Infiltration of Small Arms and Light Weapons into Benue Valley and Its Impact on the Conflict Between Pastoralists and Farmers

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Abstract

One of the challenges confronting nation states is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This problem is more pronounce in developing countries where there are porous borders and weak institutions responsible for border security like Nigeria. The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in the country is progressively complex and multifaceted phenomenon that affects people and insecurity. This paper examined the infiltration of small arms and light weapons into Benue Valley and its impact on the conflict between pastoralists and farmers. Descriptive research design was adopted while the data for the study was generated from interviews and questionnaire instruments. State fragility theory provided framework for the study. Findings from the study revealed that the availability of illegal small arms and light weapons in the Benue valley has greatly aggravated farmers and herders conflict. The destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons by Fulani herders and farmers has increased the intensity and duration of conflict, undermines the sustainability of peace agreements, impedes the success of peace building, frustrates efforts aimed at the prevention of the conflict and hinders considerably the provision of humanitarian assistance in the affected areas. The study therefore recommends that: there is also need for an improved border management mechanism using modern and sophisticated detection equipment to discourage arms trafficking through the borders.

Keywords: Arms, light, weapons, conflicts, pastoralists, and farmers

Introduction

One of the challenges that have confronted the Nigerian state since the re-inception of democracy in 1999 has been the conflict between farmers and herders conflicts. The conflict between farmers and herders in the country is decades old however, it recent manifestation has posed a lot of security challenges for the country. In the last ten years, the conflict between farmers and herders has increase both in number of attacks and the level of destruction. For instance, The Global Terrorism Index (2016) reports that in 2016, more than 1,200 people lost their lives to herder's attacks. This made the Fulani herdsmen the world's fourth deadliest group (GTI, 2016; Mikailu, 2016).

Several factors have been deduced for the rising cases of herder's invasion of farming communities in the country. Some of theaggravating factors behind this escalating conflict are climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (loss of northern grazing lands to the expansion of human settlements); technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practices); crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the spread of illicit firearms); and cultural changes (the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms) (Blench, 2010). A dysfunctional legal regime that allows crime to go unpunished has encouraged both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands (International Crisis Group, 2017).

However, others authors have explained the rising incidences of herder's invasion of farming communities to proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Terkula &Abughdyer, 2019 & Mikailu, 2016). The illegal possession and circulation of small arms and light weapons is known to fuel insurgency, piracy, kidnapping, communal conflict as well as exacerbate political ethno-religious tension hence posing threats to socioeconomic development and security challenge. The uncontrollable use of small arms and light weapons has contributed to the alarming level of armed crime, and militancy. This study therefore examines the impact of the infiltration of small and light weapons on pastoralists and farmers conflict in the Benue Valley.

Statement of the Research Problem

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is adjudged as the most immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states worldwide, fuelling civil wars, organized criminal violence, insurgency and terrorist activities posing great obstacles to sustainable security and development. According to Gamba (2019) it is believed that more than 500 million SALW are in existence globally, and these are produced in large numbers in more than 70 countries. These weapons have fueled dozens of intra-state and local conflicts around the globe; killing, injuring and displacing millions of people primarily women and children. The damage and destruction caused by small arms in Nigeria is indeed astounding. Armed conflicts, which have been carried out largely with small arms in Nigeria, have been the most visible manifestation of the devastation caused by arms. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2017) alone, about 167,000 Nigerians died as result of conflicts. In Nigeria, the evidence of proliferation is an extreme concern. Out of the 650 million SALW circulating globally, some estimated 7 million are in Nigeria, and 77,000 small arms are in the hands of major Nigerian insurgents, bandits and kidnappers (Small Arms Survey, 2019, p. 82).

In the Benue valley, farmers and herdsmen conflict has been ongoing over the years. Available data suggest that the past five years, has witnessed the killing of thousands without precise account. The Fulani herdsmen with the aid of mercenaries with sophisticated weapons launched attacks on several communities in the Benue Valley and destroyed thousands of lives and properties, farmlands and crops worth billions of naira, and rendered thousands of people homeless (International Crisis Group, 2017). Pools of studies have been conducted on the conflict between farmers and herders conflict in the country. However, there are limited studies on the impact of proliferation on herders and farmers in the Benue Valley. This study is an attempt to fill the gap.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the infiltration of small arms and light weapons into Benue Valley and its impact on the conflict between pastoralists and farmers. Specific objectives include to:

i. examine factors that influence the infiltration of small arms and light weapons into Benue Valley.
ii. ascertain the impact of the infiltration of small arms and light weapons on pastoralists and farmers conflict in the Benue Valley.

Conceptual Issues

Small Arms and Light Weapons

There is no universally accepted definition of Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW). This is because the understanding of what constitutes these categories of weapons has undergone some changes due to the dynamics of technological development, however, good working definitions abound. These tend to describe such arms and weapons either by their configuration, characteristics, size, user perspective or a combination of some of these. The Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) Handbook (1993) on weapons and vehicles defines small arms as:

> Man potable, largely shoulder controlled weapons of up to 12.7mm (0.5") caliber; such weapons generally have a flat trajectory and an effective operational range of 0-800m, although this varies considerably with caliber and weapon type, certain weapons can also provide neutralizing fire out to 1800m.

The UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (1997) considers SALW as those Weapons ranging from knives, clubs and machetes to weapons particularly below the caliber of 100mm-small- small arms are those weapons manufactured to military specification and designed for use by one person, whereas light weapons are those used by several persons working as a crew.

Despite the diverse views of scholars, there is a commonality of characteristics that permeates the various definitions. The common characteristics of the concept of small arms and light weapons can be better understood. These common elements include: a) the focus is on lethal equipment, i.e. weapons and their ammunition, generally used by military and paramilitary forces, excluding items such as knives and hunting rifles; b) second, the emphasis is on weapons that are man-portable or transportable by light vehicles, i.e. on the weight and size of the equipment; c) this equipment is easy to maintain, can function without much logistical back-up and requires light training for use and d) to be militarily and politically relevant, the definition comprises weapons that are in frequent use, i.e. weapons that really kills.

Conflict between Pastoralists and Farmers

The conflicts between pastoralist and farmers had existed since the beginning of agriculture, but the prevalence of tsetse and low settlement densities had kept the incidence of clashes at low frequency until the 20th century (Blench, 2010). The term 'farmer-herder conflict' has come to represent many different types of conflicts: interest conflicts, resource disputes, political action, and evictions, killings and livestock theft, to mention a few (Terkula & Abughdyer, 2019). One-factor explanations are therefore not sufficient for most such cases. How, then, can we define farmer-herder conflicts? Indeed, as Moritz (2006, p.23) asks: "are only conflicts over natural resources 'herder-farmer' conflicts, or are all conflicts in which the parties identify themselves or are identified by others as such herder-farmer conflicts? Also, how do we know if conflicts are about natural resources, if they are motivated by 'a culture of competition' or articulate with other religious or political conflicts? Could we define herder-farmer conflicts other than by saying they involve herders and farmers?"

Moritiz (2006) suggests that the most common way of defining farmer-herder conflicts, then, is as "low-level, small-scale conflicts between herders and farmers over access to grazing lands and campsites and crop damage. Such tensions are often linked to longstanding insecurity, drought and scarcity of natural resources, and portrayed as 'in the- moment, instinctive scrambles' for resources, as the differences between farmers' and herders' livelihoods and ways of using the land are seemingly obvious causes for conflict. It is believed that tensions erupt easily under a state of constant competition (Terkula & Abughdyer, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts state fragility theory as its framework of analysis. Fragile states, similar to failed, weak or collapsed states, is an analytical category that gained prominence from the mid 1990s onwards and gained further traction after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Background is the belief held by many policy-makers and academics alike that the potential for contemporary conflict is harboured within, not between, states. Low capacity and low-income states of the Global South are thought to pose direct threats not only to their own populations, but by extension also to their neighboring Western countries (Bates, 2009). Following this logic, fragile states are in need of development in order to be able to provide security and basic services to its citizens, decreasing vulnerability and increasing resilience to internal and external shocks.

Baliamoune-Lutz & Mark (2011, p.89) outlined the assumptions of the state fragile theory to include:

i. Conflict/post-conflict/crisis/war or political transition situations.
ii. Deteriorating governance environments.
iii. Situations of gradual improvement.
iv. Situations of prolonged political or economic crisis or impasse.

A fragile state is significantly susceptible to crisis in one or more of its sub-systems. It is a state that is particularly vulnerable to internal and external shocks and domestic and international conflicts. Fragile states are not only evaluated by degree of fragility but also types of state fragility and threat they pose in to help policymakers to appropriate responses (Cilliers & Cisk, 2013).

In a fragile state, institutional arrangements embody and perhaps preserve the conditions of crisis: in economic terms, this could be institutions (importantly, property rights)

that reinforce stagnation or low growth rates, or embody extreme inequality (in wealth, in access to property and land ownership, in access to the means to make a living); in social terms institutions may embody extreme inequality or lack of access altogether to health or education; in political terms, institutions may entrench exclusionary coalitions in power (in ethnic, religious, or perhaps regional terms), or extreme factionalism or significantly fragmented security organisations.

State fragility theory offers a suitable analytical framework for interrogation of proliferation of small arms and herders and farmers conflict in Nigeria. The Nigerian state has weak institutions and as such cannot sufficiently address challenges that confront them like security of their borders that will prevent arms proliferation within the sub-region. The political and military indicators include corruption, policing and small arms proliferation that exacerbated the pastoralists and farmers conflict in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

In this study, the descriptive survey method was employed as a research design. The essence of adopting this method is based on the fact that the survey is proven to be very effective in obtaining data on people's views /opinions, feelings, attitudes and perceptions on an issue.The population of this study was limited to three states of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba. The justification for the selection of these states is purposive (they are the worst heat states) (International Crisis Group, 2017). The population of these states according to the National Population Census (2016) (projected population) is as follows: Benue State, 7,992,784;Nasarawa State, 2,523,400 and Taraba State, 3,066,800. Therefore, total population for this study is 13,582,984.

The sample size of this study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) to arrive atthe sample size of 400.Therefore, purposive sampling technique was adopted to generate data for this research. This technique was utilised with an emphasis on communities in thestates that have directly experienced pastoralists and farmers conflicts. These respondents were selected from security agents (The Nigerian Police, Civil Defence) members of civilian joint task force, and community leaders. This study employed questionnaires and interviews instruments. Secondary source of data collection has greatly assisted on the research topic, and also provides other insights in other areas like the demographic information of the study areas. These are information obtained from books, newspapers magazines, journals among others.

The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The questionnaires and socio demographic variable were analyzed quantitatively using pie charts and graphs while the information generated from the in-depth interview were analysed qualitatively in line with research objectives.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Socio-demographical Attributes of Respondents

The socio-demographic attributes of respondents which include, sex, age, marital status educational attainment and occupation were collected and presented below. The demographic characteristics according to sex in table one shows that majority of the respondents represented by 270 (67.7%) were males where as 129 (32.3%) of the respondents were females. The preceding segment of the table deals with age, according to the table those within the aged bracket of 31-40 years constituted the highest population represented by 246 (61.7%), followed by 18-30 with 54 (13.5%) where as those

aged between 41-50 were represented by 50 (12.5%) those who were above 50 years constituted 49 (12.3%).

On the marital status of the respondents majority of them are married represented by 282 (70.7%) of the respondents 89 (22.3%) of the respondents were single while 28 (7.0%) accounted for the widow /divorce. The next segment deals with the educational qualification of the respondents, the data in table one shows that 199 (49.9%) of the respondents had secondary education, followed by those with primary education representing 99 (24.8%) of the respondents where as those with no education accounted for 61 (15.3%) while those with tertiary education constituted 40 (10%) of the total respondents.

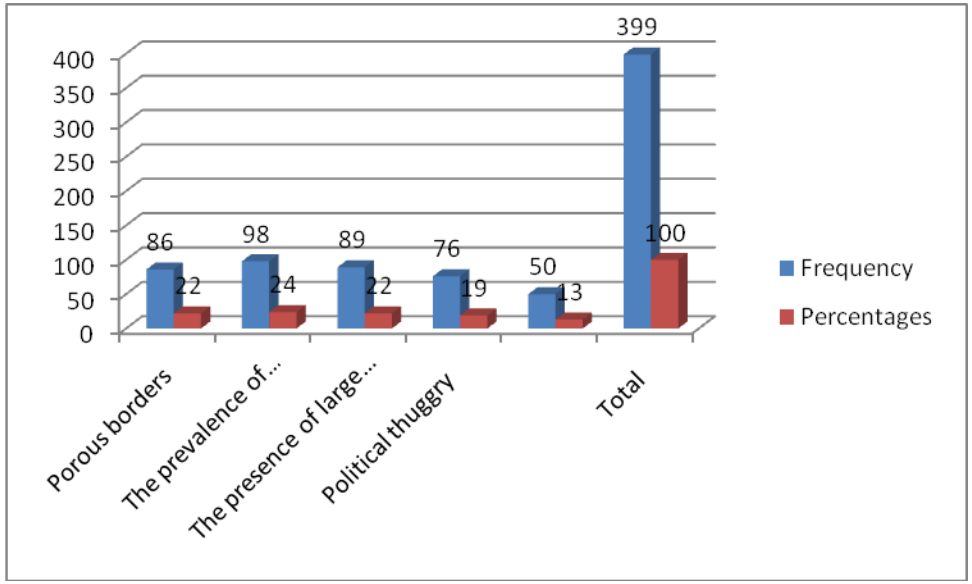
On the occupational distribution of the study majority of the respondents were farmers represented by 294 (73.7%) followed by civil servant with 56 (14%) of the respondents whereas business and unemployed accounted for 11 (2.8%) and 38 (9.5%) respectively (see appendix).

Factors that Influence the Infiltration of Small Arms and Light Weapons into Benue Valley

This objective contains presentation of data regarding the factors that influence proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Benue Valley. The data are presented in frequency distribution Figure 2 below.

The result indicates that about 86(22%) of the sampled respondents identified porous borders as one of the factors influencing the infiltration of small and light weapons in the Benue Valley, 98 (24%) attribute the influence the infiltration of small and light weapons in the Benue Valley to the prevalence of communal conflicts. The result further indicates that about 89 (22%) of the respondents the presence of large number of unemployed youths is one of the factors that have influence the infiltration of small and light arms in the Benue Valley while 76(19%) attributed the infiltration of small and light arms in the Benue Valley to political thuggery. Lastly, 50(13%) went for security negligence and conspiracy of some security personnel. The implication of the result is that several factors have influenced the infiltration of small and light arms in the Benue Valley.

Figure 1: Factors that Influence the Infiltration of Small Arms and Light Weapons into Benue Valley



Source: Field work, 2022

The result on the table above is in line with the responses obtained from interviews and Focus Group Discussions. For instance, a security personnel in Makurdi, Benue state (Interview, 20/02/2022) opined that Nigeria's porous borders is the major source proliferation of small and light weapons in the country. He elaborated that:

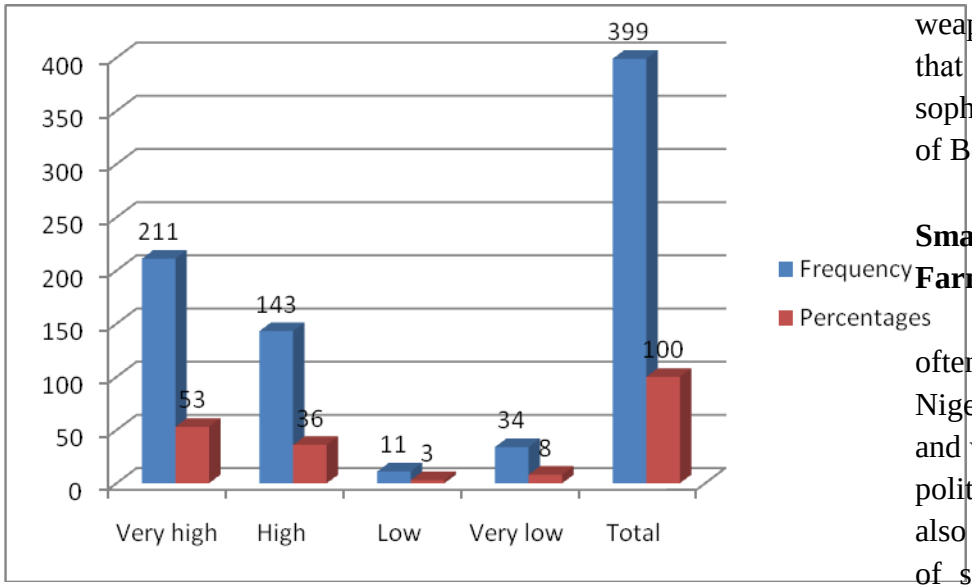
> The lengthy and porous borders, across Nigeria makes the country both an entry and exit routes of small arms and light weapons proliferation including countries like

Benin, Cameroun, Chad, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Togo among others are often mentioned. There are enough weapons to be shared around and people therefore tend to make use of it for their personal gain.

Apart from the porous borders, some respondents also pointed accused the security personnel for selling arms to criminals. For instance, the Department of State Security (DSS) had blamed the worsening insecurity in the country on corrupt members of the Armed Forces and other security agencies, who allegedly sell arms to criminals (Abagen & Tyona, 2018).

Furthermore, the result presented on Figure 2 indicates that 211 (53%) of the respondents were of the view that the rate of infiltration of small and light weapons in the Benue Valley is very high, 143(36%) said it high. The result indicates that 11(3%) of the respondents said it low and 34 (8%) said it very low.

Figure 3: The rate of infiltration small and light weapons in the Benue Valley



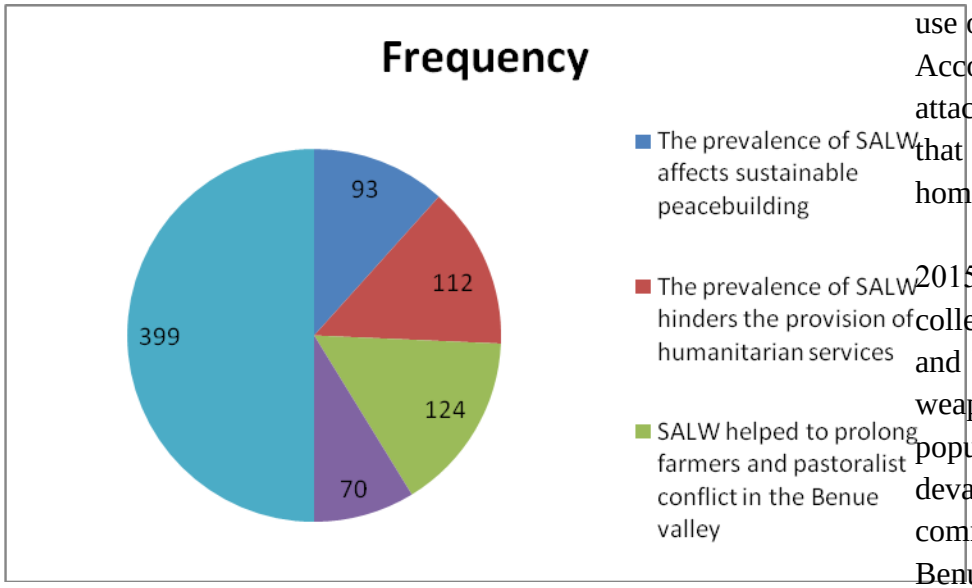
Source: Field Work, 2022

The implication of the result is that, the rate of infiltration of small and light weapons in the Benue Valley is very high. Nigeria is one of the countries experiencing some of the most devastating effects of the proliferation of SALW as a result of spillover effect of the recent crisis in Libya and Mali, as well as unresolved internal conflict in different parts of the country, especially in the North-East, Niger Delta and Southern regions (Dauda, 2017). The weapons used by our neighbours find easy access into the country and a ready market in Nigeria to increase the tempo of our own internal conflicts. But that's not the only culprit. Actually, the origins of the illegal arms proliferation could be reduced to three chief sources. One is the ineffective management of our borders. The second one is the stockpile mismanagement by our security agencies where weapons meant for government work are lent or sold to armed robberies and non-state agents. The third one is the obsolete law used in regulating the arms. In Benue State, there are ample records to demonstrate that the rate of small and light weapons is high. For instance, Abagen & Tyona (2018)reports that "Ghana" and his gang are fully and well armed with sophisticated weapons and are still terrorizing the Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria.

Small Arms and Light Weapons on Pastoralists and Farmers Conflict in the Benue Valley

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).

Figure 3: Impact of SALW on pastoralists and farmers conflict in the Benue Valley



Source: Field work, 2022

The result on Figure 3 indicates that 93(23%) of the sampled respondents agreed that the prevalence of SALW affects sustainable peacebuilding in farmers and pastoralists conflict, 112(28%) of the sampled respondent were of the view that the prevalence of SALW hinders the provision of humanitarian services to those affected by the conflict. Besides, 124(31%) agreed that SALW helped to prolong farmers and pastoralist conflict in the Benue valley while 70(18%) opined that SALW induced internal population displacement. The result implies that proliferation of SALW has several effects on farmers and pastoralists conflict in the Benue valley.

Responses obtained through interviews with victims, security officials and senior government functionaries reveal that the pastoralist's are involved in transporting small arms into Benue State using cows and donkeys. Sometimes these weapons are hidden in sacks of grain, beans and rice transported on the back of donkeys as they move from place to place. Security officials stationed at Awe also collaborated the use of dangerous and sophisticated weapons by the pastoralists. According to some security sources, a military personnel attached to Operation Ayem me kpatema (Cat race) restated that the weapons in use include AK-47 assault rifles, homemade rifles, hand guns and Molotov cocktails.

In Gassol, Taraba State, a police raid in November 2015 discovered that the pastoralist's hideout resulted in the collection of weapons including AK-47 and G3 rifles, Beretta and browning pistols and various types of ammunition. 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 herders attacks in the Benue Valley faced with the herculean task of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

To farmer in Bali (Taraba State), the only question is; who armed the herdsmen with AK47 automatic rifle? A group of herdsmen said that: they carry guns to protect themselves and their cattle against armed rustlers and criminal groups who attack their cattle. A related study revealed that the violent attacks had persisted with several adverse effects such as displacement, disempowerment, forced migration, killings among othersin addition to the destruction of several crops grown in the rural north central Nigeria as the nomads graze their cattle (International Crisis Group, 2017).

According to the a Focus Group Discussion in one of the IDP camp in Anyiin Logo Local government, Benue State (20/02/2022), respondents were unanimous in their responses that the infiltration of small and light weapons has frustrated efforts at peacebuilding. Retired military personnel in Tombo

(Buruku local government) further collaborates the above assertion thus:

> Our community was ransacked by the Fulani herders four years ago, since then our people are still in IDP camps. Several attempts to return homes have not been successful. These herders keep attacking us again and again. This has made it impossible for us to resume our normal lives. Our farming activities have been disrupted for years, our children can no longer attend schools and even during elections we were disenfranchised. In fact were refugees in our country.

A security expert in Bali (Taraba State) confirms that the destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons by Fulani herders has increased the intensity and duration of conflict, undermines the sustainability of peace agreements, impedes the success of peace building, frustrates efforts aimed at the prevention of armed conflict and hinders considerably the provision of humanitarian assistance in the affected areas.

Summary of Findings

In line with the objectives of the study, the following are the summary of the major findings:

i. Findings from the study reveals that there are several factors have influenced the infiltration of small and light arms in the Benue Valley. However, the prevalence of communal conflicts and the nation's porous borders are the major factors.

ii. Findings from the study also revealed that availability of illegal small arms and light weapons in the Benue valley by the Fulani herdsmen has greatly aggravated farmers and herders conflict. Resulting to both increase in number of attacks and casualties in human and properties losses.

iii. The proliferation of small and light arms has not aggravated pastoralists and farmer's conflict in the Benue Valley but it has hindered the distribution of humanitarian services and peacebuilding process.

Conclusion

This study has established that there is a relationship between the infiltration of small and light weapons and pastoralists and farmers conflict in the Benue Valley. In other words the proliferation of small and light weapons in the Benue valley has exacerbated the pastoralists and farmer's conflict in all states that constitutes what is known as the Benue Valley. The availability of these arms in the hands of mostly pastoralists hasprolonged the conflict and upset the return of normalcy in the affected communities.

Recommendation

In the light of the negative impact of the proliferation of small and light weapons on pastoralists/farmers conflict in Benue Valley, this study recommends the following:

i. Adoption of a national arms control strategy (NACS) to guide the clean-up and prevention of SALWs circulation. The proposed establishment of a National Commission on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NATCOM) should be fast-tracked to lead this effort, involving collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), National Taskforce (NATFORCE) and other stakeholders.

ii. There is also need for an improved border management mechanism using modern and sophisticated detection

equipment to discourage arms trafficking through the borders.

iii. Public enlightenment programmes on the dangers of gun possession and peace education programmes that advocates non-violent resolution of disputes be carried out to guarantee public safety.

iv. Security personnel who engage in arms racketeering should be adequately punish to serve as deterrent to others.

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