

# Implications of Proliferation of Arms and Ammunition for West Africa Sub-Regional Development

Amos Ojo Adedeji, Ph. D

Peace and Development Studies, Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

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## ABSTRACT

The transfer of weapons and ammunition between non-state groups has grown significantly in West Africa. The consequences of these for regional security and their cross-border impacts have made it more likely that many other security issues would arise. The problem has gotten worse. In recent times and this raises questions about the sub-region's security as a whole. The implication of proliferation of arms and ammunitions was examined qualitatively in this study. The research uses content analysis thereby limit the data to secondary data. The paper identified factors that motivate arms acquisition in the region, the most significant of which are unending conflicts and inability of government to control it. The work highlights various efforts at eradicating the threat of the proliferation of illegal arms. The efforts were been hindered by a number of challenges namely lack of transparency, corruption on the part paramilitary officer, effect of globalization among others. The paper concluded and recommended more proactive response to curb the proliferation of arms and to maintain some level of security and a secure sub-region. An extensive strategy is advised to ensure the complete eradication of illegal dealing in arms.

**Keywords:** Ammunition, Arms Control, Development, Disarmament, Proliferation, Small Arms and Light Weapons

## INTRODUCTION

The events of the past two decades have disastrously shattered the hope of mankind and completely obliterate the expectations that the end the Cold war would lead to peace and development (Azikwe, 2010). In the place of enhanced security, mankind has witnessed a spate of insecurity which has rendered millions dead and made fear a common phenomenon in human development (Adedeji, 2022a). West African countries have reduced to a fertile ground on which arms is easily taken on flimsy excuses. Criminal tendencies among youths and terrorist activities have been at an alarming rate (Oluwaleye, 2021).

The civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone were spectacular wars in the West African sub-region. Guinea-Bissau in the late 1990s witnessed civil wars; Cote D'voire suffered insurrection; Casamance secessionist has continually waging war with Senegalese for two decades; Tuareg problem has been boiling in Mali and Niger; and Liberia and Guinea has been a long time enemy constantly accusing each other of perpetrating cross-border raids in Sierra Leone rebels' crises. Another blatant instance of armed conflict is the Boko Haram issue in Nigeria (Dokubo, 2000).

It is obvious that the proliferation of armaments poses a serious threat to the stability and security of the sub-region, despite the fact that the reasons of these armed conflicts in West Africa are complex and varied. Rapid spread of weapons has been one of the major reasons for constant rage of battles in West Africa and become more frequent. Nowhere has the nexus between the availability of light weapons and the onslaught and severity of conflict been more vividly clear than in West Africa (Boutwell and Klare, 2000).

According to Ogaba (2005), "man has found it necessary to acquire weapons in the quest for survival and

security, for the purpose of hunting, self or group defense against external threats, and conflicts with real or even presumed enemies.” In contrast to the view of this renowned scholar, arms are been used today to wreak havoc on nation, ethnic group and individuals. Presence of arms has make it possible for conflict which could have been resolve amicably to escalate to war (Adedeji, 2022b). More so, arms in the hand of criminal and their misuse are posing increasing and uncontrollable threats to national, regional and global security.

Numerous nations in the region are engaged in the production of small arms, while some serve as conduits for the funding and trafficking of illicit weaponry. The number of legal and illicit weapons entering and leaving the region is unknown, and it is also unknown how many guns are in internal circulation. The illegal trafficking of these weapons frequently makes it more difficult to carry out development and peacekeeping projects successfully. Additionally, it threatens the possibility of long-term security in the region. However, it is a well-known truth that no state in the West Africa region continues to be unaffected by the issue. The menace of proliferation of arms has connection with the dreadful scale of violence that engrossed almost all West African countries (Ngang, 2007).

The effort to make the human security concept the cornerstone of arms control and disarmament is motivated by the belief that improving the security of one individual can also improve the security of all of West Africa. However, all the strategies and approach employed to safeguard human race through arms control and disarmament did not meet up the expectation. The study therefore examine proliferation of arms and ammunition in attempt to proffer workable solution to the menace.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to examine the proliferation of arms and ammunition in the West African sub-region with a view to understanding the implications on the sub-regional development and thereby proffer certified strategies.

### **ANALYTICAL REVIEW**

Conflicts at all levels and of all sizes are mostly to blame for the proliferation of weapons and ammunition. In the same way that rebel and other criminal elements need weapons to safeguard their interests while engaging in their activities, warring parties need them to defend themselves from the enemy. Therefore, it is acceptable to say that conflicts serve as a key conduit for both legal and illicit weaponry transfers. Greed coupled with grievance motivates people to engage in intra-state armed conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Armed conflict frequently results in the forcible displacement of civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, obstruction or delay of development initiatives, and obstruction of peacekeeping and peace building operations (Adedeji, 2022b). This is seen as the world’s most pressing security threat, offering serious challenges to long-term safety and development through igniting civil wars, organized crime, insurgency, and terrorist operations. This is attributed to proliferation of weapons.

According to Article 2 of the draft International Firearms Protocol, illegal firearms trafficking is defined as “the importing, exporting, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party without the authorization of or in violation of the legislation or regulations of any one of the State Parties concerned” (Green, 2000). Small and Light Weapons (SALW) in particular have been moved illegally on a large scale throughout West Africa. The most significant of them are the ongoing conflicts in the region and the absence of effective government regulations. In every region of the continent, demand for weapons has been extremely strong.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical underpinning for the work is the fragile state theory. The theory according to Suleiman and Abada (2019), is affiliated with the work of Rotberg, Zartman, René Lemarchand, and Starr. The main tenet of the fragile state theory is the prediction of unstableness for any state or institution that lack provision of democratic dividends by government. The volatility naturally happens as a result of racial or religious conflicts, threats to people's safety and property, consistent strikes, rigging of elections, and economic crises, to name a few. If the state is unable to address this threat, it may become fragile and susceptible to manipulation from both internal and external forces.

Further, the theory states unequivocally that a state that lacks the political will to demonstrate the structural capability to deal with perceived socio-political crisis in any important state organ or that fails to adequately demonstrate its use of legitimate power and passing of laws to ensure the peaceful coexistence of its units will become vulnerable to major conflict profiteers who want to exploit the volatility for political and economic gain (Suleiman and Abada, 2019). Due to the absence of law and order, which is the precursor result of the state's failure to manage its areas, this scenario will eventually destabilize sociopolitical order and provide chance for conflict entrepreneurs to create their structures.

### **Using the Discourse to Apply the Fragile State Theory**

As evidenced by some ethnic and religious conflict throughout the region, the major associations in West African countries are primarily either ethnic or religious groupings, and they exert influence over their members like government do. It was claimed that failure of the country to provide basic needs of its citizens, members of ethnic and religious groupings are generally more devoted to and loyal to their particular groups than to the nation (Lawan, 2014).

Sadly, this paradoxical circumstance encourages individuals and groups to use force against the State and its institutions. On the grounds that their ethnic or religious group has lost its essence as a result of their respective governments' projects, some communities in West Africa have been campaigning for independence. People will naturally participate in destructive behaviours using weapons and ammunition if certain universal requirements are not met (Maslow, 1970 cited in Adedeji, 2021).

The submission of the paper informed the deduction of Adedeji (2021) as he avers that failure to meet specific human requirements of the populace constitutes a threat to national security, and in extension a threat to the West Africa region as a whole. The paper also makes the logical argument that there is a connection between the state's inability to provide for the basic needs of its citizens on the one hand, and the twin vices of conflicts and the proliferation of arms and ammunition, which create an unending cycle of violence and insecurity in the West African region.

### **Explaining the Proponent of the Theory**

It can be inferred that the undemocratic nature of West African governments inevitably leads to the emergence of neglected groups that employ divisive tactics to get the attention of the government on their needs. These groups take the form of ethnic and religious militias, vigilante groups, private security personnel, and worst of all, criminal elements. Accordingly, this situation denotes the final stage of failure, and as a result, the legitimacy of the state would collapse (Rotberg, 2011). The disgruntled and resentful citizens are likely to turn against the state whenever its ability to protect itself or carry out its legal obligations begins to wane.

Due to the state's failure, many citizens logically revert to their clan and group leaders, some of whom favour intergroup conflicts due to resources scarcity and other pertinent issues. Militias of diverse groups

look for safe havens in the more marginalized sections of failed states where they blend in, more readily in the prevailing turmoil associated with state collapse, mobilizing support from resentful and marginalized sections (Alozieuwa, 2013). Such a disconnection has the potential to undermine legitimacy, lead to state failure, and have the knock-on effects of the spread of arms and ammunition resulting from violent conflicts or terrorism.

The struggle for a fair share of each group's national resources is the basis of division and mistrust in West African states. Unfortunately, in all of these vices, the government, which is meant to be impartial is biased. The government apparatus has chosen a strong dictatorial approach in violation of democratic tenets in an effort to keep maintain its position in an attempt to manipulate agitations and agitators. This will eventually result in undemocratic events such as socioeconomic upheavals, dominance, rancour, and inequality.

To secure complete political equality, it has appears that the populace have heeded to the thesis of Nnoli by fighting for the democratization of access to the ownership of the means of production and wealth (Nnoli, 2003 cited in Nwagbo, Ayogu and Chukwujekwu, 2016). Hence, the conflict will sufficiently led to crises that influence the spread of weapons and ammunition.

This theory is suitable for the paper because it revealed the internal and external factors that fueled conflicts in the West African region and the fundamental causes that sustained and aided in the spread of arms and ammunition throughout the West African countries, which is the main goal of this paper.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The work adopts the historical method and it is therefore descriptive and analytical. This also entails a chronological and thematic presentation of the work in line with the historical method. However, the reality is that the theme of proliferation of arms is a reflection of the complex nature of human interactions thereby affects different aspects of social relations, and has been diversely examined by the study. This paper therefore draws insights from the approaches of related themes that have explored the subject of proliferation of arms. The work utilized content analysis using mainly secondary materials as its sources due to its nature. The secondary data include existing literature on the topic such as books, journals, conference papers, ECOWAS Publications, reports from the various units of West African countries that deal with the issue of arms control, newspapers and other related documents.

## **RESULT AND ANALYSIS**

### **An Overview of Arms Proliferation in West Africa Sub-Region**

The primary impact of the circulation and accumulation of weaponry is their propensity to increase the danger of armed conflict. The availability of weapons encourages violence rather than conversation and has a number of negative outcomes. High levels of armed conflict impede development, divert local resources, waste public funds, or impose the "Might is Right" principle. According to the interdependence of security, development, and arms control, no real development can occur in a setting that encourages the manufacture, distribution and misuse of weapons (Aver, Nnorom and Ilim, 2014).

A civil conflict in Liberia of West Africa that began in 1989 with several hundred insurgents subsequently spread to Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire, and this was aided by availability of weapons. The cost of the Liberian conflict alone was very high. The majority of the \$430 million that the United States had spent by the time the war ended in 2003 was on food aid. More than \$4 billion was spent on the ECOMOG regional peacekeeping effort. Between 1993 and September 1997, the UNOMIL observer mission cost roughly \$104 million. Additionally, the UNMIL mission, which had a peak staff of about 15,000 people,

spent several billion dollars between 2003 and 2007 (Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010).

The distribution of weapons and violence in Nigeria have increased, and this development has been linked to the persistence of electoral inequality, bigotry on the basis of race and religion, and extreme levels of poverty and unemployment (Aver, Nnorom and Ilim, 2014). These fundamental components were seen as the foundation on which disputes are fueled. While the fragmented political system, the elite system, the youth bulge, the local militia, and the simple accessibility of surplus small arms and light weapons to resentful groups act as “triggers”.

Local gun production in Ghana was found to be a key factor in the spread of illegal weapons. It serves as the primary catalyst for the circulation of SALW transverse the nation, particularly for handguns, shotguns, and single-barrel firearms. Ghanaian blacksmiths across the nation have the ability to make roughly 200,000 weapons yearly in an illegal manner (Aning, 2003). Indicators of the impact of the proliferation of small guns in Ghana include an increase in armed robberies and criminality, ethnic conflicts, and the phenomena of land grab which has led to frequent killings that often cause injury and death.

People are extremely sensitive to electoral results, which is one of the main causes of armed conflict in many West African nations. The worst times of unrest in modern West African history have occurred in Cote d’Ivoire (2010), Nigeria (2003, 2007, and 2011 elections), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Niger, among other countries. Of all these, the surplus of arms is thought to be the main factor behind the violent conflicts in the sub-region.

The effects of proliferation of arms in West Africa is alarming, and has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, massive refugee flows, destruction, billions of dollars in losses for the international community, and severe underdevelopment. To stop the menace, the international community had to put in more than a decade of effort, primarily through arms embargoes and peacekeeping missions. Several factors, prominent among them the following according to Bah (2004) and Badmus (2009), contributed to the spread of weapons in West Africa:

1. The surplus weapons provided by the two opposing world powers during the Cold War, which were then pushed into proxy interstate conflicts.
2. Following the end of the cold war, significant number of weapons ended up in the hands of illicit arms traders, security contractors, ethnic militias, private military firms, and local smugglers, constantly fueling conflicts and made it easier to start new ones when and where conflict has stopped.
3. The speedup rate of globalization made legal and illicit cross-border movement of arms easier, while an abrupt rise in internal conflicts sparked a massive demand for SALW (Abubakar, Mohammed and Gayam, 2022), making them the weapon of choice in the greater number of recent conflicts as well as in non-war contexts like sectarian violence.
4. During election seasons, it has been usual practice of politicians to distribute weapons to intimidate and coerce rivals as well as the electorate. Given that politicians in Nigeria primarily arm unemployed youngsters to serve as their bodyguards during election times, this serves as a significant source of weaponry. After elections, nobody knows what happens to the firearms.
5. Other sources include leaks from government armories where crooked law enforcement and military personnel sell their weapons, stolen weapons from the state security service, growing local artisan production dispersed throughout the sub-region, including Senegal, Guinea, Ghana, and Nigeria, which travels along well-established trade routes

### **Impact of Proliferation of Arms and Ammunition on West Africa**

The three major categories negatively impacted by the proliferation of arms and ammunition in West Africa are Human rights and international humanitarian law, development, and governance.

## (A) Impacts on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

The first and most important facet of a citizen's life that is regulated by the proliferation of weapons is usually their access to the fundamental rights to which all people are given the right to. For the purpose of imposing their will or exercising control over others, groups or individuals acquire or seek to obtain weapons. In locations where they are ubiquitous, armaments seriously violate the human rights of civilians. There are three basic ways that the use of weapons and ammunition violates human rights, these include conflict escalation and extension, the reinforcement of criminals and criminal organizations, and an uptick in crimes against women and children (Nganga, 2008).

1. **Conflict Escalation and Extension:** The use of weapons significantly affects the outcome of conflicts. SALW are important in the conflicts, they frequently affect both the length and the severity of a conflict. Armed wars have a significant impact on civilians as well as combatants, including men, women, children, teenagers, the elderly, and people with disabilities. International humanitarian law, which offers special safeguards to non-combatants, is frequently violated when civilians are purposefully targeted by armed attacks during armed conflict (Bourne, et al., 2006). In order to defend themselves against these assaults on civilians, they are compelled to look for SALW, which reinforces and raises the demand for the weapons in the region. The fight is prolonged and exacerbated due to the increased availability of weapons.
2. **Stimulated Criminals and Criminal Organizations:** Small-scale SALW trafficking happens as people move away from war zones. Most often, criminals who possess these weapons utilize them to continue violating the citizens' human rights. Due to the easy access to weapons and spillover from regional wars, violence, particularly in the areas west of Lake Turkana along the Ugandan border in northwestern Kenya, escalated. Additionally, the presence of SALW in IDP and refugee camps has been linked to increased militarization and intimidation, and in some cases has been directly connected to attempts to utilize these camps as recruiting and training grounds for armed organizations (Bourne, et al., 2006). Not only are civilians' human rights violated when SALW are used to coerce them into combat, but conflicts often become more severe and prolonged as a result.
3. **An Increase in Crimes against Women and Children:** In situations of armed conflict, young adult men typically make up the majority of the direct casualties. Women and children also experience a unique set of crimes and hostilities. Women are subjected to rape, forced prostitution, incarceration, intimidation, and torture by insurgents. As it restricts their liberties, results in unintended pregnancies, and contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS in West Africa, this is a violation of their human rights. Conflicts also cause children to deal with a variety of issues. The recruiting of minors as child soldiers may continue to be the biggest issue. Minors learn little else other than fighting as they mature during periods of violence, increasing their likelihood of becoming criminals even after the crisis has ended (Haer, 2018).

## (B). Impact on Development

West Africa's development has been sluggish, especially in war-torn nations like Sierra Leone and Liberia. Three factors have been impacted by the ongoing conflict in the region: direct costs, indirect costs, and barriers to the delivery and availability of public goods.

1. **Direct Costs (Human Costs):** The human costs of a conflict is manifested in the number of deaths and injuries sustained by citizens of country in the war. Young male adults or teens make up the majority of the combatants. As they battle in their prime, the amount of availability of young person to work and support their nations' development is diminished by the lives lost (Adedeji, 2022b). Between 1956 and 1965, one hundred and five (105,000) people are calculated to have lost their lives in Hutu/Tutsi war, as almost one million (1,000,000) people died in the four months before the RPF took

control of the country” (Alusala, 2005). As generations were lost during the genocide, some of whom were professionals in their prime age, the direct expenses will have an impact on the growth of the country for a number of decades.

2. **Indirect Costs:** Conflict has indirect costs that prevent a nation’s economy from developing since it forces many people to flee their homes. The democratic productive age is lost to the nation in the short term, and along with them, the following generations. This is similar to direct costs. It does happen occasionally, significant part of the displaced people choose to live as refugees in host countries. The discouraged or disrupted economic investment that a country experiences in a period of conflict is another indirect cost of conflict (Adedeji, 2022b). Businesses suffer losses as a result of owner emigration, business closures due to insecurity, and robbery and burglary. The owners of the businesses might have been moved or perhaps dead before the order is restored. For fear of losing their investment, foreign investors grow weary of making investments in the nation. The conflict causes economic development to halt and, occasionally, even reverse.
3. **Restrict Delivery and Access to Public Goods:** The economic growth of a nation depends on the availability of public goods like health and education. A population can maintain a reduced death rate and reduce the severity and spread of illnesses among its residents by providing proper health care. Continuous economic development is ensured by the population’s improved health, a quality absent from nations experiencing armed conflict. Health services are less accessible in war zones in West Africa because people are unwilling or unable to work there (Adedeji, 2022b). The same holds true for other government programs like education that support long-term economic growth. Hence, the conflict hinders the nation’s capacity to experience both short- and long-term economic growth.

### (C). Impact on Governance

In addition to influencing a nation’s economic growth, a nation’s governance is responsible for ensuring the security of its citizens. In both conflict-affected and non-conflict cultures, high levels of armed violence and the proliferation of illicit weapons are frequently indications of a porous or unaccountable security sector (Bourne et al., 2006). Although having weak government contributes to unhindered arms proliferation within a nation, the proliferation of arms has an adverse effect on the governance of that nation by further weakening security sectors as more criminals and criminal groups get access to weapons.

Security inside conflict-ridden nations may result in the privatization of the security sector as a result of weakening security sectors and rising insecurity. According to Bourne et al. (2006), private security firms can expand the supply of illegal small arms if stockpile management is poor or there is internal corruption, even when they are allowed by the government to do so. Private security guards with inadequate training may also misuse weapons, and in certain circumstances, they have been connected to criminal activities and human rights abuses. The economic development suffer setback due rising in the cost of doing business due to rising in insecurity, the privatization of security sources, which cannot be appropriately regulated due to poor governance.

### Combating the Proliferation of Illegal Arms in West Africa

The violent disintegration of civil society in dozens of nations around the world has been one of the defining characteristics of the global community in this century. Escalation of ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, and other types of community strife has been identified, as well as the melting away of social norms and governmental structures that might otherwise limit the violence, from the capitalist to communist republics of the former Soviet bloc to Africa and Asia. The fact that massive death and suffering arise from sources other than the primary conventional weaponry typically has a linked with war tanks, aircraft, and warships characterizes this type of battle.

Operationally, the UN has tried to keep an eye on how well different international embargoes are preventing

the passage of weapons into armed conflict zones. The UN has backed Mali's ground-breaking initiatives in West Africa to seize and destroy firearms domestically and to push for a regional ban on the trafficking in small arms and light weapons. The issue of light weapons is also attracting the attention of other international organizations, particularly in light of its relevance to issues of economic and social development.

The demobilization of soldiers and their reintegration into civil society are two post-conflict reconstruction concerns that the World Bank is investing resources in. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through its task force on Conflict, Peace, and Development Cooperation, is also putting more of an emphasis on the necessity of early prevention measures, such as restricting arms flows in potential conflict zones, in order to prevent armed conflict.

Several sub-regional projects have also come to the aid. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) members signed the Bamako Moratorium, which is the most significant. West African states announced a three-year renewable embargo on the importation, exporting, and production of light weapons in accordance with this agreement. Additionally, they adopted a Code of Conduct that will guide its use (Organisation of African Unity, 2000).

The ECOWAS has also established a regional Program for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) that is run by the UNDP. PCASED activities include arms eradication, the revision and harmonization of national laws governing weapons, consultation with supplier and producer nations, the expansion of the moratorium, the creation of a database, and the registration of all weapons. Governments in West Africa are currently collaborating with the UN to examine the regional effects of the diffusion of light weapons and to create a regional ban on their import, export, and manufacturing.

When it came to coming up with plans to stop the proliferation of weapons throughout Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took the initiative. A Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and Other Related Materials was signed in 2006 by member nations (ECOWAS, 2006). It was a paper that the ECOWAS Moratorium predated and is therefore legally enforceable. It becomes effective in September 2009. The following are some of the Convention's highlights:

1. A ban on the transfer of small guns internationally, with the exception of those needed for legitimate actions supporting peace or self-defense or security.
2. A prohibition on small arms transfers to non-state actors that are not authorized by the member state that is importing them.
3. Information sharing protocols.
4. A strict regulatory framework for everyone who wants to own small arms.
5. Strict management guidelines to guarantee the safety of arsenals

The Convention emphasizes gender equality and domestic production of small guns and light weapons. As a result, the ECOWAS Small Arms Unit was established to handle Convention-related policy concerns. The ECOWAS Small Arms Programme (ECOSAP), a five-year program for strengthening capability with a Mali foundation, was also established in 2006. With the launch of a Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, the governments of West African states operating under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) made another enormous step forward. According to Oluwadare (2014), the Protocol's primary objective is

“.. to establish and strengthen the frameworks necessary for West Africa to respond quickly to emergency situations, particularly by enhancing cooperation in the fields of “conflict prevention, early warning, and



peacekeeping operations, the control of cross-border crime, international terrorism, and proliferation of small arms and anti-personnel mines,” as well as developing and putting into practice “policies on anti-corruption, money-laundering, and illegal circulation of small arms.”

The Protocol, according to the author, recognizes the illicit proliferation of SALW as being harmful to the sub-region’s security conditions and, as a result, includes institutional apparatus for curbing of the proliferation and preventive measures against the illicit spread of small arms. The key elements of the control measures are:

1. Control of small arms manufacturing, export, and import; and eradication of its illicit flow
2. Registration and control of the movement and use of legal stockpiles;
3. Detection, collection, and destruction of all illicit weapons; and
4. Boosting member states to collect and destroy all excess arms (Oluwadare, 2014).

The aforementioned agreements must be implemented by national law, and it is even more beneficial if such laws are harmonized among states. The law will make governments to take steps to ensure responsible use of weapons as well as implement programs to lessen their availability, even if they are not covered by a sub-regional agreement. One of the numerous approaches to accomplish these objectives is limiting citizens’ access to illicit weapons and implementing licensing procedures (Adedeji, 2022b). By labeling and registering freshly manufactured guns, registering all guns to their owners, and ensuring the secure storage of small arms and light weapons, this will eventually play a bigger part in all facets of international trade.

One of the moratorium’s main attempts to combat proliferation of illicit weapons in ECOWAS member state is the National Commissions (NATCOMS). Member states shall create National Commissions, composed of representatives of the pertinent authorities and civil society, for the purpose of efficient implementation of the Moratorium at the national level (Code of Conduct) (NATCOMS’s 2009). The purpose of national commissions is to act as the hub for regional and national activities. To stop the spread of weapons, member states

- must develop strategies, policies, and initiatives;
- inform the public of the importance of reporting unlawfully owned guns to law enforcement;
- Provide suitable suggestions to the ECOWAS Secretariat on the exemptions to be granted to the Moratorium for weapons included by the Agreement;
- updates arms registrations and transmits to ECOWAS Secretariat;
- mobilize resources to support program costs;
- maintain constant communication with the ECOWAS and PCASED Secretariats regarding matters pertaining to the Moratorium and the overall proliferation of weapons; and
- establish and maintain a communication channel with the other national commissioners in accordance with Decision A/DEC13/12/99 “Establishing of National Commissions (NATCOMS, 2009).

Following the ECOWAS member states’ signing of the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and Other Related Materials in 2006, the Moratorium was later changed into a convention. This was done in an effort to “avert and fight surplus and destabilizing accretion of SALW within ECOWAS” (ECOWAS Executive Secretariat 2006, Article 2.1, 3.1). The change was made to put more emphasis on “enforcing” the protocol rather than only using “moral persuasion” to stop the spread of illegal weapons.

Through the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), which has its headquarters in Ghana, the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP) is also involving and enhancing the capacity of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) throughout the Sub-region for the same objective (Wesseh

and Yakubu, 2003). ECOSAP also has a strategic engagement with the media through the West African Network of Journalists on Security and Development (WANJSD), which it uses for the objectives of its advocacy and communication campaigns in the battle against SALW.

The Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions' Nairobi Declaration (2000) and Nairobi Protocol (2004) as well as the continent-wide Bamako Declaration (2000), which reaffirmed the stand of the high number of African governments to improve arms control, were all influenced by ECOWAS. A ministerial conference held at the end of 2000 produced the Bamako Declaration, which advocated national action, including the coordination of organizations working on small arms issues, the destruction of surplus and seized arms, and the conclusion of bilateral agreements for small arms control along borders.

Additionally, ECOWAS join forces with the United Nations Programme of Action (PoA) to prevent, combat, and destroy the illegal trade in weaponry in all its forms. Thus, PoA established the blueprint for the application of policies to control the spread of small arms and light weapons in the West Africa. The framework, as cited in Sears (2012), has six areas that serve as the foundation for policy-making on arms control such as controlling trade, labelling and tracing, organising, destruction and reduction of excess stocks, reserve, security, and exchange of information and transparency.

By urging governments to take responsibility at the national, regional, and international levels, it also acknowledges the necessity of a multi-level approach to arms control. However, up to now, there has been uneven implementation within governments, necessitating continual political commitment and will. It could be argued right away that the ECOWAS regional body deserves praise for its engagement given the greater commitments to programs and policies it has taken on, in collaboration with partner international and regional bodies, other regional organizations, and other civil society organizations in the planning and implementation of policy.

### **Challenges of Effective Control of Arms in West Africa**

The nature of armaments, internal issues, and structural issues are only a few of the elements that make it difficult to effectively manage the proliferation of arms and ammunition in the West African region.

- The lack of transparency in the arms trade is the first and primary issue. It is challenging to evaluate Sub-Saharan African states' armaments policies because the majority of them consider them to be secret. Similar to this, armament dealers encourage corruption by getting some African nations involved in criminal activity. Small arms can also easily infiltrate the black market in the area due to insecurity through theft, leakage, or resale.
- Second, the qualities of weapons and ammunition make them particularly appealing to paramilitary and irregular forces as well as untrained individuals, aiding in their spread. Numerous causes contribute to their 'high appeal' in the region, aside from governments increasing their demand for weapons to quell and control internal and international opposition movements.
- Due to simplicity of small arms and light weapons, anyone with little to no military experience can use it. This explains why illiterate fighters and even child soldiers used always found in numerous armed wars in West Africa, including those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Nigeria, among others. Small arms are widely available, inexpensive, and reliable; they are a highly sought-after and lucrative good and are oftentimes sold with inadequate domestic and international control by a number of arms makers, from excess military stockpiles, and domestic arms traders.

### **Added Structural Elements**

The regulation of armaments is extremely complicated because to structural issues summarised as lack of organizational capabilities, the required infrastructure, and globalization factors. Among structural elements

are:

1. **Issues with Governance:** One thing that made citizens explore for alternatives was the governance's inability to offer the necessary security. Studies show that in many West African countries, a lack of trust in security forces, or occasionally just a failure of security agencies to perform their duties effectively, contributed to the citizens' strong desire to acquire weapons in order to defend themselves and their property from armed conflict (Alimba, 2017).
2. Insufficient security forces and increase rate of insecurity, have contributed to the birth of a variety alternative means such as vigilante groups and community self-defense, which consequently foster new types of insecurity (Small Arms Survey, 2011).
3. Politicians in West Africa are compel to go extra miles in their pursuit of elective office due to the high stakes. As a result, many of them search for means to maintain political power by engaging "specialists of violence" such as cultists, gangs, and thugs (Freedom, 2012). The weapons are not collected from these groups after use. Out of frustration and hardship, the weapons used for criminal activity are circulated across the region.
4. **Corruption:** The vicious loop of underpaying workers and corruption fosters the spread of weaponry, particularly small arms and light weapons among civilians. Soldiers, police officers, and security personnel are found selling weapons from government stockpiles to criminals, while customs officials are known to be bought off by arms dealers (Ayissi and Sall, 2005).
5. **Porous Borders:** Another concern is that due to its size and degree of development, West Africa consistently faces border control issues. Some of these countries have incredibly large number of borders that must be controlled. Along with the airports, each of the country border has been made use of smuggling arms into the West Africa nations. The fact that practically all of West Africa's countries have long-running instability and violent conflict is a concern. It's possible that their size and open borders make it simple to smuggle weapons, escalating and prolonging bloodshed (Ngang, 2007).
6. **Globalization:** The emergence of globalization brings opportunities and problems. The removal of government-enforced restrictions on cross-border trade and the resulting rise of an increasingly technological and complex global system of production and exchange make it more difficult to curb the proliferation of arms. The free market ideology of globalization, minimal economic restrictions, and open commerce for global development creates a fertile environment for the illicit trade in armaments. According to Malhotra (2011), the following variables related to globalization encourage the growth of the illicit arms trade:
  - a. Political and economic integration are accompanied by less constraints on immigration and human movement. This aids the arms traders to strengthen their present business connections and exploit new ones.
  - b. Capital mobility and banking reforms have helped the black market expand its trade globally by using all facets of the interconnected financial sector. Offshore markets and tax havens are also created as a result of this. E-money is a prime example of banking innovation. Banks have created cards with microchips that can store huge amounts of cash. These cards can be carried outside of the conventional routes or simply traded between people illegally.
  - c. The connection between banks and the internet has created a new challenge in preventing illegal activity in the financial sector. E-banking has made money digital, making it more vulnerable to crime. This has given Arm brokers additional options to protect their interest.
  - d. Significant growth in the commercial airline and freight industries has made travel more affordable and convenient, which in turn aided in the spread of weapons into conflict areas. It is challenging to monitor illegal arms transfers in the air and on the sea because of global mergers of airline businesses, supply chains, and shipping companies.
  - e. The expansion of international communication over the past 20 years has been unimaginable. This has

made it easier for arms dealers to communicate cheaply and internationally online.

## CONCLUSION

The end of the Cold War has brought the challenges of proliferation of arms in West Africa into limelight in sub-regional program. The movement of war from inter-state to intra-state war which arms play prominent roles is a concern. The study noted that contemporary conflicts in West Africa depend almost entirely on arms, as a result of this, arms have done more damages in the sub-region. One cannot deny the fact that there are nexus between arms and armed conflicts and the West Africa security. It established that some powerful nations are still engaging in illegal arms trading such as manufacturing, supplying and buying.

The magnitude, truthfulness, complexity, and dynamism of the current trend in weaponry proliferation, however, call for a reconsideration of the degree of commitment to the course. While the effort to curb it is proceeding in arithmetic sequence, proliferation is occurring in geometric progression. This makes it crucial that the issue of proliferation of arms and accretion must be taken into consideration in West Africa.

The fact that there are numerous measures, national, sub-regional, regional and international treaties governing the manufacturing, proliferation, and most importantly the allocation of weapons, it seems the initiatives are just but political declaration with little or no practical enforcement of those measures, as there is no comprehensive, legally binding, or global agreements on standard weapons, including small arms and light weapons, only seems to exacerbate the state of things.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear as the study noted that the proliferation of arms and ammunition escalates violence in West Africa, there is therefore need for policy actions that will be sufficient to address this issue. Based on the results of this investigation, several recommendations are given below in this perspective:

- Creation of international standards. Adopting international conventions prohibiting the unregulated and unstable movement of armaments to tense or conflict-ridden areas is the first and, arguably, most crucial step. It is to respect the conventional right of sovereign states to fortify themselves, but it is more important to recognize that this right does not include the acquisition of weapons for the purpose of committing genocide or repressing opposing movements. Furthermore, it must be accepted as axiomatic that the right to own firearms for self-defense implies a duty to keep them under constant, effective governmental control in order to prevent their being used for illegal activities.
- Good Governance Regime in ECOWAS members' state should be institutionalized. It has been noted that "bad" administration fosters rebel groups, which ultimately depend on the use of arms to further their objectives. In other words, a healthy government encourages growth that will be able to reduce the propensity for armed conflict, so regulating the supply of weaponry.
- Since national governments now control the import and export of arms, national attempts to properly regulate the trade in such ammunition is essential. An increase in governmental accountability is required in two crucial areas: first, strict ascendancy of the import and export of such arms, to prevent their illegitimate use rather than legal self-defense as permitted by the UN Charter; and second, the establishment of efficient supervision of all military-style arms establish on national territory, to avert their sale to criminal organizations and black market traders.
- In order to make it more strenuous for weaponry to be illicitly transported from one country to the others, border control structures already in place should be improved.
- There is also need to link arms control and security building measures more closely to broader and long-term conflict resolution and management effort at a social and grassroots level. More attention needed to be pay on the reduction of weapons by radically engage in arms control and disarmament process.

- The need to improve resources for data gathering and dissemination of information to appropriate quarters is a necessity. As adequate data is necessary, Both UN and West Africa should also make it as a priority to destroy the surplus and absolute weapons to avoid it getting into the black market or be used for violence and crime due to its surplus.
- Initiating of communication or cooperation between West African leaders and armaments suppliers and manufacturers. This will assist West African authorities in reducing the supply of illegal firearms by working with the manufacturers to ensure transparency in the sale and transit of weapons.

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