

Factors Influencing Arms Proliferation on Rural Development in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated factors influencing arms proliferation and rural development in the Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions, and a cross-sectional survey research design will be used to examine arms proliferation and criminality in Benue State. Area of the Study Katsina-Ala Local Government while the sample size for the study was 400, the research makes use of cluster and random sampling techniques to select the population of the study. By simple random sampling, the names of the ten (12) council wards were written on pieces of paper, wrapped, and dropped into a container and shaken thoroughly. Thereafter, five (6) council wards out of the original ten (12) wards were randomly selected. The data collected through the questionnaire was analysed using frequency counts and percentages. From the findings, it was concluded from the research findings that even though arms proliferation is caused by so many factors, profitability and utilisation of small arms have been singled out as the major cause of the unrest in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State.

Keywords: Factors; Arms; Proliferation; Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the violent and carnage-causing operations of militants, robbers, and terrorists, Nigeria has recently become a theatre of slaughter, genocide, and instability. Social vices that pose threats to the nation's survival, stability, and security, such as political violence, armed robbery, armed banditry, oil bunkering, ethno religious conflict (Udofia & Uduigwomen, 2022), vandalism, religious fundamentalism, kidnapping, militancy, Boko Haram, human trafficking, and other violent crimes, flourish more with little to no government intervention. Since the country reverted to democratic government in 1999, there has clearly been an unfortunate increase in the availability and ownership of small arms and

light weapons (SALWs), which has led to historically high rates of casualties from violent assaults.

More people have been murdered by small arms and light weapons (SALW) than by biological, chemical, or any other types of WMD (WMD). Insecurity in Nigeria has been exacerbated by the proliferation of arms, according to United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/50/70. This insecurity includes cattle raiding, armed robberies, kidnapping, intertribal fighting between the north and other ethnic groups in the south, militant groups, and most recently the Boko Haram insurgency. Given that there are guns in hamlets, villages, towns, and state capitals alike, it is exceedingly impossible to estimate the number of weapons in the nation. Given the challenges associated with lawfully obtaining a firearm, Hazen and Horner (2007) noted that the majority of small guns in Nigeria are thought to be carried illegally. Because they are illegal, it is challenging to monitor flows and possession (Okeke and Oji, 2014). Through seaports and land borders, weapons enter the country.

The authors provided a thorough analysis of the factors that led to the proliferation of weapons and the subsequent increase in criminal activity in Nigeria. These include crime, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crises, communal conflicts, social agitations, micro-nationalism, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social unrest, ethnic tensions, cross-border smuggling, and porous borders. However, these weapons enter the nation and end up in the hands of individuals, armed organisations, national dealers, and political and community leaders (Eyo & Udofia, 2016). Armed groups operating across borders, arms dealers, active-duty and retired police and military personnel, returning peacekeepers, and other individuals working on their crafts all serve as domestic sources for small arms. The key to understanding the market is demand: small gun demand will increase as long as crime and insecurity are present and there are prospects for political and economic gain through the use of force.

Despite the fact that there are certain prospects for raising the standard of living, Benue State currently has a serious problem with insecurity. This problem is characteristic of an intriguing situation in all its ramifications, as the proliferation of weapons is on the rise. And this has dreadful effects on a variety of facets of human life. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) (2001) asserts that the spread and abuse of small arms pose a danger to individual safety, undermines effective government, fuels abuse of human rights, and threatens social justice, development, and peace around the world, including Benue State.

The state's rural areas have potential for agriculture, while its urban centres, including Makurdi, Gboko, Katsina-Ala, and Otukpo, also have some profitable commercial activity potential. The educated millennials, however, favour the few available white-collar occupations. Some of these educated youth have turned to commercial motorcycle riding, working as touts at motor parks among other jobs, in order to avoid being idle and farming at the same time. Even better, some people have turned to crime as a source of income. Among the three main ethnic groupings, the state has also developed a crop of successful political

elites (Idoma, Igede, and Tiv). However, despite their inclination to offer economic possibilities that will empower young people, these individuals have not shown a particularly strong commitment to the socioeconomic development of the state.

Instead, the political elites "empowered" the adolescents in a selfish and destructive way by providing them with weapons and ammunition to pursue their political goals. According to Shilgba (2004), the elites frequently provide poor Tiv men and women guns instead of products, wealth instead of weapons, and mutual animosity instead of health to employ against other Tiv. Do we include our children among the militia, wonders Shilgba (2004)? Even beyond the borders of Nigeria, they are kept as far away from the conflict zone as is humanly possible. The other ethnic nations have also not demonstrated admirable commitment, with the exception of Idoma elites who have used their proximity to the top of the Nigerian economy to help their people; this carelessness is not limited to Tiv elites alone.

However, this is done in order to advance politically. The youth who lack literacy is therefore weaker. Meaningful progress cannot be made in Benue State with this complicity. Numerous agricultural products, including groundnuts, yam rice, and oranges, among others, have drawn customers to the state's markets. However, rather than being important in the supply value chain, young people typically opt to set up ambushes in various sections of the state to rob customers of their money.

Therefore, failing to implement economic and security measures will undoubtedly lead to risks to the populace's security and safety, which will then hinder economic progress. Small and Light Weapons (SALWs) are widely used, which is demonstrated by a rise in societal acceptance of firearms since the 1970s (Ikelegbe, 2014). Possession of weapons is today seen as a sign of manhood, rising prestige, affluence, and strength. Given the severe regulations on civilian gun ownership and the fact that licences are only granted for hunting, 80% of the firearms in civilian hands are believed to have been obtained illegally (Obasi, 2002; Nabiebu & Otu, 2019). This has led to unauthorised individuals having access to weapons, which has led to varied levels of crime throughout the state.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The spread of weapons, particularly in the majority of wealthy countries where it has resulted in the United States losing its historical monopoly on the management of means of violence, is one of the largest problems confronting the world today. In actuality, Jekada (2005), who shares the aforementioned point of view, claims that common criminals, terrorists, ethnic militias, and death squads have all obtained small guns and light weapons, making them no longer the exclusive property of militaries and police forces. One issue that affects all countries, not just developed ones like Nigeria, is the spread of weaponry.

The subsequent rise in household, governmental, and international violence, however, indicates that the world is rapidly heading in the direction of annihilation. This is made more apparent by the fact that human life and existence have never been in such danger as they are right now. This tendency is fuelled by

a number of factors, all of which can be traced back to the rapidly expanding production capacity of small arms and light weapons, whose widespread availability for both public and private use has made them powerful catalysts for criminal activity, war, interethnic or communal strife, and other forms of atrocities against humanity and society. According to data, there are an estimated 1,734 companies producing arms in 98 different nations. Furthermore, 41% of the 639 million weapons in existence today are unlawfully owned. 88% of the export of conventional weapons goes to France, the United States, Britain, and China, all industrialised nations. This, combined with indigenous gun production in Nigeria, has led to crime and insecurity there. Kidnapping, terrorism, weapons robberies, and general insecurity are now problems in Benue State as a result. Despite several government initiatives, including an amnesty programme where illegal weapons were recovered, crime persists. In light of this, this study interrogates the interface between arms proliferation and criminality in the Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study's overarching goal is to determine how security in Benue State's Katsina-Ala Local Government Area is challenged by the proliferation of weaponry. While the following are the particular goals

1. To determine the variables affecting the proliferation of weapons in Katsina-Ala Local Government
2. To identify the main actors in this proliferation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of Katsina-Ala Local Government contribute to the spread of weapons?
2. Who are the main players in Katsina-Ala Local Government's spread of weapons?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abagen & Tyona (2018) conducted a study on the impact of arms proliferation on Nigeria's National security. The major objective of the study was to investigate the rapid increase of arms and ammunition in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary materials and data was analysed using qualitative method of data. Findings from the study real that Nigeria since independence in 1960 has witnessed a lot of internally-generated crisis, beginning with the Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970, the battle for political offices through elections, ethno-religious crisis, the Boko Haram menace, Fulani herdsmen attacks, militancy in the Niger-Delta region and armed robbery among others has greatly contributed to the proliferation of illegal weapons in the nation, which entails that Nigeria's national security is under serious threat. The paper recommends the use of modern technologies by security operatives at our porous borders and seaports as well as adequate provision of security manpower and other logistics to help curtail the flow of dangerous illegal arms, and ammunition into the Nigerian nation-state.

Omitola and Awotayo (2016) investigated arms proliferation and challenges of national security and sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper made use of secondary materials and data was analysed qualitatively. Findings from the study revealed that Nigeria porous border; money laundering among other factors are major causes of arms flow into the country. The paper contends that all control initiatives have not worked effectively as illegal arms flow is still on the rise. The paper reveals that the proliferation of arms has created an ever expanding circle of violent conflicts and hampered sustainable development of the country as all areas of socio-economic development are affected (Alobo & Nabiebu, 2022).

Olayiwola (2017) evaluated proliferation of arms and security challenges in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary sources and content analysis was utilized. The trend has continued despite the illegality of the trade. The proliferation has taken a serious dimension since the beginning of the current political dispensation. As a result of this, Nigeria has faced serious security challenges. They include the Maitatsine religious riots in Kano and Bauchi; religious riots in Kaduna; conflicts in Jos, the Zango-Kataf, Yoruba-Hausa/Fulani, Ife-Modakeke, Aguleri-Umuleri, TivJunkun, Ijaw-Ilaje, Ijaw-Itsekiri, Urhobo-Itsekiri and Ijaw-Urhobo; Niger Delta crisis and of recent the Boko Haram insurgency. The perceived attack from the Fulani herdsmen in certain parts of the country are various crisis faced as a result of the proliferation. This development calls for serious attention from the states as it poses serious security challenges. The increased number of internal crises or conflicts has been subsequent to the proliferation of arms in the state, and has engendered the further proliferation of arms.

Alimba, (2017) conducted a study which deals with controlling the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria: Emerging issues and challenges. The measures often adopted to regulate small arms overtime have yielded little or no result because of increased demand for and supply of small arms and light weapons are readily induced more speedily than envisaged worldwide. Recent accounts revealed that Nigeria is awash with small arms, and that large quantities of these weapons are found in illegal hands in nooks and crannies of the country. These weapons are used to commit crimes and fuel violent conflicts, thereby thwarting the achievement of peace and its sustainability in the country. Poor security network, corruption, border leakages and politics have played dominant roles in the excessive availability of arms in Nigeria.

Brown, (2018) examined the impact of proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the quest for national security in Nigeria. The thrust of this paper is on the impact of uncontrolled proliferation, stockpiling, trafficking, availability and usage of these arms on Nigeria's national security as it is believed to fuel alarming levels of armed crime, communal conflict, political instability, social unrest as well as making all the geo-political zones of the country to be flooded with small arms. The paper further argues that the inability of the Nigerian government and its law enforcement agencies to check the menace has led to a major challenge of security, as it was revealed that previous and current efforts at tackling the issue has not yielded much efforts as only a few number of

seizures of illegal arms has been made hence the proliferation continues to sustain and exacerbates armed conflicts within the country. The study is anchored on the realist and failed state theories using secondary data, literature evidence, descriptive and historical methodology. Findings reveal that the impact of small arms and light weapons on the society is too grave and devastating to be treated with kid's glove as it leads to massive loss of lives and properties, erodes social capital, facilitate corruption and climate of impunity.

Wonah, (2016) examines the proliferation of small arms in the Niger Delta and is of the opinion that the proliferation of small arms in the Niger Delta is a consequence of the existential realities of the people of Niger Delta. This opinion is made more concrete with the adoption of political economy approach with takes a holistic analysis of the subject matter. It took into consideration the inherent contradictions of a capitalist mode of production which finds expression in economic determinism as the underlying factor in determining the material existence of the people of Niger Delta as occasioned by the actors of the state.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey study methodology will be used to look into the spread of weapons and crime in Benue State. With a 400-person sample size, the research topic is the local government of Katsina-Ala. The population for the study was chosen using cluster and random sampling approaches. The names of the ten (12) council wards were written on pieces of paper, wrapped, put into a container, and shook erratically in addition to the standard random sample. The following step involved selecting five (6) council wards at random from the original ten (12) wards. Frequency count and percentage were used to analyse the information obtained from the questionnaire.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section of the study presents and analyses the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

TABLE 1:Socio- Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Categ ory	Freque ncy	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	301	86
Female	49	14	
Total		350	100
Marital Status	Single	96	27.4
Married	223	63.7	
Divorce/Wi dow	31	8.9	
Total	350	100	

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Age		
18-30	99	28.3
31-40	141	40.3
41-50	68	19.4
51 and above	42	12
Total	350	100
Education		
No formal education	25	7.1
Primary	31	8.9
Secondary	182	52
Tertiary	112	32
Total	350	100
Occupation		
Farming	177	50.6
Business	45	12.9
Fishing	26	7.4
Civil Servant	102	29.1
Total	350	100
Religion		
Christianity	289	82.6
Traditional	61	17.4
Islam	0	0
Total	350	100

Source:Field Survey, 2023

The data in Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents. The distribution of the respondents according to sex in table 1 shows that 301, or 86%, of the respondents were male while 49, or 14%, of the respondents were female. This shows that there are more males who are heads of household than female respondents in the study area. This is in line with the African tradition, where males are regarded as heads of households. The next segment, which is the marital status of the respondents, shows that 223 or 63.7% were married, whereas 96 or 27.4% were single, and divorce or being a widow accounted for 31 or 8.9% of the total respondents. The implication of this for the study is that, since the majority of the respondents were married, they were faced with the reality of taking care of themselves and their family members and being displaced from the abode due to the proliferation of arms, which result in a high rate of crime in the area of study and can negatively affect their means of livelihood.

The third segment in Table 1 shows that 99, or 28.3%, of the respondents were aged between 18 and 30 years. 141, or 40.3%, of the respondents were between the age brackets of 31 and 40 years, whereas 68, or 19.4%, of the respondents were aged between 41 and 50 years, and 42, or 12%, of the respondents were 51 years and older. This shows that a significant proportion of the respondents (141, or 40.3%) were between the ages of 31 and 40. This has two implications for the study. First, it shows clearly that it is a productive population. Secondly, since the majority of them are of adult age, the tendency for youthful exuberance orchestrated by this segment of the population would be high. The preceding segment shows the educational qualifications of the respondents. Those with secondary education constituted the largest group with 182 or 52% of the respondents, followed by tertiary with 112 or 32% of the respondents, whereas those with non-formal and primary education accounted for 25 or 7.1% and 31 or 8.9%, respectively. This result shows that the majority of the respondents are literate enough, and by that, they have the capacity to respond objectively to the matter under investigation.

On the basis of the occupational distribution of the respondents, the majority of the respondents—representing 177 or 50.6% of the respondents—engage in farming, followed by civil service with 102 or 29.1%, while those in business and fishing accounted for 45 or 12.9% and 26 or 7.4%, respectively. This shows that farming is a major source of livelihood for the people. With the disruption of farming activities due to arms being in the hands of unauthorised persons, this has brought security challenges to the area, thereby making farming activities more difficult and challenging. On the basis of religious affiliation, the majority of the respondents were Christians, with 289, or 82.6% of the respondents, while traditional religion accounted for 61, or 17.4% of the respondents. This implies that the study area is inhabited predominantly by Christians.

Research Question 1 Results

TABLE 2: Cause of Arms Proliferation in Katsina-Ala LGA

Causes of Arms Proliferation	Frequency	Percentage
Electoral Violence	69	20
The Growth of Ethnic Militias	87	25
Profitability and Socio-Economic Utility of Small Arms	153	44
Unemployment and Poverty	41	11
Total	350	100

Source. Field Survey, 2023

The data from table 2 shows the causes of arms proliferation in Katsina-Ala Local Government. Data elicited from the field indicates that profitability and socio economic utility of smalls arms is responsible for the proliferation of arms in the area of study representing 153 or 44% of the total respondents, followed by the growth of ethnic militias which accounted for 87 or 25% , whereas, electoral violence, unemployment and poverty stood at 69 or 20% and 41 or 11% respectively. This shows that among all the caustic factors of arms proliferation in the area of study, profitability and socio-economic utility of small arms stood as the major causes of proliferation of arms in Katsina-Ala. The implication of this to the study is that, hence the users of these unauthorised weapons make much money through various ways such as kidnapping, assassination; banditry etc the tendency for these arms to be proliferated would in the area of study is very high.

Comparing the opinions of other members of the public with those of the key informants revealed no appreciable differences because the majority of those questioned emphasised socio-economic factors as the primary drivers of the proliferation of guns in the research region. The Chairman of the Shitile Traditional Council expressed the following views in an interview with Mr. John Kuje:

Shitile had enjoyed peace with her neighbours for so many years until the borders issues between her and Ijyuran-Tiev in Katsina-Ala Local Government and Kuteb and Jukun in Taraba States. When these borders become porous volunteer's sons of the land were called and given traditional blessing to protect the land from external aggressors. However, some of the selected youths later abandoned this responsibility bestowed on them and began to commit crime in search of money through kidnapping, killing, assassination, and all forms of banditry. The mother of an African Independent Television, (AIT) editor, Steve Ayua was abducted and released after a ransom was paid. As much proceeds continue to pour in from this criminal activities many youth you began to procure arms and engage themselves in this profitable venture leading to the proliferation of arms in the area.

Similarly, interview held with Mr. TernaYaga of Mechihi ward in Katsina-Ala Local Government on 30th October 2022 concerning the causes of arms

proliferation in the area of study accused politicians for been responsible for arms been in the hands of unauthorised persons. He maintained that in attempt to win elections and perpetuate in power, politicians acquire weapons and give to some selected youths to help them rig elections with the hope that if elected, the interest of those youth will be prioritised. But most often, after willing elections these politicians abandoned these youth hence the need for them to create other alternative to eke out a living whether the society frowns at such is inconsequential to them. This has scenario has place us on this unfortunate situation.

It is therefore pertinent to state that even though the causes of arms proliferation in the area of study are many, the profitability of economic incentive from these illegal deals is identified as the major cause of proliferation of arms in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State.

TABLE3: Actors of arms Proliferation in Katsina-Ala Local Government

Actors	Frequency	Percentage
Smugglers of Arms	87	25
Politicians	90	26
Blacksmiths	51	15
Youth	122	34
Total	350	100

Source:Field Survey, 2023.

The data in table 3 shows actors in arms proliferation in the area of study. Findings from the study revealed that youths are the major actors in proliferation of arms representing 122 or 34% of the total respondents, followed by politicians accounted for 90 or 26% while Smugglers and blacksmith stood at 87 or 25% and 51 or 15 respectively. This means that there are so many actors that engage in arms proliferation in the study area. This implies so many arms in the hands of unauthorised persons thereby causing security breaches in the local government and its environs.

Commenting on the subject matter, one of the respondents who granted interview on the condition of anonymity lamented that Katsina Ala government in the last 8years has become a battle field where guns are openly displace without security agent apprehending the carriers. Youths of various ages have unhindered access to sophisticated weapons which are often used to cause mayhem in the study area. There are instances were militia gangs mostly youth exchange fire with military personnel even killing some in the process. The professionalism exhibited by these gangs as well as the kind of weapons used is worrisome.

This shows that even though politicians, smugglers and those blacksmiths producing arms the role of youth gangs is at the centre of criminal activities in the study area.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study's examination of the findings that emerged as a consequence of the research is the focus of this section. The conversation is organised in accordance with the study's four research goals.

In objective one of the study, the task of the researcher was to examine the factors influencing the proliferation of arms in Katsina-Ala Local Government. Findings from the study revealed that electoral violence, the growth of ethnic militias, profitability and utility of small arms as well as unemployment and poverty are the major influencer of arms proliferation in the area of study. Due to massive poverty and unemployment politicians have devised a means to manipulate the youth to favour their political ambition by way of procuring weapons and given it to them to ensure they emerged victorious at the polls; thereby making arms to be in the hands of unauthorised people. This scenario has created the desire to get rich quick by most youth since those who had earlier engaged in it made money which they do not necessarily have to account for thereby making it a fertile breeding ground for criminality to thrive. After election, these weapons are used for kidnapping, banditry, killing and general onslaught on the masses in bid to survive since politician at this point abandoned them to their fate.

In the second objectives the duty of the researcher was to identify actors in arms proliferation in the area of study. Findings from the study revealed that the major actors include smugglers of arms, politicians, blacksmiths and the youth. These category of people played different roles in procurement and usage of arms in the area of study. The youth who handles these weapons are the major actors since they are the ones that put them to use for different reasons which has caused serious security breaches in the study area. The study which was hitherto known to be vibrant business environment has been reduced to battle field by criminal elements masquerading as militias gangs. This no doubt has made many businesses have to close down for the fear of unknown.

CONCLUSION

The research's findings lead to the conclusion that, despite the fact that there are other causes of the proliferation of guns, the use of small arms for profit has been identified as the main culprit behind the disturbance in Benue State's Katsina-Ala Local Government. The impacts of increased access to weapons on crime are severe, followed by the destruction of agricultural systems and the breakdown of social support structures, which negatively affect and impoverish the majority of small and medium-sized families. Local economies are hampered, and jobs are lost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is true that several attempts have been made to seize illicit guns and lessen violent crimes across the nation. The present issues with small guns and light weapons call for a multifaceted strategy that will engage everyone and their mother, including the commercial sector, non-governmental organisations, and the global community. To solve the issues of insecurity of lives and property, the

government should first implement a comprehensive security policy, which should address the problem of armaments proliferation. In this vein, the following suggestions are offered.

First, it's important to offer work opportunities to the young people who use these lethal weapons so they may make a decent income and avoid having the opportunity to engage in such heinous crimes for the greater welfare of society. Second, effective leadership should be characterised by good governance, which means that individuals in positions of power should view themselves as servants rather than leaders. By doing this, they would have the best interests of the populace at heart and implement policies that are focused on the needs of the populace and have the potential to spur growth, improving the quality of life for all.

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