



# The Achievers Journal

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## West African Arms Proliferation and Its Effects to Nigerian Society

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### **Abstract**

*The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has become an alarming phenomenon in West African (WA) sub-region. This can be attributed to a number of factors ranging from artificial border that ensure border porosity across the sub-region, illegal manufacturing or smuggling of arms and weak governments of most countries in addressing issues of insecurity, and demands of citizenry has been captured for responsible factors. Nigeria suffers seriously, with a number of insurgent groups who use the available arms to actualize their activities. It is in this line, that present study discloses arms proliferation across West African sub-region and its negative implications to Nigerian society. The free flow of SALW has become to be a social problem across WA, despite efforts been placed by peace keeping and building bodies like ECOMOG. This paper employed qualitative content analysis of the existing studies to determine the present study. Although, there were a number of related studies to this topic but the point of departure is; the present study is centered on the level of arms circulation in WA sub-region and its effect to Nigeria. It is observed that the purposeful leadership in the sub-region to address needs and demands of indigenous people, review of border lines across WA countries with consideration of ethno-cultural relations, and ensuring advance strategy of security operation will at least lessen if not control the menace.*

**Keywords: proliferation, arms, sub-region, porous and border**



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## **Introduction**

The most serious issue militating against West African Sub-region is proliferation of Small arms and light weapons (SALW). The free flow of such weapons has facilitated the activities of many insurgent groups, armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, assassination and many other vices across the region. In this vein, Nigeria suffers seriously with influx of SALW through sea coast and land borders. Another motive that also played an important role in ensuring the circulation of these arms can be attributed to trouble with Liberia since 1990 which made the usage of the SALW more easily and widespread across the sub-region (Blum, 1-12). The rampant use of these weapons has triggered escalation of political violence, ethno-religion conflict which has been the major problem affecting West African countries (Aluko 71-80). Although some of the criminal activities have historical stand point but with current availability of weapons, violence has become to be over and above the effort of international humanitarian aids resources and in turn, affect the livelihood of individuals causing huge number of internally displaced persons, refugees. As such, it requires much more from the peace making and peace building capabilities of organizations like Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), African Union (AU) and the United Nations Organization (UNO) to curtail the menaces (Aluko 71-80). It is against this scenario this study hopes to understand the nature of arms proliferation across West African sub-region and to explore how usage of small arms and light weapons affect socio-economic system of Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

In order to interpret the present study, qualitative content analysis was adopted to analyze secondary data. The sources were mainly dissertations, conference papers, journals, seminar, text books etc. The analysis and interpretation was made by using content analysis so as to arrive at reliable and objective judgment.



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## Factors Leading to Arms Proliferation in West Africa

It is observed and recorded that a number of factors are responsible for circulation of small arms and light weapons across West Africa where most of the illegal manufacturing and marketing are found to be in Africa which has become very disturbing phenomenon, and are leading to destruction of both lives and properties across the sub-region.

- **Availability/Accessibility:** It has been recorded that about 875 million arms produced by more than one thousand companies from 100 countries were in circulation across globe and 100 million out of the figure were found to be in Africa, while 2/3 of the weapons were at possession of civilians. Moreover, reports showed that about 500,000,000 military arms were in circulation across world and 300,000 -500,000 people fall victims by these weapons yearly; whereas 9/10 victims of this killings were civilians (Esther 80-87).
- **Civil War/Ethno-Religious Conflict:** Civil war and persistence ethno-religious conflict among the diverse ethnic groups contributed immensely for rampant circulation of SALW (Francis, 8). Therefore, the trouble with Liberia since 1990 made the usage of SALW more easy and widespread across the sub-region (Blum 1-12).
- **Poverty:** Wide spread of poverty across African continent coupled with other social problems like corruption has facilitated the possession of SALW by criminals (Saleh. *et al*, 76-85).
- The operation has been seen and analysed as an issue related to politics that involves huge number of gladiators. There are politicians behind the operation of arms smuggling across West African States (“Kondor”).

However, there have been effort by peace-making and building bodies like Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), African Union (AU) and the



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United Nations Organization (UNO) to curtail the menaces but up till to date the phenomenon is persistence and invariably its repercussion has been causing a lot of damages to both human and non-human resources. The free movement of such weapons has been considered to be the motive behind destabilizing social co-existence among African societies (Caleb 76-85). Studies revealed that cross-border crime remains (that's the free flow of SALW across West African countries) the major factor affecting socio-economic and political activities in WA sub-region ("Ado").

## **Effect of Proliferation of SALW to Nigerian Society**

Many studies raised several effects of SALW to Nigerian's societies and its destructive effects to both human and non-human;

- The proliferation and its effect remain active up till today which has affected Nigeria economically sequel to destruction of property and cease of investors. Almost 97% of businesses were affected in Yobe state of North-eastern Nigeria (Cyril 183-196).
- Been Nigeria weak in its administration resulted rampant circulation and usage of such weapons and in turn affects the conducive atmosphere of security in the country ("Anthony *et.al*").

It is understood that portability, durability, simplicity and its low cost made both state and non-state actors engaged using SALW and indeed the border porosity of Nigeria has made such smuggling possible which in turn affected the livelihood of citizens across 36 states of Nigeria (Moses and Ngomba 788-799). Almost 81% unknown borders has been discovered across Kano State in northern Nigeria which remains illegal exits by criminal smugglers. A finding also shows that the security personnel in Kano State do not have enough working arms to tackle the menace of crime in the state. It has been recorded that almost 70% lacks working facilities to



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fight against criminal activities. Consequently, most of the security personnel suffer from lack of job satisfaction because of low salaries, non-payment of allowances, delay in promotion/implementation and lack of accommodation has also beard to be another factor responsible for insecurity in Kano State (Yahaya, *et al* 47-56).

Moreover, the negative implications with current 21<sup>st</sup> century trend and changing in different dimension using SALW by insurgent groups has caused the political, economic, and socio-cultural development of Nigerian societies stagnant and that, until the re-strategize policies couple with effort of intelligent security personnel, Nigeria as a society will continue to suffer both human and property destruction (John and Julius 1638-1652). Contemporary technological advancement has also played a significant role to ensuring escalation and extension of trans-national threats across Nigerian borders. Criminal activities have been changed as a result of technological advancement (Ngboawaji 74-97). The negative impact of arms proliferation to Nigerian society has touched every angle of institution. It has been noted that the circulation and usage of such weapons has disrupted 2011 general election which has direct connection with inability of government to address the problem (Odoh and Uchenna 64-74). The availability of SALW has created much more tension between arms herders and farmers across the country. Involvement of Fulani Herdsmen in Trans-border Crimes has also added much burden to Nigeria's security. Trans-border crimes undermines national security in Nigeria henceforth, the advantages use by Fulani or Hausa herdsmen in playing part of such criminal activities will no doubt affect the future progress, public trust and democratic values of the country (Ikyas and Umara 52-61).

The weak Nigerian government and its negligence to addressing the need and demands of the citizen has also influenced the people of Niger-Delta region to be using such weapons for the harassment of both oil exploration companies and government officials to claiming their rights



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having the fact that, the exploration exercise in the area has caused air, water and land pollution which invariably affects the livelihood of the inhabitant (Abang and Idoma).

## **Conclusion**

The analysis highlights that artificial borders, weak governments, poverty ridden social structure along with civil wars across West African societies have been the major contributing factors in regard to the current phenomenon of arms proliferation. In line with this introduction of purposeful leadership across the sub-region countries so as to address needs and demands of indigenous people, review of border lines across Western African countries with consideration of ethno-cultural relations, and ensuring advance strategy of security operation will at least lessen if not control the menace.



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