

SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH-EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This study examines the proliferation of small arms and its impact on socio-economic development in North-East Senatorial District of Benue State. The study reveals that small arms proliferation is prevalent in the area, primarily caused by electoral violence, communal conflict, and the growth of ethnic militia and insecurity. The effects of small arms proliferation on socio-economic development are devastating, including fear and panic, breakdown of law and order, increased armed robbery, erosion of state authority, loss of property, and death. The study identifies amnesty programs, registration and licensing of arms, disarmament, collection, and destruction as measures to minimize the effects of arms proliferation. The study recommends public enlightenment programs, punishment for electoral violators, empowerment of security agents, and community partnership to address the problem of small arms proliferation.*

Keywords: *Small Arms Proliferation, Socio-Economic Development, North-East Senatorial District.*

1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The ease with which individuals and groups have access to and move around with small arms is a matter of concern to government. This is because of increasing nature of communal conflicts and heightened criminal activities. According to the United Nations Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms (1997), small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machines guns and light machine by extension, the automatic weapons that developed from such firearms are also called small arms which include machine guns using the same ammunition as military rifles, as well as the larger caliber machine guns, are so classified. The term usually includes rifles, handguns (pistols and revolvers), shotguns, submachine guns, and machine guns. Small arms are delighted to be used by the armed and security forces to maintain internal peace and security and to protect the territorial integrity of the nation, beside government security agencies, there are some individuals who have been given the license to keep small arms for their personal protection. However, it is unfortunate that these arms have found their ways in the hands of non-state actors who use it to unleash pains and sufferings on innocent citizens across

the globe. Guns and small arms are no longer the preserves of militaries and police force but have fallen into the hands of ordinary criminals, terrorists, ethnic militias and death squads around the world. This position is underscored by the findings of the Inter-Governmental Action Against Money Laundering in West Africa (2023) that small arms are now in the hands of politically-motivated insurgent/rebel groups, armed criminal gangs including campus cult gangs, security and law enforcement operatives; politicians, international oil merchants, drug traffickers, ethnocentric or sectarian community leaders or warlords and commercial arms dealers.

Globally, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the major challenges countries all over the world are grappling with especially in most of the developing countries of the world to the extent that the states are losing their traditionally monopoly over the control of the instrument of violence. In fact, Jekada (2005) underscores the above view by stating that guns and small arms are no longer the exclusive preserve of militaries and police force but these weapons have also fallen into the hands of ordinary criminals, terrorists, ethnic militias and death squads around the world. Most government do not publish statistics to transfer of small arms; worst still are private companies who are highly secretive about arms deals. Much of the trade is carried out through black markets and other illicit transfers (Eloma, 2024).

The argument by some other scholars that Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) do not cause conflict is accepted, but its effect on conflicts cannot be ignored. According to Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba (2004:224) While small arms and light weapons do not of course, cause conflicts, they soon become part of the conflict equation by fueling and exacerbating underlying tension, generating more insecurity and adding to the number of casualties” While prolonging the conflict, SALW also hinder the chances of resolving such conflicts; warring factions, as demonstrated in the Liberian Civil War and Sierra-Leone conflict, have been known to concede to peace negotiations only as a strategy to buy time to stock up arsenals in order to launch further attacks. This assertion was affirmed by Weiss (2003:4) when he stated that, “The mere presence of guns undermines alternative conflict resolution strategies” The availability of small arms plays a role in perpetuating the violence and making it more lethal at every level, from criminal activity to full-fledged war, in both developed and developing countries (Weiss, 2003).

Africa states witnessed the most destructive and violent conflicts at the tail end of the 1980s and 1990s. From the genocide in Rwanda, the almost decade long conflict in Liberia (1989-1997), the Sierra-Leone crises, the bloody crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the conflict in Mali have all gone to show the extent of small arms and light weapons wreaking havoc on the continent (Eloma, 2014). In assessing the African region in the third quarter of the twentieth century, Arlinghause (1998:8) did not hesitate to conclude that in Africa, “Development is security and security is development”. Indeed, there are several countries that have been torn apart by conflicts that have remained so for a longtime across the African continent. What makes these conflict areas thick is the availability and widespread use of small arms and light weapons. Without these small arms and light weapons, conflicts and crises would not be prolonged as they have been in parts of Africa. The spread of small arms and light weapons and its degree of proliferation has reached an alarming proportion especially in the developing world of Latin America, Asia and

Africa. For instance, according to the Small Arms Survey, there are at least 875 million firearms in the world (Small Arms Survey, 2007). These weapons have now come to undermine the stability of most of the countries of the developing world directly and indirectly (Eloma, 2014). This study seeks to examine small arms proliferation and socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons have been considered as the most immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states worldwide. Fueling civil wars, organized criminal violence, insurgency and terrorist activities thereby posing great obstacles to sustainable security and development. In most cases, experience has shown that small insurgencies tend to develop in to larger civil wars and possibly destabilize an entire region. This trend especially in Africa is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the states and their attendant failure to deliver on governance. Arms and weapons are often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or delay developmental projects, and hinder peace-keeping and peace-building efforts.

When conflicts end or subside, small arms often remain in circulation. Which may lead to additional violence and suffering since fighting can resume or conflicts may erupt in neighboring regions. In non-conflict areas small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in homicides, suicides, accidents and they are frequently the primary tools of terrorists bent on sowing chaos and discord (Stohl & Hogendoorn, 2010). Equally devastating is the considerable collateral damage caused by arms proliferation. In particular, the countless death through forced displacement, loss of access to healthcare, etc. cannot be overstated. The destruction of properties and communities including deprivation of sources of income and destruction of right to family, resulting in considerable psychological trauma and creation of large number of refugees depending on humanitarian aid are all direct causes of conflicts and violence involving SALWs.

In Benue State, worried by the proliferation of arms, the State Governor Samuel Ortom, the 29th of May, 2015 set up Amnesty Programme for those who were willing to relinquish illegal arms in their possession to the government, offering various amounts of money for each category of arms, ranging from N10,000 and N20,000 for locally manufactured firearms to as much as N100,000 for automatic weapons (Adegegh,2015). The amnesty period is supposed to end by August ending after which anyone caught with illegal arms would be prosecuted. The scheme appears to have started paying off. Last month, tens of youth returned firearms in their possession at a public ceremony in Government House Makurdi (Adzegeh, 2015). The Governor revealed that the programme was extended at the instance of one Terwase Akwaza, Alias Ghana, who surrendered at the end of August when the programme was expected to expire. He added that Akwaza had pleaded for an extension to enable some of his members embrace the programme. According to the governor, the amnesty programme will help to recover illegal arms in the state, make the state safe for investment, and boost social activities (Adzegeh, 2015).

Consequently, looking at the negative impact of arms proliferation in Benue State and in other parts of the country and considering the fact that, since the return to civil rule in 1999, Benue State has had its share of violent conflicts, it is argued that, there are large amount of weapons in the hands of non-state actors particularly due to the inability of the government to guarantee the protection of lives and property. It is on the foregoing that this study seeks to examine the effects of small arms proliferation on socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general research objective of this study is to assess the effect arms proliferation on socio-economic development in Zone A senatorial district in Benue State? The specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the prevalence of arms proliferation in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.
- ii. Identify the causes of arms proliferation in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.
- iii. Analyze the effect of arms proliferation on socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.
- iv. Investigate why individual carry arms during elections in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.
- v. Examine the factors preventing the control of arms proliferation in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.
- vi. Suggest solutions that can minimize the effects of arms proliferation on socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to individuals, government and international organizations. To the individuals, the study will highlight the negative impact of arms proliferation as it will sensitize them to understand how arms proliferation affects their personal development because resources, they would have used for development will be used for arms purchase to prosecute war.

1.5 Research Assumptions

- i. Small arms proliferation is a threat to socio-economic development in North-East Senatorial district of Benue State.
- ii. The proliferation of small arms is not prevalent in North-East senatorial district of Benue State.

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Different theoretical perspectives may be used by different scholars. However, at every given time, a theory or theories are adopted based on its or their explanatory values. As scientific research, the importance of the application of a theory in analyzing the phenomenon under study in this research

cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, the diverse and plural nature of Benue State entails the adoption of theories with dual perspective on the dynamics of conflicts that have led to proliferation of small arms and political violence. In this study, the frustration-aggression theory is adopted.

2.1.1 Frustration-Aggression Theory

The literature review examines the frustration-aggression theory and its application to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Benue North-East Senatorial District. The theory posits that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, which can arise from the denial of legitimate desires or needs. The review highlights the relevance of the frustration-aggression theory in explaining the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the study area. It notes that the high level of unemployment and poverty in the area has led to frustration among the youth, who then engage in aggressive behavior such as armed robbery and political thuggery. The review also examines the role of the state in perpetuating violence and conflict in the study area. It notes that the state's failure to provide basic needs and services has led to the formation of ethnic militias and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The literature review also critiques the frustration-aggression theory, noting its limitations and lack of empirical support. However, it argues that the theory remains relevant in explaining the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the study area. Overall, the literature review provides a framework for understanding the complex issues surrounding the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Benue North-East Senatorial District. It highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of frustration and aggression in the study area.

The frustration-aggression theory is relevant in explaining the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Benue North-East Senatorial District. The high level of unemployment and poverty in the study area has led to frustration among the youth, who then engage in aggressive behavior. The state's failure to provide basic needs and services has led to the formation of ethnic militias and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The frustration-aggression theory has limitations and lack of empirical support, but remains relevant in explaining the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the study area.

3.0

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study is survey research design. Consequently, the vastness of Zone A posed the challenge of limited coverage, thus, some segments of the population were sampled for the study.

3.2 Research Setting

North-East Senatorial District of Benue State is made up of (7) local government areas namely; Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Vandeikya, Ukum and Ushongo. According to the 2006

Census, the local government areas that make up North-East Senatorial District of Benue State have a combined population of 1,478,065.

The people are predominantly farmers and have an extensive arable land with a suitable climate for the production of various crops. The people typically engage in the production of cash crops such as rice, soybeans, groundnuts, maize as well as subsistence crops like yams, cassava, millet, guinea-corn and sorghum. Bush fallow and mixed cropping are the dominant systems. The zone has the advantage of an all-round capacity to produce virtually all the major food crops. All crop farmers raise either or a combination of pigs, sheep, goats and poultry to supplement income from crop farming. The system of animal husbandry by farmers is mostly free range though some practice semi-intensive method. Although, farming is the major occupation of the people, a good percentage of the people engage in trading, carving, weaving or fishing.

Benue State is blessed with the longest stretches of river system in the country with over 100 ponds and lakes. The River Benue which is the second longest river in the country dominates the drainage pattern. The next major river is the Katsina-Ala River which is a tributary of the River Benue located in Zone A. Other rivers include: Konshisha, Aya, Moon, Amile Tamen, Amile Kiriki. This means the Zone and indeed Benue State as a whole, offers a great opportunity for the establishment of viable fishing industries.

The choice of North-East Senatorial District of Benue State as the area of study is because, politically, the area of study is very volatile with high-level of political thuggery and cases of political assassinations. According to Adzegeh (2015), prominent politicians in Benue State now live in palpable fear even as uncertainty pervades the society, following recent killings in the state.

3.3 Population of Study

The target population for the study is therefore 1,478,065 which comprises of adult (both males and females) resident in the North-East Senatorial District of Benue State.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

In order to arrive at the number of respondents to be involved in this study, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination as presented below is used.

$$\text{Sample Size (n)} = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample Size (required)

N = Total Population (universe)

E = Degree of Freedom (0.05)

Sample Size =400

3.5 Sampling Procedure

Therefore, in order to select the 400 respondents, the study used cluster, purposive and random sampling technique. Consequently, North-East Senatorial District of Benue State will be divided into seven local governments using cluster sampling technique. The names of the local governments are Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Vandeikya, Ukum and Ushongo. Therefore, three out of the seven council wards were purposively selected because in recent times, the local governments selected have had cases of communal conflicts, political violence and rising cases of armed robbery attached which is an indication that large number of arms are in private hands in the area of study.

Therefore, the local governments selected were Kwande, Ukum, Katsina-Ala and Ushongo local governments.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

This study seeks to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, structured questionnaires and oral interview served as the major tools for eliciting information from respondents. The questionnaire will be designed into two parts, part A and part B. Part A consists of the socio-demographic attributes of the respondents while part B had questions concerning arms proliferation on socio-economic development from. The questionnaires will be distributed by hand with the help of research assistants. Data will also be collected from key informants such as security agents and community leaders in the area of study. The questions on the interview guide will be the same with those on the questionnaire.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentages and bar charts will be used to present and analyze the data collected through questionnaires while the data elicited from key informants will be analyzed descriptively. The research assumptions of the study will be analyzed descriptively as well.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the target population which consist of civil servants, farmers, business people, opinion and community leaders who were 18 years and above in area of study. Therefore, out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 384 questionnaires were retrieved representing 96% of the total population. Consequently, data presentation and analysis were done using 384 respondents.

The data presented in Table 4.1 below indicated that, majority of the respondents represented by 56.2% (216) were males while 43.8% (168) were females. The dominance of males in the sample was because, the men were more willing to discuss security matters than the women. On the marital status of the respondents, majority of the respondent 59.4% (228) were single whereas, 40.6% (156) were married. The dominance of single people in the sample has serious implications on the

study because single people can be very volatile and if small arms fall in their hands, they could cause a lot of damage.

On the education of respondents, majority of the respondents had secondary education represented by 33.8% (130), 31.3% (120) had primary education, 16.1% (62) had tertiary education, 10.4% (40) had no formal education while the least 8.4% (32) had other forms of education. We can infer from the above data that majority of the respondents are literate and this where emphasis needs to be made on education, sensitization, workshops and organization of town hall meetings to educate the population about the effect of small arms proliferation on socio-economic development. On occupational distribution, majority of the respondents represented by 38.5% (148) were farmers, 32.8% (126) were business people, 16.7% (64) were civil servants. 6.8% (26) were unemployed, and 5.2% (20) had other occupation the data presented above shows that, majority of the respondents were farmers and this is because Benue State in general is an agrarian economy and if small arms are not controlled in the area of study, most of the farmers will not be able to go to their farms or take their products to the market because of the fear of being attacked and this can pose a grave danger to food security.

Lastly, on religious affiliation, most of the respondents were Christians represented by 95.3% (366), followed by Islamic religion with 3.1% (12) while traditional worshippers were 1.6% (6). This implies that Christian respondents dominated the study area.

Table 1: Social-demographic data of respondents

Socio-demographic data	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	216	56.2
Female	168	43.8
Total	384	100
Marital status		
Married	156	40.6
Single	228	59.4
Total	384	100
Education		
No schooling	40	10.4
Primary	120	31.3
Secondary	130	33.8
Tertiary	62	16.1
Others	32	8.4
Total	384	100

Occupation		
Civil servants	64	16.7
Farmers	148	38.5
Business	126	32.8
Unemployed	26	6.8
Others	20	5.2
Total	384	100
Religion		
Christianity	366	95.3
Islam	12	3.1
African Traditional Religion (ATR)	6	1.6
Total	384	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2: Causes of small arms proliferation in North-East Senatorial District

Causes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Communal conflict	112	29.1
Electoral violence	132	34.4
Growth of ethnic militias	108	28.2
Insecurity	32	8.3
Total	384	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table two reveal as follow, Electoral violence was identified as the leading cause (34.4%), followed by communal conflict (29.1%), growth of ethnic militias (28.2%), and insecurity (8.3%).

Table 3: Effects of Small Arms Proliferation on Socio-Economic Development

Effects of Small arms	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Breakdown of law & order	173	45.1
Increase in crime rate	87	22.6
Fear and panic	65	16.9
Militarization of social life	38	9.9
Loss of lives and property	31	5.5
Total	384	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table three reveal as follow: Breakdown of law and order was the most cited effect (45.1%), followed by increased crime rate (22.6%), fear and panic (16.9%), militarization of social life (9.9%), and loss of lives and property (5.5%).

Table 4: Respondents' opinion on whether Small Arms Proliferation affects

Socio-Economic Development

Responses	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
Yes	305	79
No	24	6
Not sure	55	15
Total	384	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table four reveal as follow: An overwhelming majority (79%) believed that small arms proliferation affects socio-economic development, while 6% disagreed, and 15% were unsure.

4.2 Discussion of result

The first assumption of the study states that, "the proliferation of small arms is not prevalent in North-East senatorial district of Benue State". This assumption is rejected because finding does not agree as shown in Tables 2. This is further objected by Jekada (2005) who argues that a broad historical overview of weapons proliferations reveals an endless receding tide and flow in the pattern of their spread, varying substantially across areas such as intensity of arms production, sophistication of weapons exchanged, level of international demand for small arms, and tightness of linkage to foreign policy objectives.

The second assumption states that small arms proliferation is a threat to socio-economic development in North-East Senatorial district of Benue State". This assumption is accepted based on the finding in Table 3 and Table 4. This assumption has also agreed with studies of Stohl and Hogendoorn (2010) alleviate poverty and promote economic growth.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This research was designed to examine small arms proliferation and socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State. The major findings of this study were that, there was very high incidence of arms proliferation in North-East senatorial district of Benue state.

Study findings on the effect of arms proliferation on socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue state revealed arms proliferation as having a tremendous effect on socio-economic development in the area as it evident by majority (79%) of the respondents. The effects are enormous and they ranged from breakdown of law and order (45.1%), increase in crime rate (22.6%), fear and panic (16.9%), militarization of social life (9.9%) and also loss of live and property (5.5%). In the situation of aforementioned, people cannot go to their farms or to the market places to buy or sell and this severely affects socio-economic activities.

Study findings on measures that can minimize the effects of arms proliferation on socio-economic development in North-East senatorial district of Benue State revealed amnesty programme (26.3%) as chiefly among other factors in the effective control of arms proliferation. Other measures as revealed include the registration and licensing of arms (24.2%), disarmament (18.5%) and collection and destruction (18.0%).

5.2 Conclusion

The proliferation of small arms in Benue North-East senatorial district is a severe security concern, driven by electoral violence, communal conflict, and the growth of ethnic militia and insecurity. This has led to devastating consequences, including widespread fear and panic, breakdown of law and order, increased armed robbery, erosion of state authority, loss of property, and death. The region's socio-economic development has been significantly hindered as a result. Key obstacles to controlling arms proliferation include political tussles, porous borders, poor governance,

corruption, and globalization. However, amnesty programs have been identified as a crucial step in mitigating the issue, supplemented by measures such as registering and licensing arms, disarmament, collection, and destruction. The complexity of the issue is highlighted by the case of a militant in Kastina-Ala who was granted amnesty but later implicated in the assassination of a security adviser.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Public Enlightenment and Education: Implement public enlightenment programs through various media channels, town hall meetings, workshops, and seminars to educate the public on the dangers of gun possession and its impact on socio-economic development and public safety.
2. Political Reforms and Accountability: Politicians must recognize that election matters are not a "do or die" affair and should desist from hiring thugs to cause chaos during and after elections. Additionally, political elites must be educated to view politics as a peaceful competition, and those who violate electoral laws must be punished.
3. Empowering Security Agents and Community Partnership: Security agents must be empowered and provided with necessary equipment to tackle small arms proliferation. Moreover, security agencies should partner with local communities to gather intelligence and address the issue holistically.

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