

ECOWAS Efforts in Combating Small and Light Arms Proliferation in West Africa: Challenges and Prospects of Boko Haram 2005 – 2021

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Abstract

Illegal possession of weapons and transfers of weapons has led to the emergence of violent conflict in most West African states. The situation has resulted in the wanton destruction of lives and property. Profound studies have proved that if the resources used during the wars have been diverted to positive use, African states could have advanced in every sector significantly. That is the reason the sub-regional organisation; ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons was created in response to the proliferation of such weapons across West African borders to curb the threats and the malevolence within the states. The scope and duration of hostilities have produced fertile ground for the sale of arms and other light weaponry. The inconsistent implementation of regional accords in West Africa generates vulnerabilities that arms traffickers might exploit for their illicit enterprise. These traffickers are fast to exploit weak national controls and limited collaboration between border control officials, as well as variances in-country regulation. Therefore; the study looked into the efficacy of the ECOWAS Convention as well as the necessity of continental synergy to reduce the threats and the destruction. The study is qualitative, it analyzed the data obtained descriptively. The study discovered that the spread of Small and Light Weapons has hampered socio-economic and political development in the region, as well as worsened human security. As a result, the paper recommends that ECOWAS Heads of State and Government and Leaders of security organizations convene a regular regional security summit to curb this illegal trade.

Keywords: Security, Weapons, Illegal, Proliferation, Regulation, ECOWAS

Introduction

Concept of Small and Light Weapons

To better comprehend the role of ECOWAS in the management of SALW, it is critical to investigate the concept of small and light weapons as proposed in several scientific kinds of literature. According to Arms Survey, small and light weapons are defined as any portable deadly weapon that expels or launches a shot, bullet, or projectile, is designed to expel or launch a shot, bullet, or projectile, or can be quickly converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet, or projectile by the action of an explosive (2013). Some of the purposes of small and light weapons are described in the Arms Survey, such as the expulsion or launch of bullets or explosives. Bullets and explosives, as seen in most African countries, wreak massive damage to life and property. Small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; submachine guns; assault rifles; light machine guns; heavy machine guns; hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers; portable anti-craft guns; portable anti-tank guns; recoilless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank missiles, according to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in 2016. According to Sunday (2011), A tiny and light weapon is any weapon that can be changed into any of the weapons previously described by UNIDIR (2016).

Sunday (2011) defined a small and light weapon as any weapon that could be converted to any of the weapons previously classified by UNIDIR (2016). In North-Eastern Nigeria, terrorist organizations have used explosive devices, gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, and mines. Minor or light weapons are weapons that have been converted into harmful chemicals. In addition, Chelule (2014) looked at tiny and light weapons in terms of

ammunition, which is a part or component of a firearm that is essential for its correct operation. The SADC Firearms Protocol proposed a revised definition of small arms vs light weapons in 2013. Small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns, according to the SADC definition.

Countries with Weapon Production Capacities in Africa

In Africa, the unexpected implications of these two sources of small and light weapons have had unanticipated ramifications for the continent's socioeconomic and political fabric. According to a 2017 UN study, Africa's massive gun population has resulted in the deaths and relocation of thousands of people due to one or more of the causes. Terrorism has surged in the region as a result of weapon proliferation, a global trend that has proven difficult to combat. Thieves and criminals frequently employ machine guns, rifles, grenades, and pistols. Conflicts in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and other African countries gave these weapons a chance to be used (Ogu, 2012). As a result of the cessation of violence in these countries, weapons are transferred to other countries with violent conditions. The sale and transfer of weapons in war zones benefit individuals and groups. Several academics have looked into the nature of arms-related violence in several African regions, including Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa, according to Ogu (2012). Central and East Africa have remained among the most hazardous locations on the planet. As a result, the region's development has halted. Weapons have been acquired at a pace that exceeds the rate of food consumption, both locally created and imported. Ogu (2012) used the example of Rwanda's 1994 intra-ethnic war, which resulted in the deaths of 800,000 people owing to the usage of small weapons such as machetes. In addition, the study claims that 300,000 people have perished in Burundi. The loss of human life as a result of armed conflict has impeded the development of the region's human resources. Because of the proximity of the borders with other countries, notably Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic, there has been an increase in the transit of weapons into the West African region. Foreign countries provide firearms to the government and armed rebels, therefore gun trafficking in these areas is not restricted to illegal sources. The situation is comparable to that of Southern Africa, which has the highest rate of weaponry proliferation on the continent.

Throughout history, the region has had horrific civil conflicts that have necessitated the sale and usage of small, light weapons. According to Chelule (2014), most of the armament in the region was brought there during the Cold War. However, some came from inside the region. This is exacerbated by the region's insufficient weapons production capabilities. In South Africa, a former colony, the AK-47 played a crucial part in the fight for independence from colonial rule. It's worth remembering that after the devastation of colonialism and apartheid, this lethal weapon, the AK-47, became a symbol of liberty and freedom. The Mozambican flag has a gun shape, signifying the bond between weapons and freedom. In countries like Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Angola, the AK-47 is revered for its role in national liberation. The Southern African Development Community, like ECOWAS's arms control mission, is responsible for weapons control in this region (SADC). It is important to note that this research aims to prevent the spread of firearms through illegal and authorized means, not to condemn gun use as a critical security tool.

The weapons circulation trend that has been documented in other African regions is not absent from West Africa. According to Chelule (2014), Africa has an estimated 8 million tiny firearms in circulation, contributing to the region's increasing instability. In West Africa, the government's inability to maintain internal security, the high prevalence of poverty, and the rising rate of youth unemployment is fuelling the demand for weapons (Ogu, 2012). Although there are areas in West Africa that manufacture guns, as previously noted, the majority of advanced armament enters Africa from elsewhere. As a result, inter-communal conflict, armed robbery, insurgency, and terrorism are all on the increase. For example, 2016 was highlighted by violent farmers/headers conflict, which led to the loss of lives and property owing to the spread of firearms to herders (Mamah, Ndujihe, Nkwopara & Ozor, 2016). It is impossible to overestimate the impact of the arms agreement on regional drug

trafficking and smuggling. The proliferation of small guns generates an environment of fear and distrust, which is both a barrier to economic success and a catalyst for social disturbance.

Small Arms and Development

Economic and social progress that fulfils the requirements of the current generation without endangering the needs of future generations is one of the criteria for long-term growth. Sustainable growth is difficult in an environment of armed conflict, especially when it is used as a cover for the illegal looting of natural resources. During the conflict, physical and human resources are destroyed; transit routes or fertile areas are blocked or diverted; and national industries are occasionally corrupted or taken over by armed groups, discouraging foreign investors and aid agencies from moving forward with critical projects and assistance (United Nations, 2017). Given Africa's widespread poverty, foreign organizations' efforts played a critical part in improving people's socioeconomic well-being. As a result, the violent conflict will impede continuing intervention initiatives and aggravate the situation for many people. According to an Oxfam report referenced by the UN (2017), the cost of violence on African development between 1990 and 2015 was around \$300 billion.

Small Arms-Crime, Elections and Leadership

The availability of small firearms and light weapons, as well as their dissemination, is a tremendous stimulant for all forms of criminal behaviour. Individuals and syndicates may find it hard to function without weapons. Furthermore, if there is poverty and a need for food or other resources, inexpensive firearms make it much easier to get such items by pressure and force (Chelule, 2014). Some metropolitan areas may be impossible to reach without modern compact and light weaponry that might play a crucial role in bypassing urban security systems. Given the high poverty rates and the ongoing need for people to break out of poverty, weapons at lower prices enable desperate adolescents and individuals to attain their goals. Other studies have found that in certain regions of Africa, buying a rifle is cheaper than buying a loaf of bread.

In Africa, elections are a period when small and light weapons are sold and exchanged because they determine who gets what, when, and how. Nearly 19-25 per cent of African elections are tainted by violence (Bashir, 2014). Pre-election violence, election violence, and post-election violence have all had an influence on countries' socioeconomic and political systems as a result. Nigeria's elections in 2013, 2017, and 2011, as well as those in Liberia, Niger, and Guinea, were all plagued by violence. According to experts, small firearms have remained a critical tool in the loss of millions of lives and houses, as well as the migration of communities (Bashir, 2014). Election-related violence is sometimes fueled by dissatisfaction with the political process (Jones and Hoetu, 2012).

When seen from a political perspective, and with the possibility of armed persons forming a new government, the prevalence of firearms may be seen as unfriendly to the election and leadership processes. Furthermore, allowing for external intervention, the transit and sale of arms diminish the state's sovereignty and authority to govern its internal affairs. The destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons in many parts of the world, according to a UN Security Council statement, increases the intensity and duration of armed conflict, undermines the sustainability of peace agreements, impedes the success of peace-building, frustrates efforts to prevent armed conflict, significantly hinders the provision of humanitarian aid, and jeopardizes the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations (United Nations 2012).

If weapons are in the hands of unauthorized persons, it will be hard to manage conflict, restore security, and reconstruct civilizations that have been ravaged by violent wars. The popularity of SALW puts a lot of pressure on the government because of the rising humanitarian situation and the administration's apparent inability to stop the trend. Every day, more than 1,000 people are believed to die as a result of SALW violence, which has resulted in millions of deaths, as well as injuries, maiming, and community misery (Religions for Peace, 2014). According to Sunday (2011), small firearms alone have created havoc in Africa, killing an estimated 5,994,000

individuals in the past 50 years and another 30,000 per year. In terms of refugees, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that 12.7 million people in Africa were internally displaced in 2017 (Religions for Peace, 2014).

ECOWAS Intervention in the SALW

Given the potential dangers posed by the proliferation of small and light weapons, a variety of efforts have been put in place to prevent their spread. One such institution that deals with SALW in West Africa are the Economic Community of West African States. A pact adopted by fifteen West African countries founded the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on May 28, 1975, in Lagos. The purpose of ECOWAS, which was hosted by Nigeria during General Yakubu Gowon's administration, was to ensure that the region's economic growth and development were realized by the collaboration and integration of West African governments.

To raise the standard of living of its peoples, increase and maintain economic stability, foster closer relations among its members, and contribute to progress and development, ECOWAS seeks to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transportation, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial issues, and social and cultural matters. This method became required due to colonialism's exploitative and disastrous effects on Africa's poorest economies. Because most West African economies suffered the same fate under brutal British colonialism, they needed to join together, connected by the English language, to make economic growth.

Nwachukwu (1991) claimed that by the mid-1970s, West African economies were already suffering economic issues as a result of the 1973 global oil price shock, based on the position of most West African countries following independence. Nigeria was only able to pass because of its well-established oil market. Because most economies were import-dependent, encouraging domestic economic growth was important to achieve development and reduce dependency on other nations. Given all of these challenges, Isyaka (2019) sees ECOWAS as the only multilateral entity capable of resolving West African nations' difficulties. Olaniyan (1990) concurred, noting that the belief in economic integration as the best way to address underdevelopment is based on the theoretical rationale that this sort of integration boosts the rate of GNP growth in participating nations. The increase in market size in the firms that were previously operating at a low and local level can now expand their operations to other West African nations, thereby increasing their profit margin; increased economic expansion because increased trade will engineer increased competitiveness and specialization, allowing individual states to achieve economies of scale and lower production; and efficient utilization, according to Olaniyan (1990). In some portions of the integrated area, this impact refers to the cumulative erosion of a member country's relative or absolute economic status, or the drawing of labour and capital elsewhere.

According to Isyaka, there have been debates on the influence of ECOWAS in terms of its professed goals and the military, economic, and sociological complexity of West African States (2019). The goal of this study is to restate ECOWAS' involvement in stopping the proliferation of small and light weapons, rather than to support or refute the assertions.

ECOWAS Moratorium

The ECOWAS Moratorium is one such initiative, which tries to address the security risks generated by the spread of SALW. Bah (2014) noted that ECOWAS adopted a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa under the leadership of Mali, which had successfully concluded peace negotiations with Tuareg rebels, in recognition of the grave threat that the proliferation of illicit small arms poses to the country's security. In an unprecedented move, the Bamako Declaration, a major agreement limiting the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, was signed.

Adopting the ECOWAS Moratorium is a critical step toward addressing the sub-problem of illicit small-arms proliferation and general disarmament in the sub-problem regions. It is seen as a strategic alliance for disarming armed groups and militias. The moratorium said in its preamble that the spread of light weapons is a destabilizing factor for the ECOWAS Member States and a threat to the peace and security of our people. This reflects ECOWAS's worry about the socioeconomic issues posed by the region's development of small and light weapons. The next section digs more into the ECOWAS moratorium's specifics.

Aspects of the Moratorium

The Moratorium's Code of Conduct required the creation of National Commissions to ensure that the moratorium's purpose was accomplished in all nations. This was to be made up of civil society and government representatives. The Bah (2014) moratorium is intended to aid in the formulation of policies, actions, and strategies aimed at reducing the proliferation of small and light firearms. Develop arms registers to transmit information to the ECOWAS secretariat; make recommendations to the ECOWAS Secretariat on weapon handling; manage resource mobilization to meet program expenditures; liaise with the ECOWAS and Program Coordination for Assistance on Security and Development (PCASED) on any relevant issues; develop modalities for the exchange of information and experience with other national commissions.

NATCOM was founded with the approval of the national parliament in Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, but it was established by presidential order in francophone nations. Once a year, they got together to examine the success and problems of their activities the previous year.

While the purpose of NATCOM was to minimize arms proliferation, it did not eliminate the requirement for true state-to-state arms sales. These essential rights of states to internal security capabilities are captured in Article 9 of the Moratorium, which lays out the protocols and rules for importing armament. The ECOWAS secretariat, on the other hand, was in charge of this.

Collecting and destroying weapons is one of the Moratorium's techniques for getting rid of the region's huge arsenal. This would very certainly result in a non-weapons environment's socio-economic progress. This was in response to Ivor Richard Fung, Director of the United Nations Research Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNRCPDA), who stated that if African countries are to have a chance of achieving sustainable socio-economic development, they must first collect and destroy excess weapons that aren't needed during peacetime, as well as reduce the flow and proliferation of small arms. While light weapons are still in use, there is a good chance that conflicts may erupt or reoccur. The initiative's main purpose, according to Bah (2014), was to ensure a surplus for the national government. According to Bah (2014), the program's main purpose was to ensure that surplus guns did not endanger national security that illicit arms were confiscated, and that peace accords were established to gather weaponry. Another important part of the moratorium is Article 7, which involves a review of harmonized legislative and administrative acts. Controlling arms trafficking inside the region was difficult due to the intricacy of customary regulations, which were based on the varied cultures of West African ethnic groups as provided for by British colonialists. As a result, the goal of this article was to consolidate the rules controlling gun regulation so that they might be more easily administered and managed.

Institutional Arrangement of the Moratorium

Several institutional arrangements have been established for implementing the ECOWAS Moratorium, according to Isyaka (2019); CASED was established by the UNDP in March 1999, and its termination in 2014 resulted in the establishment of the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Program [ECOSAP], which aims to play pivotal roles in SALW control in West Africa.

An Arms Control Unit was formed at the ECOWAS headquarters. This office was in charge of the Coordination and Assistance for Security Development (CASED) program. This was meant to be a complement to a separate

regional and global disarmament effort. The CASED's main goals were to establish NATCOMs, provide technical assistance to NATCOMs, educate armed and security personnel, create an Armaments Register and Database, collect and destroy weapons, mobilize resources for NATCOM activities, and conduct information, education, and awareness campaigns.

Another institution of the Moratorium is the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC). UNREC's mission was to assist African nations in implementing peace, arms control, and disarmament programs. Technical support to the government, the establishment of civil society groups to raise awareness about arms proliferation, and the destruction of confiscated SALW are among the UNREC's successes.

Barriers to the Control of SALW

Despite ECOWAS' efforts to regulate small and light weapons, the proliferation of SALW has continued due to a variety of roadblocks. The lack of transparency in the arms trade ranks first on the list. Most Sub-Saharan African countries, according to Bashir (2014), keep their weapons policies secret, making them difficult to examine. While it is agreed that national arms strategy should not be made public, ECOWAS should be permitted to lead on such policies to discern between legal and illegitimate arms movements.

Another issue is the region's volatility, which provides a continual market for weapon sales, resales, and theft. As previously noted, tracing the movement of some of these SALW is difficult because of their simplicity of use, lifespan, and low cost. This is due to a lack of organized infrastructure and financial resources to combat SALW trade in the face of globalization. The issue of governance is another major worry for ECOWAS. Because the government has been unable to meet people's security needs, certain groups have become stronger than others, requiring the employment of weapons. Residents in many African countries felt driven to acquire firearms to protect themselves and their property from armed conflict, according to research, due to a lack of faith in security forces, understaffing, or simply the security services' inability to carry out their tasks adequately. Despite its poor performance, the government maintains power in a life-or-death scenario made worse by the deployment of SALW. According to Bashir (2014), one key factor fostering the proliferation of SALWs is the crass nature of Nigerian politics. The corruption monster is causing havoc in the fight against the proliferation of SALW weapons. Civilians who have turned criminals as a result of non-payment of salaries resort to stealing to make a living. According to Ayissi and Sall (2015), weapons traffickers bribe customs agents within the borders, while soldiers, police officers, and security professionals are accused of selling government weaponry to criminals. Nigeria, for example, has 770 kilometres of shared land border with the Republic of Benin to the west, 1500 kilometres with Niger to the north, 1700 kilometres with Cameroon to the east, 90 kilometres with the Republic of Chad to the north-east, and 850 kilometres of the maritime border on the Atlantic Ocean, totalling 4910 kilometres of borders to be controlled. It's tough to maintain control in this situation.

Globalization is another roadblock to halting the spread of SALW in West Africa. Despite the benefits of globalization, the absence of state-imposed limits on cross-border trade, as well as the more linked and complex global system of production and exchange that has formed, complicate the challenge of preventing the spread of SALWs (Bashir, 2014). Political and economic integration, the growing prominence of the black market, and the growth of internet-based commercial transactions, which allows criminals to expand into the commercial and freight industries, are all globalization trends that, according to Malhotra (2011), may exacerbate the proliferation of small and light weapons.

Finally, regulation and the legal framework for the control of SALWs are still pressing concerns. Andre Stemmed (2011) distinguishes small arms and light weapons from other arms control challenges, complicating their legal regulation: a lack of institutional mechanisms, while the few existing control regimes are relatively

weak; the distinction between legitimate users of this category of weapons, state security forces, and illicit proliferation that occurs outside the state system is a problem that must be addressed; as a result, outlawing such weapons,

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following suggestions have been made to increase ECOWAS' capacity to successfully prevent the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the area.

1. ECOWAS, Heads of State and Government, and heads of security organizations should meet regularly to discuss regional security issues. These individuals should assess the current security situation at the conference and seek proactive solutions to the issues.
2. Border control in the West African Sub-region should be a priority. Apart from acquiring modern border control technologies, a broad-based relationship with communities living along the border is required to report suspicious movement to the ECOWAS Security Group. There should be a quick response to early warning, and synergy between communities along with borderline and security agencies.

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