Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Gun Violence in West Africa Sub-Region

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Abstract

The unlawful use of small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence is a global problem which affects every country. At the global stage, it is well known that far more people are killed in armed conflict through the use of small arms than by bombs. The study therefore examined the sources and modes of transfer of these weapons and their effects on the citizenry. Data were sourced using both primary and secondary methods. Data selected was analysed through the use of descriptive method such as tables and frequency distribution. Findings revealed that the porous borders across the West African sub region is one of the causes of small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence and this has led to destruction of lives and properties. The government of the countries in the West African sub region should collaborate to beef securities in their borders.

Keywords: Small Arms, Light Weapons, Gun Violence, Proliferation, West Africa

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Introduction

Small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence (SALWPGV) is a global phenomenon and not restricted to West Africa sub-region. In essence, it affects the entire world. However, the focus of this research is on West Africa sub-region which has witnessed and still witnessing arms conflicts, gun violence and several other conflicts. According to Michael Klare cited by Simbine and Sesay (2006), small arms and light weapons (SALW) "have been the primary weapons of violence in the many ethnic and internal conflicts that have erupted" in most parts of the world including the West Africa sub-region mostly since 1990. Users of the term include amongst others, Late Kofi Anna, an Ex-Secretary General of the United Nations. However, in many countries, a lot of small arms have found their way into the hands of unauthorized persons. In recent years, the official security and gun control agencies of many West Africa countries have noticed the influx and increasing circulation of small arms among their citizens disregarding the official regulations.

In fact, SALW seems to know no borders in West Africa. Weapons are circulating at all levels from the smuggling of individual weapons to large shipments. Keili (2005) in his assessment of the border threat noted the patterns of arrival and circulation of small arms within the Mano River Union (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). According to him, communities interviewed disclosed that during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, particularly AK-47s, RPGs, FM light machine guns, M16 rifles, two-barrel Berettas, pistols, bazookas and mortars, increased along

the Koinadugu–Kailahun axis of Sierra Leone.

Some of these arms and ammunitions are still being trafficked into Sierra Leone from Guinea and Liberia and vice versa. The assessment report identified the Guinea Forest and the Parrot Beak regions as the most prominent routes for trafficking arms within the Mano River Basin. The borders between West Africa's states are long and full of footpaths, which are poorly patrolled. More than 150 illegal crossing points were identified to and from Sierra Leone and Guinea and Liberia. Over 85% of crossing points were covered by fewer than 11% of the customs, immigration and security officials identified. The Sierra Leone Border Threat Assessment Report established that smuggling of SALW can be a real threat to stability in the Mano River Basin.

Significantly, for many years after the end of the super power rivalry and hostilities (what is referred to as the 'Cold War' by some scholars), Africa continent became most afflicted by internal conflicts as brutal civil wars broke out in many countries leading to state collapse in some countries such as Liberia, Sierra Lone, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria to mention but a few. Simbine and Sesay (2006) noted that there are over 600 million small arms and light weapons in circulation worldwide. It was reported in March 2003, that globally, 500,000 people were killed yearly by small arms and the number of small arms in circulation in sub-Sahara Africa was estimated at 30 million (Barro, 2006).

The increase in small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence in the West Africa sub-region is alarming as it has led to the destruction of properties and loss of lives. It is based on this point that the paper discussed this topic considering also, modes of

transfer, characteristics of SALW, causes, effects of SALW and the efforts adopted in curbing or minimising this challenge in the region in particular and the continent at large.

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are:

- To evaluate the characteristic and causes of small arms, light weapons and gun violence in the West African sub region
- To examine the sources and modes of transfer of small arms and light weapons in the West African sub region.
- To examine the effects of small arms, light weapons and gun violence in the West African sub region.
- To assess the adopted efforts in curbing small arms, light weapons and gun violence in the West African region.

Methodology

The study made use of secondary source of data collection to evaluate the causes of small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence in the West Africa sub-region. Data obtained were analysed using historical and analytical techniques.

Conceptual Clarification

There is no generally accepted definition of what constitutes small arms, light weapons and gun violence among scholars and institutions. This concurs with Barro (2006) statement that “there seems to be a lack of consensus in the literature with respect to identifying a small arms as opposite to a standard conventional weapon”. Nevertheless, there are some useful definitions which describe these concepts either by configuration, characteristics,

size, user views and even combination of some of these.

For instance, according to the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) handbook on weapons and vehicles, small arms is defined as man-portable, largely shoulder controlled weapon of up to 12.7m (0.5inches) calibre; such weapons generally have a flat trajectory and an effective operational range of 0 to 800meters; although, this varies considerably with calibre and weapon type, certain weapons can also provide neutralising fire up to 1800meters (RMCS, 1993). The United Nations panel of government experts on small arms (1997) sees small arms and light weapons as those weapons which range from knives, clubs and matches to weapons particularly below the calibre of 100milimeter; small arms are those weapons manufactured to military specification and designed for use by one person, whereas light weapons are those ones used by several persons working as a crew.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs of US Department of State (2001) defines small arms and light weapons "as encompassing man-portable firearms and their ammunition primarily designed for individual use by military forces as lethal weapons." It further explains that a typical list of small arms would include self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Renner (2006) in his definition considers small arms to be "weapons that can be carried by an individual, and they include everything from revolvers and pistols to machine guns, light anti-tank weapons and shoulder fired surface-to-air missiles". Okoro (2012) states that, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in 1983, enlarged the original Second World War definition of small arms as encompassing "all crew-

portable direct fire weapons of less than 50millimeter and which includes secondary capability to defeat light armour and helicopters." This NATO definition brings most automatic assault rifles such as the AK-47 series, US M16, the Israeli Uzi submachine gun as well as all types of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, RPG-7, stinger, machine and submachine guns, and shoulder fired surface-to-surface missiles (SAMs) under small arms category. However, Laurence (2007) defines it from users' perspective as those weapons that can be carried by an infantry soldier or perhaps a small vehicle or pack animal.

Arms proliferation is defined as the spread of weapons from one group of owners and users to other (Obasi, 2003). This he elaborated could be vertical as in the case of different actors within states already possessing particular weapons or lateral where the acquisition involves a spread to states not previously possessing them. However, it could be argued that the definition appears to restrict the concept of proliferation of arms to such states, whereas arms transfers are known to transcend states, groups and individuals, with multifarious modes of transmission. Acquisition of small arms can be transacted through official channels or, through covert, clandestine or black market networks. Proliferation of arms is facilitated by certain intermediaries based on legal or illegal demands coming from particular lawless or restricted environments. The Geneva-based organization, Small Arms Survey, maintains, that "SALW do not proliferate themselves... rather, they are sold, resold perhaps stolen, diverted and maybe legally or illegally transferred several time. At each juncture in this complex chain of legal and illicit transfer, people-brokers,

insurgents, criminals, government officials and or organized groups are active participants in the transmission (United Nations Report, 1997)."

The UN report acknowledges that massive acquisition and accumulation of arms could enhance proliferation. It however qualifies the accumulation with such terms as 'excessive' and 'destabilizing' under certain conditions. As noted in the report, the mere accumulation of weapons is not sufficient criterion by which to define an accumulation of weapons as excessive or destabilizing, since large numbers of weapons that are under the strict control of a responsible state do not necessarily lead to violence. Conversely, a small number of weapons can be destabilizing under certain conditions. For the purpose of this study therefore, proliferation is construed to refer to excessive accumulation and illegal spread of weapons which could have a destabilizing effect on the state.

Like other concepts already discussed above, there is no specific definition of gun violence. However, it has been seen as violence committed with the use of a gun (firearm or small arms). Gun violence is not only a West Africa sub-regional problem but a global one which leads to several deaths and lots of non-fatal injuries every year. The American Psychological Association reports on gun violence, prediction, prevention and policy states that gun violence is an urgent, complex and multifaceted problem which requires evidence based and multifaceted solutions (APA, 2013). According to the report, gun violence is associated with a confluence of individual, family, school, peer, community and socio-cultural risk factors that interact over time during childhood and adolescence. Although many youths desist in aggressive and

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antisocial behaviour during late adolescence, others are disproportionately at risk for becoming involved in or otherwise affected by gun violence.

When the challenge of gun violence is raised, the tendency is to focus on homicide. Gun violence occurs in a range of situations, all of which negatively impact states across the West Africa sub-region. Robberies, assaults, domestic violence, suicides and officer-involved shootings are all scenarios where firearms are too often a key part of the criminal act or incident. In sum, gun violence inflicts harm on the West Africa sub-region in particular and the world at large; and severely compromises security safety.

According to the United Nations report (1997), small arms and light weapons are firearms that can be easily purchased, easily concealed, easily carried, and easily used. Best Practice Guidelines for the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and Nairobi protocol on small arms considers them as "weapons designed for personal use and they shall include: light machine guns, machine pistols, fully automatic rifles and assault rifles and semi-automatic rifles" (Best Practice Guidelines, 2006 quoted in Okoro, 2012). Sesay and Simbine, 2006) pointed out that the spread of small arms and light weapons has been principally facilitated by the rapid improvements in science and technology of weaponry and miniaturization. Resulting from this miniaturization is that many weapons previously classified as 'medium' weapons such as explosive missile projectors, US M72 and Russian RPG7 are now effectively considered as individual 'light' weapons alongside traditional man-portage small arms, including the popular Soviet

built AK-47 assault rifles, automatic rifles, machine guns, shoulder-fired missiles, rocket systems, and light weapons to mention but a few (Simbine and Sesay, 2006).

Small arms are widely available, transportable and easy to use. Small arms play a significant role in accelerating violence, both in times of war and in degraded "peacetime" environments. Easy access to small arms is central to perpetuating social dislocation, destabilization, insecurity and crime in the build-up to war, in wartime and in the aftermath of conflict. Small arms also hamper recovery efforts and compromise the capacity of humanitarian aid workers to go about their work. Small arms are misused within both domestic as well as public spheres, and they affect everyone in the community, though in different ways and for different reasons (Farr, 2008).

According to the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA, 2006), "a thousand people die every day and at least 3000 are injured daily by small arms and light weapons (SALW); small arms are considered the number one tool used to kill and injured civilians which represents between 80-90% of casualties in conflicts". Today, approximately one thousand, one hundred and thirty five companies in more than 98 countries are manufacturing small arms and light weapons, ammunitions or components, a number that has doubled in the past 40 years (Mc Lean and Cross, 2004). Trafficking of small arms is not localized in one region, but contaminates the entire international community. For example, 390 million guns that are produced in Italy (IANSA, 2006) find themselves in fragile and failed states in continents such as Africa where conflict is a daily occurrence. Those that are most vulnerable

and susceptible to the disastrous effects of small arms are children, especially those in conflict or post conflict situations who have witnessed the atrocities of war.

In the current world environment in which the realities of globalization are literally forcing the rapid breakdown of borderlines, low intensity conflicts in which small arms are critically and widely used are threatening the non-negotiable core value of national security especially developing countries of the West Africa sub-region. The political, social and economic conditions of the sub-region simply guarantee easy breakdown of order within the various countries requiring arms for settlement since there is no culture for peace. Although, there are virtually no visible traces of substantial production of small arms in the region, small arms are freely available and widely used. Fiske's observation makes the point clearly when he stated thus:

> "With a seemingly supply of smuggled arms at their disposal, groups as far afield as West Africa have been able to prolong conflict… with disastrous effects on their immediate communities and beyond, gunrunners need war to keep them in business (Fiske, 2000 quoted in Williams, 2014)".

In recent years, numbers of sources have cited figures that purport to document the proportion of civilians injured by small arms and light weapons in various conflicts. Many of these sources put the proportion at 80 to 90 percent of all people injured. It is important to note that these estimates are almost always provided

with no indication of how they have been arrived at. Thus in recent years, a large number of documents by non-governmental organizations and even articles in the peer-reviewed medical literature have cited figures which are increasingly being used as evidence by those concerned with weapons availability and misuse, but which are difficult, if not impossible to substantiate.

Small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence in the West Africa sub-region could be regarded as a product of failure of political leadership due to bad leadership, poor governance, militarization of the society and state violence leading to poverty, mass unemployment, economic crisis of development and other forms of poor human development indices in Nigeria.

The West Africa Sub-Region

It is the region that dominates the western part of Africa between the Sahara desert and the gulf of Guinea. It politically comprised of the following countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. West Africa forms one of the major sub-regions of the African region and it is often referred to as a sub-region of the African region. The end of the Cold War had in contrast unleashed an outbreak of callous intra-state and trans-state conflicts resulting in untold magnitude of human tragedy. The West Africa sub region thus has in the past two decades ignominiously played host to some of the most callous and brutal conflicts in recent history.

Armed violence at the end of the cold war according to Okoro (2012) assumed an endemic proportion in much of the

countries that constitute the West African sub-region. The nature of the devastation that typically accompanied these conflicts plunged the sub-region into depths of despondency and stunted growth. No single country was in absolute terms spared the plight of this menace. The degree of this conflagration however varies within the various nation-states of the sub-region. Countries like Liberia in the 1990s dangerously came close to total collapse under the impact of such violence. The Liberian violence in turn spilled over to Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast inflicting also significant degree of devastation on the peoples and the political, cultural, economical, social and religious structures of these countries. Other nations like Senegal, Mali and Nigeria despite having made spirited efforts to prevent the spread of civil wars into their countries, have continued to be embattled by recurrent bout of armed disturbances and insurrection in sections of their country. The Casamance rebels of Senegal, the dissident Boko Haram group in Nigeria's North-Eastern region and the Tuareg militia in Mali all represent the security quagmire that plagues even these nations in the sub-regions that ostensibly appear to be at peace. Ghana however stands as an exception to this rule, despite its geographical proximity and demographical interaction with its violence afflicted neighbours has inexplicably remained untainted by armed violence, having to contend only with the economic and social impediments arising from harbouring refugees from affected states. Since its return to democratic governance in 1992, Ghana has progressively bolstered its security to enjoy a level of stability unprecedented in the sub-region.

West Africa sub-region has undeservedly come to be

epitomized by massive killings, internal displacements, wanton refugee flows and acute poverty. The sub-region essentially portrays to the world a gloomy picture of human deprivation and indignity. This was the image captured by Kaplan (2000) that "West Africa is becoming the symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real 'strategic' danger. Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-state and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms and international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism (Kaplan, 2000)."

Conflicting figures are available of the volume of SALW circulating the West African sub-region but conservatively it is believed that 500 million illicit arms are in existence globally and these are produced in 70 countries of the world (Virginia, 2006). The United Nations report (1997) estimates that of these 500 million illicit weapons, 100 million are in Sub-Sahara Africa, with eight to ten million concentrated in the West African sub-region alone. SALW are convenient and attractive to rebel groups and dissident that characterize the West African landscape because they are widely available, very cheap, deadly, easy to use and easy to transport and smuggle. Boutwell and Klare (2000) stated that unlike heavy conventional arms, such as artillery pieces and tanks, which are typically acquired by government forces, small arms transcend the dividing line between government forces, police, soldiers and civil populations. Similarly, not more than a few hours of training is required to acquire the level of proficiency considered sufficient for

the execution of rebel warfare. This reason more than any, perhaps accounts for the large number of children involved in armed conflict in the sub-region, and the severity and brutality of such conflicts. Renner (2006) reported that Africa alone has suffered about 5,994,000 fatalities in the last 50 years due mostly to SALW. Narrowing the estimate to West Africa, Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba (2004) wrote that "in conflicts since the end of the Cold War, while there are no official figures, an estimated 30,000 people have been killed by SALW in conflict each year since the end of the Cold War."

The suffering inflicted on the people of the West Africa sub-region by these endless conflicts is only rivalled by one already entrenched by a dysfunctional economy. Almost all the countries in the sub-region are rated amongst the 15 poorest in the world, with five occupying the least five position in that strata. With per capita income average of less than 500 dollars, more than half of its 230 million people cannot afford to live on more than one dollar a day (World Council of Churches, 1998 quoted in Keili, 2008). This situation is one that continues to pose a paradox for a sub-region that is blessed with abundant natural resources; from the diamond fields of Sierra Leone to the vast oil wells of the Gulf of Guinea. This pervasive state of penury is one that has been reasonably attributed to the perpetual state of insecurity in the region.

Though warfare were executed among historic state structures in West Africa sub-region, the degree of destruction in these wars were nowhere near the predatory nature of contemporary battle scenes of the region. These traditional wars were executed with moderation and civility. According to Worger *et al.,* (2001) the dynamics of warfare however changed with the introduction of

firearms to the sub-region by European explorers in the fifteenth century. Early European merchants made their debut into West Africa around the fifteenth century and established a vibrant trade relation with the West African coastal communities. The major aim of this trade was precious metals which were mostly exchanged for finished European goods like cloths and firearms. The discovery of the new world extended the range of these trade commodities to include slaves which for the succeeding centuries became the major object of export from Africa. Slavery was armed on business that thrived on violence and frequently the European slave merchants pitted African tribal groups against themselves in order to ignite the chaos that was necessary for the trade to continue to flourish. For Worger *et al.,* (2001), the slave trade had an enormous impact on Africa. It resulted in a great increase in violence within the continent.

Although, some scholars have blamed the present culture of violence in the sub region on this slave induced militancy, what is important to this study is the massive use of firearms it introduced into the region and the gun violence it entrenched thereafter. Perhaps even worse, the negative psychological effect it had on the people of the region as a result of the callousness of this trade in human merchandise they were exposed to. In describing this effect Worger *et al.,* (2001) said of the peoples psyche thus:

> "continual enmity is fostered among the Negros of Africa and all social intercourse between then destroyed; and which most assuredly would not be the case had they not these opportunity for finding a ready

> sale for each other."

Nevertheless, one cannot out-rightly claim savagery was alien to Africa before slavery, cruelty as manifested in the hot iron branding of slaves that was common with slave trade was hitherto alien to them. The enduring character of such influences was described by Weiss (2003) when he said that once a culture of violence has taken root, it appears irreversible even innate. The people practically were inured to the atrocities that surrounded slavery and the pattern of subsequent conflicts in the region became literarily transformed. The table below consists of the countries in the West Africa sub-region with details of guns and homicides.

Causes of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in the West Africa Sub-Region

i. Failed security: Weiss (2003) identified what he terms to be "state-level failure to provide security" as a major cause of small arms and light weapons proliferation. He explained that the handicap or ineptitude of government and its security agencies to provide security to her citizens permits the growth of lawlessness, armed robbery and other vices that increase the feeling of insecurity. The logical response to such state of insecurity was a conscious drive to acquiring arms to guarantee self-preservation. He attributed the failure of the state of Somalia in the 1990s to the unbridled arms flows that followed the outbreak of lawlessness in that country.

Beyond the factor of insecurity, Weiss blamed the failure of government policies to provide basic necessities for its young population. The group he also described as the "seemingly never-

ending pool of poor disenfranchised, and uneducated young people." He argued, these groups provide ready recruits for violent or rebel organizations. He employed the analogy of Sierra Leone where despite disarmament, the unemployed youths still jumped at another opportunity to take up arms at the rekindling of the Liberia's civil war. Elaborating on his demand-side approach to fighting small arms proliferation, Weiss called for the small arms menace to be regarded as a humanitarian rather than a security issue.

ii. Trafficking in small arms: The West Africa sub-region shares land and sea borders with other regions in the continent; it would be difficult to find any state in the world capable of effectively controlling such extensive borders. Naturally, traffickers make use of these porous borders to smuggle in such different and dangerous products as drugs and arms. For instance, the Nigeria Customs Service attributes the growth in trafficking to staff shortages, the lack of modern surveillance equipment and a shortage of vehicles. The smuggling of arms and ammunition into the West Africa sub-region has reached disturbing levels. Sometimes these arms are imported into the sub-region hidden in clothing, vehicles or kitchen utensils.

iii. Local arms production: In the 1970s and early 1980s, local arms production did not receive enough attention in the West Africa sub-region. Arms manufactured locally were mostly used for hunting and for traditional rites. However, the rise in the use of firearms for the violent crime suggests that locally produced arms have become a sound and cheap alternative to imported weapons (Yacubu, 2005).

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Sources of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The sources of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Africa are varied and dynamic. Edeko (2011) observed that they range from the manufacture and supply of new weapons both inside and outside the continent, to the remnants of weapons shipped into Africa in the 1970s and 1980s by the former Soviet Union, the United States, and their allies to facilitate different interstate and intra-state proxy wars. The violent protests and struggles against colonial rule as well as the acts of pacification and suppression of these protests with the use of weapons; the years following the independence of the African continent and the continued efforts of Europe to remain relevant in the politics and economy of Africa has greatly propelled the transfer of illegal arms across time and space in Africa. Through efforts of military aid and interventions, peacekeeping operations, as well as other similar conditionalities, non-estimated small arms and light weapons have gained access into several states on the continent and have continued to proliferate among individuals, especially rebel groups, terrorists and other non-State actors, and have continued to inflict untold harm on other civilian population, especially women and children, as well as the state in particular and the continent in general.

Furthermore, the source of proliferation of small arms and light weapons is well linked to local manufacturing. Even the legal acquisition of small arms and light weapons for various security agencies by the Nigerian government illegally finds their way to militia groups (Yacubu, 2005; Adejo, 2005; Nte, 2011). Surprisingly, Simbine and Sesay (2006) noted that, out of the 640 million small arms circulating globally, it is estimated that 100

million are found in Africa about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone. The majority of these small arms and light weapons, about 59% are in the hands of civilians, 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8 % by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The gun trade is worth $ 4 billion annually, of which up to $ 1 billion may be unauthorized or illicit. Eight million new guns are manufactured every year by at least 1, 249 companies in 92 countries. Ten to 14 billion units of ammunition are manufactured every year enough to kill every person in the world twice over.

Modes of Transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons

There are three broadly established and conventional modes of transferring arms. Legal transfer of arms conforms to all legal formalities usually from one state actor to another or their accredited agents. The second and third avenue is what have been dubbed grey channels or covert transfers. Grey channels, according to Ploughshares are arrangements by which "government officials look the other way as their agencies arrange for arms to be sent to foreign groups and countries for profit, strategic calculation or both," while black market transfers involve "unlawful transfers by private arms dealers and smugglers (Ploughshares, 2002).

Effects of Small Arms, Light Weapons Proliferation and Gun Violence in the West Africa Sub-Region

The true magnitude of the problems caused by small arms, light weapon proliferation and gun violence in West Africa cannot be accurately quantified as so many of the effects are hard to measure; such as fear and want. However, there is no dispute that

these have had devastating effects on development, governance and everyday life for West Africans. The following are some of the major effects of small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence in the West Africa sub-region.

- The easy availability and use of SALWPGV is leading to tragic effects, not only for combatants but also for civilians, who form the majority of casualties. Millions of West Africans have been killed or displaced as a result, and an immeasurable amount of property has been destroyed. People are losing their lives, their health, their families, their homes and their livelihoods.
- The growing illegal character of the flow of SALW in West Africa is transforming the bulk of arms transfers from a legal, accountable trade to what is better described as trafficking. What is perhaps most alarming is the number of state and non-state actors involved in the network of illegal transfers of light weaponry.
- The most significant and far-reaching effect of SALWPGV beyond the huge economic cost and social crisis, is the shift in cultural values. West African societies have been weaponised and a culture of violence now prevails in most of the sub-region. SALW are extreme tools of violence in West Africa due their nature.
- The complex dynamics of small arms in West Africa is lightweight, and so can be used by child soldiers, who have played such a significant role in recent conflicts in West Africa. SALW therefore remain the primary weapons of intra- and inter-communal feuds, local wars, armed insurrections, armed rebel activities and terrorism throughout the sub-region. Every West African country has experienced widespread violence in which small arms featured. SALW have particularly fuelled overlapping and uncontained

conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, and the sub-region is still struggling to survive ongoing conflicts in which small arms play a central and destabilizing role.

●SALW have been used to grossly violate human rights, to facilitate the practice of bad governance, to subvert constitutions, to carry out coups d'état and to create and maintain a general state of fear, insecurity and instability. They are also being employed for non-political and non-conflict-related crime and violence.

●It also affects public services. The proliferation of small arms within the sub-region has inhibited access to basic services and key infrastructure, such as health clinics, schools and markets. There is a strong correlation between small arms violence and deteriorating public services in the sub-region. Government services and aid programmes have to be curtailed or withdrawn because of insecurity. Levels of school enrolment and literacy have declined, as have immunizations, while child and maternal mortality have increased. Over time, this has represented a huge cumulative loss in productivity and wealth.

West Africa Sub Regional Effort in Combating Small Arms, Light Weapons Proliferation and Gun Violence

In 1993, the then Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare requested the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send a UN mission to observe the effects of uncontrolled SALW proliferation in his country. By the late 1990s, SALW control became one of the most important security priorities of a large number of states (Garcia 2006). The search for a feasible and

sustainable peace to the internal conflict in Mali led to the adoption in 1998 of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa. The broad aim of the Moratorium is to create an environment conducive to socio-economic development in the sub-region. The objectives of Moratorium regime are:

To prevent conflicts; post-conflict reconstructions and stems the increasing wave of crime and banditry in the sub-region especially with the understanding that easy access and availability of small arms may lead to violent solutions, to problems and their circulation within and across borders facilitates the formation of new armed groups and new conflicts; It also facilitates the use of untrained civilian militias, ill-disciplined fighters, and unaccountable mercenaries. Increase in socio-economic development in general and donor supported development projects in particular (Badmus, 2009).

Furthermore, an operational framework was put in place within the context of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa (PCASED) to facilitate implementation of measures associated with the moratorium (ECOWAS Moratorium 1999). PCASED is a regional project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that is executed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). PCASED predates the Moratorium, as it was originally intended to support the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Mission on the Proliferation of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara sub-region. However, following the adoption of the Moratorium, the ECOWAS Heads of States and Government

requested that PCASED become the central pillar in its implementation.

Conclusion

From the above findings and analysis, the paper has attempted to look at the West Africa sub-region and issue of gun and homicide, causes and sources of small arms and mode of transfer, their effects and the efforts made in combating it in the West Africa sub-region. The issue of small arms, light weapons proliferation and gun violence has remained a topical challenge in the West Africa sub-region. Small arms and light weapons facilitate and exacerbate gun violence and other forms of conflicts which outcome is large-scale displacement, migration and refugees. The level of different conflicts in the West Africa sub-region is increasing the demand for these small arms and light weapons as many communities in the sub-region which have suffered defeats from other communities prepare themselves by simply acquiring their arms in the pretence of self-protection.

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