysis. Similarly, the geographical character of border zones and the manner in which borders affect the operation of governance networks have also been somewhat neglected, despite their crucial significance in the implementation of cross-border projects.

Adejumobi (2015), posit border as demarcations found within international divides, covering political entities and affiliates, with legal jurisdiction of states autonomy and sovereignty and a geographical divides that forms the juridical zone between one state and another. Afolayan (2000), added that



border is the line of divides that marks the limit of a country land, legal and sovereign coverage from another. Within this delimited boundary, nations exercise authority and influence, as to what goes in and what comes out of the state. He further noted that it is within this region a country can restrict, accept and ban items, materials and equipment from gaining entry into her territory or otherwise (Afolayan, 2000).

In the international arena and among nations around the world, borders share multiplicity of similarities identified above by Adejumbi (2015); Afolayan, (2000). In addition to their view, Iwebi (2017) added that their area of similarities further encapsulate the allotment of ethno-cultural cleavages and groupings, formal and informal cross-border dealings, relations and transactions, articulated ethics, laws, principles and guidelines governing the operational conducts of the border security agencies.

Asiwaju (1984) captured that border is a precincts zone of a state, with significance and authority, restricts unwanted movement of illegal, human and materials including smugglers and their smuggled items. They are characterized by dual dimensional associations between the host. nation and her neighbouring state. James (1989) in Mbaegbu (2018) summarised that borders are defined in terms of latitudes, longitudes, geometric circles and straight lines-split several ethnic and cultural communities. Mears (2003) agrees with Egunjobi and Afolayan (2006) when they say that the observably and even ties associated with the total way of life is the identity of a given group in an area of inhabitation are of prominence. Therefore, the unique style of living and the steady interactions and transactions of people within the border communities are closely related to the ideal transactions and interactions found in the open market. In other words, borders include the geographical areas round nation's territorial demarcations between another. Thus, in the same line of thought, Spencer (2007) notes that borders play delicate role in the stability of any nation in terms of peace and conflicts, as the arms used during the period of conflict, violence



and crisis are usually smuggled into a target country through her borders.

On the other hand, arms smuggling has remained a phenomenal issue at the international, regional and national levels. A common observation emerging from the different positions on arms smuggling summarily posits that it covers a wide spectrum of weapons and the ways they are unlawfully pushed into a state. For instance, the ECOWAS Convention on Arms Smuggling and other Related Materials of 2006, which is the West African sub-regional benchmark for regulating arms and ammunitions among member countries captures arms as destructive weapons and ammunition of war, which include: firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or a gas bomb, a grenade, rocket launcher, a missile, or a mine. Revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns are also examples of arms (Iwebi, 2017, Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Nigeria is a destination of smuggled arms (Chuma-Okoro, 2011), the causes include criminal activities, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social unrest, ethnic tensions, cross border smuggling, porous borders, black marketeering, privatization of security, insecurity, poverty, economic crisis, mass unemployment, among others (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Accordingly, Shagaya in Eke (2000), maintained the “the history of Nigeria may be described as one of the continuous encounters with border problems as she shares borders with five African Countries: Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Four of these are Franco-phone countries, of which they have no clearly delineated and well-defined boundary with Nigeria”.

Security

The concept security has been subjected to various interpretations by scholars or analyst in international system and can also be divided into two; Traditional and Non Traditionalist schools of



thought. The former school favours the maintenance of the Cold War that is the ideological rivalry between the West and East which focus on the rolling back of communism and containing capitalism, as security is defined in military and state centric approaches while the non-traditionalist school on the other hand, broaden the meaning of security to include issues such as human, economic, environmental, social, feminists and other threats. This includes what possibly endanger the survival of the individual as well as the state. In common usage, security is the lack of threat, and the opposite is insecurity as recently witnessed in Nigeria with a particular reference to the national borders. According to Wolfer (1962) he posits that ‘Security rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter an attack or defeat’.

Berkowitz and Bock (1968) see it as ‘the ability of a nation to protect its internal values from external threats. Ayoob (1997) reiterates “that which threatens or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional and governing regimes. It can be deduce from these definitions or conceptualizations that security are state centric which concerns itself mainly on military capability to deter external aggression and also favours the traditional meaning of security which is beyond the meaning in this paper. Security has much to do with our national borders, in a state of insecurity; threat can be regarded as flux.

However, border areas have become one of the major sources of conflict in Africa over the years, such as neighbour assisted in attempt to overthrow late President Eyadema of Togo in late 1986 that led to the souring of relations between Togo, Ghana and Burkina Faso. Likewise, the attempted overthrow of the Jerry Rawlings’s government in 1985 was blamed on Togo. In short, unfriendly neighbours could undermine the economic security of the state by encouraging or condoning smuggling at the border. Smuggling or illegal entry are important issues of current border management which could undermine the security of the state. It was on this basis that the former head of state in Nigeria, Mohammed Buhari put in place a Decree 20 stipulating death for



those guilty of smuggling of dangerous drugs and petroleum products was introduced in 1985.

Also, Walt (1991) argues that security may be defined as the study of threat, use and control of military force. It explores the conditions that make use of force on individuals, states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent and engage in war. Security is important and connected with the concept of border which requires protective measures to combat any activities that could endanger the lives and property as well as putting the integrity of the state (Nigeria) into question.

Therefore, security should be given utmost importance and to link border security with that of national security because the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that brought about communal conflict in many countries can be linked to cross border arms trafficking. There has been a growing discontent with Nigeria's lack of security at our borders as terrorists used this as a means of entering and other illegal activities at our national borders. This calls for more attention at securing and management of our borders. Star and Most (1976), said that even if "a border does not necessarily cause either conflictual or cooperation, international integration existence (non existence) of border impinges on the range of possible policy options which are unavailable to the decision makers and biases them toward (and away from) interactions with other nations.

Issues and Challenges in Nigeria Border Security

The study discovered in details the challenges to border security as it could be observed that Nigeria lacks border protection and much importance has not been accorded to our national borders as evident in the vulnerabilities of threat pose at our national borders such as trans border activities and the prevalent terrorist attack that befall the country resulting in the unrestrained influx of migrants through the routes. The challenges are discussed below:



a. Porosity of Borders

The porous borders contributed and continue to encourage the cross border crimes and instability in the region. Also, promotes the increasing number of illegal trade such as smuggling of contrabands goods- adulterated drugs, stolen cars including cars that have exceeded the permissible age limit prescribed for use in Nigeria and other goods like shoes, poultry products and many more. The porous borders could also be explained in the use of dried tree, oil drums as well as rims of tyres to demarcate the national borders, this makes the border to be disorganized, poorly managed and secured. This promotes the unrestrained influx of illegal migrants and cross border activities. However, there are indefinable corridors or regions that served as a route to these illegal migrants, thereby posing a serious threat to the country and the national borders. For instance, it has been discovered that Nigeria has 1497 irregular and 84 regular routes as movements were done through the illegal routes.(Nigeria Immigration Service, 2010). There are so many outlets for smuggling of various goods across the border.

b. Corruption

The corrupt practices of the security operatives at the borders pose a serious challenge to the border security. The corrupt and inept attitudes of border officials resulting in the numerous check points of bamboo suspended by oil drums also contributed negatively to the border security. It is important to note that these checkpoints are not meant to check passport but to extort money from people. Hence, the criminals easily infiltrate the borders as smugglers, bribe their way into the country. It also explains why there are many criminals involved in trans border activities and terrorists in the country as criminals move in arms and ammunition and thousands of innocent Nigerians have been killed and many more died in the hands of terrorists with the influx of weapons in the country as smugglers continue with their business without being punished.



c. Inadequate Manpower and Logistic Support

Another problem related to border security in Nigeria is the inadequate manpower or personnel which has a negative impact on the security of our national borders. It makes it difficult for the security operatives to adequately man the national boundaries and effectively patrol these several corridors that lead to the country. The inadequate manpower does not allow for adequate patrolling of these illegal routes as criminals use the illegal routes as a means of entry into the country. Also the criminals sometimes outsmarts the security operatives at the borders due to inadequate personnel and logistics problems.

Poorly Patterned Borders

Nigeria borders are artificial creation from colonialism which continues to pose a serious threat to the country. The demarcation of the borders were done by the colonial masters without considerations to the culture of the people as can be seen in the cultural ties of marriages, celebration of religious festivities, language and many more. It should be noted therefore, that boundary delimitation affects the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the border communities to the extent that one cannot differentiate a Nigerian from Chadians or Nigerians due to culture and linguistics in which communities with homogenous culture and language are found at different sides of the borderline, hence makes it difficult to put in place immigration laws when members can just change their identity when they feel like.

d. Institutional Framework

ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of People, Goods and Services was established by the ECOWAS Member States in 1979. The main aim of this Protocol is to facilitate the free movement of people, goods and services within the West Africa without Visa; this simply means that any ECOWAS citizen who poses valid travelling document and International Health Certificate can transverse the entire region without a visa. Thereby, compelling all member states to abolish the use of visa in order to ease the movement of people in the region. However, in spite of the



positive pronouncement of this protocol, it has its own negative effects. This protocol allows the movement of criminals to move across the border and also engage in cross border activities under the pretext of this protocol. It is important to note that; border has become a safe passage for people without identities as ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement has been abused to mean an entry without valid documents.

The following factors pose a serious threat to the internal security of lives and property in the country, as the infractions at the border calls for enforcement of reforms of the border control system. While terrorists move from in and out of the country, smugglers of all kinds of contrabands continue with their business. For instance, the recent security challenges in Nigeria, there are speculations that these groups are also from neighboring countries, this would not have been possible if there were adequate security at the national borders.

The borders are seen as means of smuggling of illegal weapons and all contrabands goods, even armed robbers usually escape through the boundaries after committing crimes in the country. All these tend to endanger the socioeconomic development of the country as well as the political stability. Also, the integrity and the image of the country is now put to questioning as Nigerians face a lot of harassment and subject to all kinds of humiliation outside the country.

e. Lack of provision of Basic Amenities

The lack of development by the government to provide basic social amenities in the rural areas as well as the border communities. This is another factor militating against good border security, when the people at the rural areas and the border communities are living in abject poverty and lack of basic infrastructure, this makes them to encourage cross border activities and also involve them in clandestine activities such as armed banditry, smuggling and many more. There is need for the government to develop the rural areas and the border communities.



f. Political Instability and Economic Crisis in Neighbouring Countries

Nigeria is the most populous as well as the richest in West Africa, in terms of economic, population preponderant, military capability, Nigeria dwarfs all the countries in west Africa. This explains the more reason why crisis in neighboring countries such as political instability, famine and diseases split over to Nigeria as her proximate neighbours depend solely on Nigeria. However, when Ghana was suffering from economic downturn many of her citizens fled to Nigeria to make ends meet (Nwolise, 1985). Nigeria was negatively affected that she had to send them back to their country.

Furthermore, the factors enumerated above tend to pose a serious challenge to the country by spreading to the internal insecurity of lives and property and inform cross border activities one way or other (Adesola, 2008). Also, in the 21st century which is characterized by globalization, there is need for integration and cooperation if not the country will lose out in the new global order.

As globalization emerges, so is the challenges become more complex and requires a new approach. It is against this background that Nigeria cannot be dormant to the pursuit of security at our national borders or else the environment will continue to be hostile and insecure for the people therein.

Problems and Consequences of Smuggling Arms and Ammunitions in Nigerian Border

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often one of the major security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy (Nte, 2011).

The first small arms came into general use at the end of the 14th century. Initially they were nothing more than small cannon held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch



hole. Later a stock was added- the match lock and the first real handgun. Small arms are defined as smaller infantry weapons, such as fire arms that an individual soldier can carry. It is usually limited to revolvers, pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, carbines, assault rifles, rifle squad automatic weapons, light machine guns, general-purpose machine-gun, medium machine guns and hand grenades. However, it can also include heavy machine-guns, as well as smaller mortars, recoilless rifles and some rocket launchers, depending on the context. Large mortars, howitzers, cannons, vehicles and larger pieces of equipment are not considered small arms (Nte, 2011).

African countries have experienced direct, indirect and consequential impacts of weapons proliferation. Thousands of people, – both civilians and combatants – are killed or injured every year on the continent. Yet, even when death or injury is avoided, small arms proliferation and misuse can dramatically impact a community, country or region's landscape. The threat and use of small arms can undermine development, prevent the delivery of humanitarian and economic aid, and contribute to refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) populations (Stoh l& Tuttle, 2009).

West Africa's regional superpower, Nigeria, continues to face serious challenges. Efforts at reform continue since 2005 but progress is slow. Inter-communal violence remains a serious concern. Since the end of military rule in 1999, fighting in several regions of the country has claimed thousands of lives (Vines, 2005). North East and North Central, the Southern parts of the country, and of recent the North West Nigeria have been seriously affected.

A long history of the militarization of society has contributed to the problem of SALW in Nigeria. The military has ruled for the majority of the period following independence from Britain in 1960. During the Biafra War (1967– 1970), large numbers of SALW passed into general circulation. Civil–military relations have worsened since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, and most of the population see the armed forces and police as coercive and corrupt (John, Mohammed, Pinto, and Nkanta,



2007). SALW has been defined in different international and regional instruments, and also in national statutes. A common observation emerging from the different definitions is that the term “small arms and light weapons” covers a wide spectrum of weapons, their ammunitions and their spare parts.

The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials of 2006, which is the West African sub regional benchmark for regulating SALW defines small arms as arms destined for personal use and which include: firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or a gas bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system or a mine. Revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns are also examples of SALW (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Light weapons are the following portable arms designed to be used by several people working together in a team like heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted, portable anti-aircraft cannons, portable antitank cannons, non-recoil guns, portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers, portable anti-aircraft missile launchers, mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeters (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Managing the Smuggling of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) through Cross-Border Cooperation in West Africa, An x-ray

West African countries in the last decade were interested in local cross border cooperation. States and regional organisations have been working hard to promote cross-border cooperation. This could be understood within the context of serious security problem of most of the states in West Africa, especially Nigeria. The influx of small arms and light weapons through the borders of most of the West African countries has given rise to the insecurity situation in Nigeria. It is important that countries of West Africa, especially Nigeria tackles the problems that has given rise to the continuous insecurity in the sub-region, like poverty, youth unemployment, inequality etc.



West Africa is at a critical juncture in its socioeconomic and political development. On the one hand, it is well endowed in terms of natural resources, strategic location and large market and has great potential for development and peace, while on the other, it is confronted with a number of challenges that render its rather fragile institutions and post-conflict societies vulnerable to political instability, economic crisis and violent conflict. One such threat is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the sub-region, as is evident from the outbreak and aftermath of civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, the Tuareg revolts in Niger and Mali and the insurgency, banditry, kidnapping etc in Nigeria.

Although the sub-region has one of Africa's most sophisticated peace and security architectures (Obi 2009: 119), it still faces formidable intra-regional security challenges. Of note are the threats posed by the connections between the proliferation of SALW, violent conflict and the activities of transnational criminal networks operating in the region and peace, security and development in West Africa. These networks are well established in some West African countries, which are regarded as hubs for global criminal networks that engage in illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking, arms proliferation, illegal mining of minerals, cross-border crime and smuggling and piracy.

There are also reports of some criminals successfully infiltrating the highest echelons of security and border control agencies in some countries in the sub-region. The infiltration is particularly prevalent in countries with weak structures and limited capacities for promoting the rule of law (UNDOC 2010a, b). With their connections to government officials, these cross-border networks are able to undermine law enforcement efforts and operate with impunity. In some countries, high levels of unemployment, weak governance and porous borders have rendered the sub-region vulnerable to transnational and violent cross-border crimes. In its 2010 annual report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime asserts that:

West Africa is a paradise for organized crime, offering ideal conditions for trafficking contraband: a strategic location,



porous borders, weak governance, widespread poverty and extensive corruption. As a result, criminals and insurgents are exploiting the region. West Africa serves as a transit point between Latin America and Europe for US\$ 1 billion-worth in cocaine, as a destination for counterfeit medicines and toxic waste, and as a source of stolen natural resources, particularly oil. Human trafficking, whether for forced labour or sexual exploitation, also occurs in the region. (UNODC 2010b: 31).

The foregoing scenario provides a rather unflattering perspective on the context for SALW proliferation. State monopoly over the use of force is countered by persons with unauthorised access to small arms, who are often part of organized criminal networks (BBC 2008a, 2008b). In the Northern part of Nigeria, insurgency, bandits, terrorists militias have used illegally obtained SALW to kill, kidnap and destroy properties and engaged in the transnational trade.

In principle, small arms are not supposed to be flowing into West Africa, as in 1998 the members of ECOWAS pledged not to import, export or manufacture SALW. This moratorium has since become a legally binding and permanent convention, but both measures have been routinely flouted, with disastrous consequences for human rights and regional security. Contributing factors include lax arms export controls in supplier countries, sub-regional allies who provide cover and sometimes financing (for example Burkina Faso facilitated the supply of arms to Liberia, despite a UN embargo), and transnational arms dealers motivated by profit to break the law (Darkwa, 2006). Another key factor is the ability of embargoed buyers to use misappropriated funds or trade valuable commodities, such as diamonds or timber concessions, for arms.

The Small Arms Survey notes that Nigeria has porous borders on both its land and sea edges, allowing gun smuggling from a variety of countries. Many of these weapons come from war-torn countries elsewhere in Africa. Others have found that many of the arms smuggling rings operate out of Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. The smugglers use speed-boats to



connect to the high seas, and then ferry the arms back to shore (Darkwa, 2006).

The management of licit weapons aims at providing safeguards against their falling into the hands of unauthorised persons as well as preventing their unauthorised use by authorised persons. Controlling illicit proliferation, on the other hand, is geared at preventing such weapons from being accessible and available to all persons. In other words, licit weapons are to be controlled by putting measures in place assigning responsibility for their acquisition, possession and use, whilst illicit weapons are to be completely banned. It is therefore important that the countries of West African sub-region should setup strong cross-border cooperation within the sub-region so as to address the myriad of insecurity within West Africa.

Border Conflicts in West Africa

Interstate conflict over boundaries has been relatively frequent. These disputes have sometimes escalated, and in some cases reached full-scale war. There are many aspects in the origin of these conflicts; some factors have made them difficult to be solved after years; and others have contributed to their lower potential for open conflict.

The development of democracy and supra-national integration processes have improved the prospects for territorial dispute settlement in some cases, but in other instances democratic practices and procedures have intensified bilateral conflicts between states over boundaries or territorial issues. In any case, supranational institutions (the African Union and the RECs especially) and some countries' commitment (Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, etc.) are contributing to generate an environment prone to solve the conflicts (Dokunbo, & Oche, 2003).

- **Niger and Benin:** inherited dispute from colonial times concerning inter alia Late Island in the River Niger. Finally solved by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2005 to Niger's advantage.



- **Mali** faces the effects of the ups and downs in Côte d'Ivoire, but it is involved and experienced in controlling and resolving regional conflicts. General insecurity along borders in the north, including cross-border banditry and terrorism, remain troubling issues in regional relations.
- **Burkina Faso:** relations with Ghana, in particular, have warmed up to the point of beginning discussions about uniting Ghana and Burkina some years ago in the manner of the defunct Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union. Burkina mediated a political crisis in Togo and helped to resolve the Tuareg conflict in Niger. A territorial dispute with Mali and a border war over the alleged mineral-rich Agacher Strip in 1985 was mediated by Ghana and Nigeria and led to lessening of tensions between the two nations. Côte d'Ivoire made accusations of Burkinabé support for rebels and Burkina claims of mistreatment of Burkinabé workers. In September 2007, ECOWAS intervened to attempt to resolve the dispute over two villages along the Benin-Burkina Faso border that remain from a 2005 ICJ decision (Eselebor, 2008).
- **Mauritania:** since 1976 Spanish withdrawal from the Western Sahara, Mauritania was involved in unsolved conflict, together with Algeria and Morocco. Mauritania and Algeria recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) but Morocco still occupies the "Southern provinces" and claims Algerian and Mauritanian support to the Frente Polisario (Popular Liberation Front of Shaguiat-el-Hamra and Río de Oro). Mauritania has declared neutrality in the dispute, seeking a peaceful and expedient end to the conflict, and diplomatic relations with Algeria and Morocco have resumed. The completion of a sixth berm by Morocco just north of Mauritania's crucial rail link along the border with the Western Sahara, between Nouadhibou and the iron ore mines, further complicated bilateral relations. Very friendly relations with Senegal after independence were followed by complications due to the split between blacks and Maures in Mauritania, seeing Senegal itself as championing the rights of



Mauritania's black minority. Estimated 30,000 Afro-Mauritanian refugees live in Senegal (Eselebor, 2008).

- **Senegal** enjoys mostly cordial relations with its neighbours. Clear progress on other fronts with Mauritania (border security, resource management, economic integration, etc.). A short section of boundary with The Gambia is indefinite.
- **The Gambia** signed a Treaty of Confederation in 1982 with Senegal. The goal of the Senegambia Confederation was to combine the armed forces of the two states and to unify their economies and currencies. After just a short stretch of years, Gambia permanently withdrew from this confederation in 1989.
- **Guinea-Bissau:** The multitude of small offshore islands and a military able to sidestep government with impunity has made it a favourite trans shipment point for drugs to Europe.
- **Guinea (Conakry):** conflicts among rebel groups, warlords, and youth gangs in neighbouring states have spilled over into Guinea resulting in domestic instability. Guinea is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation; the majority of victims are children, and internal trafficking is more prevalent than transnational Trafficking (Lafaji, 2003).
- **Sierra Leone:** as domestic fighting among disparate ethnic groups, rebel groups, warlords, and youth gangs in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone gradually abates, the number of refugees in border areas has begun to drop slowly. Sierra Leone considers excessive Guinea's definition of the flood plain limits to define the left bank boundary of the Makona and Moa rivers and protests Guinea's continued occupation of these lands including the hamlet of Yenga occupied since 1998.
- **Liberia:** The First Liberian Civil War, instigated by Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) on December 24, 1989, eventually spread to neighbouring Sierra Leone in 1991 when dissidents of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) began using Liberia as a staging ground for NPFL



backed military assaults on border towns in Sierra Leone. In 2001, Liberian forces along with the RUF began attacking and burning refugee camps and Guinean villages along the border, and this subsequently led to a large number of attacks, beatings, rapes, and abductions of refugees by Guinean police and military forces. Liberia is a source, transit, and destination country, principally for young women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Victims of cross-border trafficking come to Liberia from Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Nigeria and are subjected to the same types of exploitation as internally trafficked victims. It is also a transshipment point for Southeast and Southwest Asian heroin and South American cocaine for the European and US markets. Corruption, criminal activity, arms-dealing, and diamond trade provide significant potential for money laundering, but the lack of a well developed financial system limits the country's utility as a major money-laundering center (Bassey, C and Osita 2010).

- **Cote d'Ivoire:** in 1989, after fifteen years of no progress, the Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire border re-demarcation commission finally agreed on the definition of the 640-kilometer border between the two countries. Recent civil war and related conflicts added tension to the restless dynamics in the Northern border area between shepherds and farmers.
- **Ghana:** Transportation and communication links with both Côte d'Ivoire and Togo have improved, despite problems with both countries. By 1992 Ghana's relations with Côte d'Ivoire were relatively good, but ugly incidents in late 1993 and early 1994 developed following a championship soccer match in Kumasi, Ghana, that had resulted in the elimination of Côte d'Ivoire from competition. Ghanaian immigrants in Côte d'Ivoire were violently attacked, and as many as forty or more Ghanaians were killed.
- **Togo:** After 1918, following the defeat of Germany, the League of Nations divided the German colony of Togoland from north to south, a decision that divided the Ewe people among the Gold Coast, British Togoland, and French Togoland. After



1945, the UN took over the Togoland mandates. During the 1950s, when the independence of Ghana was in sight, demands grew for a separate Ewe state. Following a UN plebiscite in May 1956, in which a majority of the Ewe voted for union with Ghana, British Togoland became part of the Gold Coast. After Togolese independence in 1960, relations between Togo and Ghana deteriorated, aggravated by political differences and incidents such as smuggling across their common border. At times, relations have verged on open aggression. The result of the transfer of Togoland to Ghana has meant that many Togolese keep one foot on either side of the border, living in Ghana by night and working in the markets of the capital, Lomé, by day. The colonial and post-colonial state in Ghana and Togo both seem to have had similar difficulties in controlling their borderlands

- **Chad:** since 2003, Janjawid armed militia and the Sudanese military had driven hundreds of thousands of Darfur residents into Chad. Chad remained an important mediator in the Sudanese civil conflict, reducing tensions with Sudan arising from cross-border banditry. Chadian Aozou rebels reside in southern Libya. Only Nigeria and Cameroon have heeded the Lake Chad Commission's admonition to ratify the delimitation treaty, which also includes the Chad-Niger and Niger-Nigeria boundaries. Chad is a source, transit, and destination country for children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. To a lesser extent, Chadian children are also trafficked to Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria for cattle herding.

In other parts of Africa, the Apartheid regime in South Africa provoked many disturbances in the normal relationships between African countries until the nineties. There were also times of uprising and tyranny. The crisis in the region of the Great Lakes in 1994 challenged enormously the international community and left their scars in African borders as well. Enormous movement of refugees to the camps of Goma, Darfur, and many others like the Sahrawi camps in Tindouf (in the extreme *Hamada* of Algeria) were several generations live since the mid-seventies. Famine and



droughts hit regularly wide areas of the continent. But border conflicts like the exchange of fire between Kenyan and Ugandan security forces in 1989 are already forgotten and a new spirit of integration prevails. On the other hand, religious conflicts affecting border areas, can have a very negative impact in cross-border dynamics.

African countries have made a good use of international aid and now face new development challenges including governance and democracy, strengthening of supranational mechanisms and more South-South cooperation. This spirit is also perceived when talking about international boundaries, but not that much on the ground. Local trends prevail, as well as centralistic approaches, with very few exceptions. On the other hand, ancient cultures still are present in some border areas, overcoming the dictates of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) and further international conferences, and opening another suggesting field to build cross-border concepts over pre-colonial entities. The territories covered by the Yoruba groups, or societies “on the move” like the Touareg and Mauri paint very interesting pictures to tackle cross-border cooperation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is high level of insecurity in the West African region and other parts of Africa, as a result of porous borders, which has given room for the smuggling of arms and ammunitions. Nigeria is grappling with lots of security challenges ranging from insurgencies, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, herders/farmers clashes, armed robbery etc. The study reviewed that smuggling of arms and ammunition is not just a challenge to west Africa sub-region, but also a threat to the lives and properties of the citizens. There is need for government of the countries in west Africa sub-region to step up measures in combating smuggling of arms and ammunition, therefore, their cooperation is a sine quo non to the success of eliminating arms trafficking in their various borders. The following recommendations were therefore made so as to help in mitigating the problems of arms and ammunition across the



west African borders and engender cooperation in the border patrol.

- First, with 100 million SALW, Africa already has more than its fair share of weapons in circulation. If this and the assertion that the availability of SALW aggravate and prolong violence are truisms, then the West African countries needs to cooperate and establish a joint border patrol so as prevent the smuggling of arms and ammunition in the sub-region.
- The government should establish mobile border post teams to cheek the borders. This should be done amongst the west African countries.
- The Nigeria government and other West African countries should improve and increase allowances and salary packages of security personnel's especially their customs service in order to encourage them to do the work better and with vigour. Governments should provide scanning machines at both the borders, sea ports and airports to check mate this menace of arms smuggling.
- The government should increase man power of the security agencies by recruiting more personnel or officers to effectively man the borders.
- The government especially the Nigeria senate should enact a law with stiffer penalty for smuggling of arms and ammunition.
- Finally a radical review and overhauling of gun legislation by way of greater cooperation within the West African countries could be very instrumental in limiting the amount of guns and other SALW in circulation and thus reducing their use.



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