The changing patterns of small and light weapons (SALW) proliferation and the challenges of national security in Nigeria

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Abstract
This work tries to examine the changing patterns of the proliferation of Small arms and Light Weapons in the world, Africa and Nigeria in particular, including the menace caused by this ugly phenomenon. The work which relied on carefully selected secondary sources found out a rather dangerous dimension of arms proliferation in sub Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular, with the Niger Delta region as the epicentre. In the same vein, the study found out that porous borders, excessive use of arms by the police, corruption and sales of arms to civilians by security operatives, poverty and unemployment, resistance movements in the Niger Delta, desperation of politicians, and weak arms control mechanism as some of the factors responsible for massive Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation in Nigeria. The impact of this menace on Nigeria’s national security cannot be over emphasized. In the light of the foregoing, some policy recommendations were offered to stem this ugly trend.

1. Introduction
The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often one of the major security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy.

According to Colombian Encyclopedia University Press, the first small arms came into general use at the end of the 14th century. Initially they were nothing more than small cannon held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch hole. Later a stock was added- the match lock and the first real handgun. Small arms are defined as smaller infantry weapons, such as fire arms that an individual soldier can carry. It is usually limited to revolvers, pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, carbines, assault rifles, rifle squad automatic weapons, light machine guns, general-purpose machine-gun, medium machine guns and hand grenades. However, it can also include heavy machine-guns, as well as smaller mortars, recoilless rifles and some rocket launchers, depending on the context. Large mortars, howitzers, cannons, vehicles and larger pieces of equipment are not considered small arms.

Amoa, (Pambazuka September 21, 2006) quoting from Small Arms Survey (2004) stated that it cannot be an over statement to say that small arms in Africa have played the major role in every political conflict, from South, East, and West. Africa. Accordingly, Amoa writes that “conservative estimates indicated that there are about eight million small arms and light weapons in West Africa alone: of the 640 million small arms circulating in the world, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa.

The issue of small arms is as important as life and death small arms have contributed to the political disintegration of many African countries. The effects of the proliferation of small arms are felt by many Africans. In many African countries, there are no enough people to till arable lands, and generations waste their lives by engaging in pointless wars. Children are denied their childhood and are forced to become Adult before puberty. Despite all these, the resilience of the African people is demonstrated by the number of activists and other leaders who risk their life for peaceful change.
Furthermore, Amoa posits that there are about 640 million small arms for every ten people on earth. The majority, 59% are in the hands of civilians. Further, 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The gun trade is worth US $ 4 billion a year, of which up to US $ 1 billion may be unauthorized or illicit. Eight million new guns are manufactured every year by at least 1, 249 companies in 92 countries. Ten to 14 billion units of ammunition are manufactured every year, which is enough to kill every person in the world twice over (Small Arms Survey, 2002).

It is interesting to note that illicit guns start out in the legal trade. Statistics reveal that 80% of the guns used in crime in Mexico were legally acquired in the US. Similarly, 72% of the guns used in crime in Rio de Janeiro were once legally owned in Brazil. A thousand people a day die as a result of guns Of these 1000 deaths, on average 560 are criminal homicides, 250 are direct war deaths: 140 are suicides, while 50 are accidents or cases of undetermined intents. Three people are wounded for every one killed. Small arms are responsible for 60-90% of the direct conflict deaths that occur each year (ibid).

Over the last few decades, there has been a dramatic shift in the nature and methods of war and warfare. While the conventional wars between the 18th and the 20th Century were fought along the lines of national interest, for clearly defined strategic purposes among the regular forces of internationally recognized states i.e. interstate in character, most contemporary wars take place within the confines of nation-states involving a wide range of actors consisting not only of governments but also of armed political militias, rebel groups, religious and ethnic groups, expatriates and diaspora groups, child soldiers, criminal gangs and mercenaries (Boutwell and Klare, 1999:1). In Africa, this new trend has been taking a deadly toll throughout the entire continent from north to south and from east to west. At the turn of the millennium, more than half of all African countries were affected by war of one kind or another. The deadliness of violent conflict exemplifies itself by the fact that most of the people affected are no longer military personnel but large proportions of the civilian population. Many are forced to flee from their homes and villages, undertake long and often dangerous trekking trips on the search for peaceful sanctuaries but sometimes fall in the line of fire of the fighting factions or even become targeted by them intentionally. The reasons for this are manifold ranging from great economic inequality and decline, state failure, the colonial legacy, lack of patriotism and foresight, greed, corruption, the fight for control over natural resources and environmental degradation.

As already mentioned, the nature of war has changed in many respects. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), it is interesting to note that it has not only changed from inter-state to intrastate, but the underlying dynamics have also evolved. Although most violent conflicts are now intra-state in nature, many of them end up becoming regional or having severe regional ramifications. In such regional wars, conventional troops make use of proxies as a forward line of protection in exchange for access and control over natural resources. An equally devastating development in African warfare is the upsurge of genocidal wars or ethnic based conflicts. Such wars are characterized by the fact that they involve the massive use of propaganda, they spread with extremely high speed, cause immense displacement of people, create an atmosphere of fear and confusion, have a high death toll within relatively short periods and are fought without the use of sophisticated and heavy weapons. The catalyst of all these man-made human catastrophes is small arms and light weapons (SALW).

This is the case in the terrible episodes of Rwanda and Burundi in the early and mid 90s, the more recent crisis in Darfur, the fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo and to a certain extent the intertribal skirmishes in Nigeria between the Hausas in the north and other ethnic groups in the south just to name a few. Other obvious qualities of wars of genocide are that the attacks are centrally coordinated and well-planned.

In a nutshell, the greatest shift of paradigm in African war dynamics is the fact that they have become factional. Fractional wars are: “fluid by nature. There is rarely a defined front line and fighting is frequently opportunistic rather than strategic. Warfare is low tech and small arms are the main weapons. Such wars are not costly and can easily be sustained without external support. Frequently these conflicts move rapidly from the original cause to revolve around the exploitation of commercial, mineral and natural resources. Factions will seek to involve, exploit and control a significant proportion of the civilian population in order to sustain the conflict.”(DFID, 2001:8)
This definition does not only capture the new and true nature of most of Africa’s violent conflicts, but also in a subtle manner highlights the main focus of this work, namely small arms and light weapons (SALW) and the role they play in aggravating war, violence and thus insecurity in Sub Saharan Africa and indeed Nigeria.

Of an estimated 640 million SALW in circulation world-wide (Small Arms Survey, 2004), 100 million are said to be in Africa according to African Union sources (AU Peace and Security Agenda, 2005). This seeks to provide answers to whether there is a direct link between the acquisition of weapons, in this case, small arms and light weapons and the escalation or melting down of conflicts into a full-blown war or wanton acts of killing. In addition, this work shall seek to answer the question whether the mere presence of SALW in Africa and Nigeria and whether it has led to an increase in the sense of security or if it has actually increased insecurity in real terms.

According to research carried by Oxfam International, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and safer world, African countries spent over 300 billion dollars on armed conflict between 1990 and the year 2005. This amount according to the report corresponds almost identically to the sum of international aid that was granted to Africa within the same period (IANSA, 2007). Spending this kind of money in a part of the world where millions perish yearly due to easily curable diseases, hunger and starvation and where basic education is not guaranteed is grossly irresponsible, intolerable and clearly demonstrate how many African countries suffer from bad governance as well as from the irresponsible actions of weapons producing states. This must therefore be addressed as soon as possible.

Also, the fact that there are numerous international treaties regulating the production, proliferation and most particularly distribution of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) but no far-reaching, binding and universal agreements on conventional weapons including SALW only seem to make the situation worse. The mere fact that a lot more people have died directly and indirectly all-over the world as a result of the use of SALW than due to the effect of weapons of mass destruction, casts a big shadow of doubt over the moral rectitude of the big powers and major weapons producing countries. It is therefore of enormous importance to carry out scientific research on the effects of seemingly less destructive weapons which are actually killing more people and posing a bigger threat to peace and security than the so-called weapons of mass destruction.

It is also particularly relevant in the African context to research on the role that SALW play in conflict and in daily life.

Despite the fact that some regional organizations like the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the South African Development Community (SADC) etc. address the issue of SALW, not enough scientific research has been carried out to expose resources wasted (in monetary terms), the corrupt practices involved, the security threat they pose and, most of all, the number of lives lost as a result of their presence and use in Sub Saharan Africa. Exposing the negative role and impacts of SALW on the African society through this kind of research will raise awareness to these issues and force governments to review their priorities. The end result will be a more developed, peaceful and secure Africa with the capacity to manage its own difficulties. Ultimately, it is very crucial to carry out research on this subject to reveal the lethality of SALW, create international public awareness of their impact and thus give a boost to current international efforts towards an international Arms Trade Treaty setting up global guidelines for the control of all conventional weapons, including SALW. In order to have a good understanding of the subject and present logical results, as well as practical recommendations, this research used several sources of data and a quite simple methodology. In addition to tapping on information produced by national governments, use was also made of the material collected and reports published by the UN and major civil society organizations. Other valuable sources of information are reports on weapons sales, deliveries, thefts and interceptions. These reports rely on radio, television, newspaper and online sources of information on SALW transactions from the areas researched. For this work mostly electronic news sources and journals were consulted. Although no primary field research was carried out, some primary sources included interviews with citizens of Nigeria which is one of the countries hardest hit by SALW proliferation and use in Sub Saharan Africa. Extensive use was also made of secondary literature of already published or existing research materials on the subject.

2. Small arms and light weapons; definitions, examples & data
As already mentioned in the introduction, SALW have killed by far more people than biological, chemical or any other types of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). According to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/50/70, 15th January (1996), SALW are the most destabilizing conventional weapons. The Nairobi Declaration designed to combat the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa concluded that: “the easy availability of illicit small arms and light weapons escalates conflicts and undermines political stability and has devastating impacts on human and State security”(Global Policy, 2007). SALW are also notorious for their use in the gross violation of human rights not only on the African continent but also world-wide, as it has been widely documented by UN agencies and international human rights groups, most especially Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and on some other important facts and figures. Since the scope of this research is limited to the sub-Saharan African context, the definitions and categorizations will be looked at from the perspective of the different regional conventions and other initiatives on SALW in Africa, Nigeria and indeed the Niger Delta region. Consequently, the following concepts will explained to give readers a working insight.

2.1 Small arms

According to Best Practice Guidelines for the Implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and the Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons, small arms are weapons designed for personal use and shall include: light machine guns, including machine pistols, fully automatic rifles and assault rifles and semi-automatic rifles (Best Practices, 2005). They include: Firearms: any portable barreled and lethal weapon that expels, is designed to expel or may be readily converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of burning propellant, excluding antique firearms or their replicas. Antique firearms and their replicas shall be defined in accordance to domestic law. In no case, however, shall antique firearms include firearms manufactured after 1899; - any device which may be readily converted to a weapon as referred to above or destructive device such as an explosive bomb, incendiary bomb or gas bomb, grenade, rocket launcher, missile, missile system or mine. Ammunition: - the complete round or its components, parts or replacement parts of a small arm or light weapon, provided that those components are themselves subject to authorization in the respective State party; and Other related materials: any components, parts or spare parts of a small arm or light weapon, that are essential to its operation (ibid).

2.2 Light weapons

Light weapons are on the other hand are: “portable weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a crew: heavy machine guns, automatic cannons, howitzers, mortars of less than 100 mm caliber, grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons and launchers, recoilless guns, shoulder fired rockets, anti-aircraft weapons and launchers, and air defense weapons”(SADC: Safeafrica and saferworld, 2003). From the above definitions, we can see that SALW embody a huge spectrum of different kinds of weapons and are not as ‘small’ and ‘light’ as their names suggest. Not only are military and police hardware in terms of guns and machine guns included but ammunition for SALW, anti-personnel landmines,(UN, 1997), grenades and certain kinds of bombs and even missiles etc. also fall under this category. The regional documents from which these definitions were taken even go as far as to include replacement or spare parts of SALW systems as categories of SALW. While many in other parts of the world will not consider pistols, revolvers, semi-automatic rifles and shotguns as SALW, the above definitions are very much in line with those provided by major international NGOs like Safer world, IANSA and Oxfam International. This is particularly crucial and relevant because it includes those weapons which civilians usually tend to possess into the broader category of SALW and thus aims to subject them and their trade to greater scrutiny.

3. The SALW process

The SALW control process has been a very rocky one and it has been very difficult to convince certain big powers to engage themselves in it in a fruitful way. However, due to the general shift of attention from conventional weapons per se to SALW in the mid-90s, the UN held a conference on small arms and light weapons in 2001. Unfortunately, the lack of consensus on the extent of the problems they posed and how they could be solved forced the conference to limit its focus only to the illicit trade in SALW. It ended with a United Nations Program of Action (UNPoA), which committed governments to fight the illicit trade of SALW by implementing a number of different measures. The conference also came to the conclusion that in addition to biennial reviews, the UNPoA would be revisited after five years for assessment and
modification if need be. The SALW review conference, held in 2006, also failed due to a lack of agreement on matters of ammunition, possessions, prohibition on transfers to non-state actors and global guidelines for SALW transfers. Several countries were blamed for not backing the project particularly the United States, which was accused of leading the ‘tyranny of the minority’ (SIPRI, 2007, p. 432). Since 2001, this minority, including China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and Russia, has permanently blocked various attempts to elaborate or widen the scope of the UN Programme of Action on SALW.

However, despite the lack of ground-breaking success at the 2006 SALW review conference in New York, two positive results were registered. Firstly, the fact that the international community still considers the UNPoA as a framework for both international and national action to fight against the illicit trade in SALW. Canada proposed an inter-sessional meeting of states in 2007 to discuss concrete measures to speed up the implementation of the existing UNPoA and to look for other ways to further the cause outside the SALW process.

Also, a biennial meeting of states (BMS) is scheduled for July 2008. Secondly, several countries used the framework of the Review Conference to voice out their opinions on the process and their support for an ATT (SIPRI, 2007, p. 433).

4. Factors affecting the proliferation and use of SALW in sub Saharan Africa and Nigeria

As opposed to heavy conventional weapons like battle tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, warships, combat aircraft and helicopters, several characteristics make SALW very attractive to paramilitary and irregular forces and even untrained civilians. Apart from the fact that many governments increased their demand for SALW to counter political insurgency and suppress domestic opposition movements especially with the advent of multi-party politics across SSA in the late 80s and the 90s, a number of different factors account for their ‘high desirability’ on the continent.

4.1 Simplicity and durability

Due to their relative simple nature, SALW are quite easy to use even by people who have had very little or no military training. This explains their use by untrained combatants and even child soldiers as it was the case in many armed conflicts like in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda. In addition, they require little maintenance and logistical support and can remain operational for very long periods of time. The long lifespan of SALW makes them a constant threat to the society in which they are especially if they are present in large numbers (UNDP, 2002:12). The AK-47, the undisputed number one SALW worldwide can stay operational for 20 to 40 years (Kollicoat, 2006:6). And that with relatively little or no maintenance depending on the conditions to which it is exposed. Even in cases where they begin to malfunction due to age and wear, the old and malfunctioning components can be replaced by new ones or spare parts taken from other weapons.

4.2 Low costs and wide availability

Due to the fact that the production of SALW does not necessarily involve sophisticated or hi-tech capacity and also because they are produced for military, police and civilian usage, there are a lot of producers and suppliers all over the world. This makes them cheap to procure especially as much of them are being recycled from conflict to conflict. A brand new AK-47, much coveted for its firepower and simplicity, can be purchased from a Russian factory at 240 US Dollars depending on the derivative (type) and the amount bought. In certain parts Africa, where supplies are plentiful, it can be bought for 30 USD (Controlarms, 2006:4). In some places in Angola it could be bought between 13 to 20 USD (SAS 2003, p. 271) and in 2001, according to the UN, it could be procured for as little as six US Dollars or traded for a chicken or a sack of grain (AR, 2001:1) The availability and cheapness of SALW in SSA is further enhanced by the fact that 12 African countries have joined the ranks of producers though on a much lower scale. They include; Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Namibia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Sudan, Tanzania, Guinea and Ethiopia (Bourne, 2007:60).

4.3 Portability and easiness to conceal

As their definitions demonstrate, SALW can be moved from one place to another by a single person or by a light vehicle. They can thus be smuggled quite easily from one place to another. In the Great Lakes region, SALW shipments are sometimes disguised as non-lethal cargo or as humanitarian supplies and are often
discovered only after the trafficker fails to bribe police and customs officers or when a plane crashes and reveals the hidden nature of its cargo (Boutwell and Klare, 1999:34). Small arms are sometimes imported into Nigeria hidden in clothing, vehicles or kitchen utensils (Ayissi and Sall, 2005:56).

4.4 Lethality

Though many SALW are quite simplistic in nature, their lethality has increased making it possible for a single combatant to constitute a big threat to an entire society. Today’s assault rifles and other automatic weapons can fire up to several hundred rounds a minute. An AK-47 assault rifle can release 600 rounds per minute as long as the trigger remains pressed down and when being operated in automatic mode. Its maximum range lies between 800 to 1000 meters, but its accuracy is guaranteed when used by a trained marksman with the range of 400 to 600 meters (Controlarms, 2006:3).

4.5 Usability by military, police and civilians

Due to their very nature, SALW unlike heavy conventional weapons are designed to suit police or military forces as well as civilian use. Depending on the rigor of firearms laws and control mechanisms in any given country, citizens can be in possession of anything ranging from hunting guns, simple pistols and shotguns to fully automatic weapons.

4.6 Other factors affecting the proliferation and use of SALW

The factors discussed above pertain to those qualities of SALW per se that make them attractive for use in areas experiencing tension or armed conflict in Africa. There are also other reasons why they are in such a high demand on the continent. These could be qualified as structural problems which exist due to lack of organizational skills, the necessary infrastructure, funds, failure of state etc. These show the complexity of the SALW problem and suggest that international effort is necessary to overcome it.

4.7 Porous borders

Africa is the second largest continent in the world and the second most populated as well. Due to the sheer size of some of its countries, there is the chronic problem of border security. Nigeria, one of its average-sized countries is an example. It has 770 km of shared land border with the Republic of Benin to the west, about 1500 km with Niger to the north, 1700 km with Cameroon to the east, 90 km with the Republic of Chad to the north-east and 850 km maritime border on the Atlantic Ocean. Out-stretched these tally up to 4910 km of borders which have to be controlled. Ayissi and Sall (2005:55) argue that it will be very hard to find any country in the world capable of effectively controlling such extensive borders. Arms traffickers exploit this situation to smuggle SALW into the country. It is also interesting to observe that all three largest sub-Saharan countries, namely Sudan (the continent’s overall largest), the Congo DRC (3rd overall largest) and Chad (5th overall largest)(CIA Fact Book Data, 2004) have been experiencing instability and armed conflict for long. It may well be that their size and their porous borders make it easy for weapons to be smuggled inflaming and protracting violence. The obvious fact that African and indeed Nigerian borders are abysmally porous explains the massive cache of SALW in these areas.

Conservative estimates indicate that there are about eight million small arms and light weapons in West Africa alone. Of the 640 million small arms circulating in the world, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa. Several regions of Africa have made and continue to make efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms, such at. the West Africa Moratorium on importation, the Exportation and Manufacture of small arms initiated by civil society, which has now adopted as a convention awaiting ratification by members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

To be fair, African governments are making efforts to deal with the menace caused by small arms: however, their efforts are undermined by arms brokers and governments with expansionist aspirations who push small arms into the hands of “non-state actors” for personal gain. These non-state actors usually push the same agenda from one country to another, and that is to gain control over an area with valuable mineral resource. The international community could play a vital role in curbing the proliferation of small arms. The international community ought to challenge the small arms manufacturers and to put pressure on them to slow down with the production of small arms. The UN Review Conference on small arms, which was held in June 2006 in New York, did not achieve the desired results, and so much effort is still needed to secure agreement on how to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
5. **SALW and insecurity in Nigeria**

According to Ibrahim (2003), since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999, more than 30 communal clashes, bordering on religious ethnic conflict have been recorded throughout the country with each claiming hundreds of lives and properties. Similarly, many people, including women and children had been displaced in the process, resulting in untold hardship and suffering for them. In a very fundamental way, small arms means; revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifle and carbineer, sub-machine guns, assaulted rifles and light machine guns, Dane guns, local pistols and hand grenades. With the overall persistence and massive importation of small arms into Nigeria, the country is gradually shifting from the position of absolute stability to one of uncertainty and fear. This has become a thunderbolt that should jolt Nigerian patriots. Perhaps what may be an understatement is that after a decade, Nigeria can be said the one of the head quarters of Small and Light Weapons of the world with the Niger Delta as the epicentre.

Although there is the tendency to single out the Niger Delta as Nigeria’s biggest small arms problem, the legal and illegal circulation of SALW has far-reaching effects on ethnic and religious violence and most especially on armed banditry, which is prevalent throughout the national territory. According to a study carried out by International Alert, the failure of Nigeria’s government to implement disarmament or arms control programs after the civil war of 1967-70 and after other violent conflicts within the country thereafter is at the source of the country’s SALW proliferation problem.68 The availability and of course use of SALW in religious, ethnic clashes and armed robbery has killed more than 10,000 Nigerians since 1999 i.e. an average of 1000 people per year (IRIN, 2006:17). Security forces are acquiring weapons in a bid to live up to the demands of security in the country while individuals and/or groups are buying small arms because security forces are not up to task and also because of the benefits of carrying out illegal and criminal acts (Hazen & Horner, 2007:25).

It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of SALW in circulation in Africa as a whole and in Nigeria in particular. This is partially because of the extensive nature and the porosity of Nigerian borders, corruptibility of the customs and security apparatus, incapability, lack of interest and will on the part of local government officials and politicians (Interview, 2008). But the main reason is poor record keeping. Before 2003, the only data available was a semi-official document stating that Nigeria’s citizens possessed approximately one million firearms (SAS, 2003:83). International alert reported that the number of illicit SALW in Nigeria ranges between one and three million (IA: 2). This number may seem small for a country counting up to 135 million inhabitants, but play a big role in crime, violence and insecurity in many parts of the country.

5.1 **Sources of SALW**

More than 1, 135 companies, in more than 98 countries world wide are involved in some aspect of production of small arms, ammunition and/or components (Amnesty International, 2003; Ewa, 2006)9. At least 60 of them are involved in legal export of small arms (ibid). This figure is on the increase (Omega, Foundation, 1999; Cholewa, 2006).

In the last 40 years, the number of countries producing small arms had doubled (Cholewa, ibid). The majority of these small arms producing companies are located in West European countries. The huge small arms production is one of the factors feeding the uncontrolled grey market in small arms and their transfers into irresponsible recipients (ibid).

Small arms produced or designed and licensed by the western European companies like FN Herstal, Heckler and Koch, Steyr Mannlicher, and Beretta are widely used throughout the world. They are standard equipment of the armed forces in many countries and are used by government and non government forces in ongoing armed conflicts throughout the world (Cholewa, 2006).

There is one common pattern which occurred in most of the west European arms companies at the end of the cold war. Almost all of them faced severe financial difficulties throughout the 1990s, due to the downsizing of the military forces and equipment, followed by significant reductions in production size and changes in ownership and organization (Weideche, 2005).

By 2004 all countries in Western Europe hosted companies producing small arms or their components. The military production is dominated by the Belgian company FN Herstal and the German Hecker and Kock. They also belong to the major small arms suppliers’ worldwide. They established
licensed production in a number of countries. After them, the most significant military small arms producers, and small arms producing facilities are the Italian Beretta and Australian Steyr Mannliher and French GIAT industries, the Spanish Santa Barbara Sistemas. A Belgian company, FN Herstal, is the largest SALW manufacturing company in Western Europe, and its total sales were roughly worth EUR 400m in 2003. Its most popular product, FAL assault rifles are in service in many countries. Almost 100 percent of Herstal Group sales are derived from sales outside Belgium.

The exact origins and transit countries of the illicit small arms flows and their ammunition into Nigeria is not known or well documented. While countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Serbia are often mentioned (Hazen & Horner, 2007:33), analysts point out that smugglers operating from Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon and within Nigeria itself facilitate the illegal trade.

For rebels groups operating in the Niger Delta such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) SALW deliveries come in through Nigeria’s Atlantic borders. Smugglers, profiting from the lack of effective control of the long maritime borders, use speed boats to obtain guns from ships far in the high seas. On land, weapons are said to be smuggled in through Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon (IRIN, 2006:17-18). Weapons have also made their way southwards from conflicts in Chad and Niger over the last decade and some have also come from the west through the Lagos-Benin coastal axis from as far off as Sierra Leone and Liberia (IRIN, 2006:17-18).

However, the three most notorious entry ports of illicit SALW according to the International Alert study are the South-West (Idi-Iroko and Seme in Ogun state), the port city of Warri in Delta state, and the north-eastern border with Niger and Cameroon (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states). In addition to weapons smuggled into the country, Nigeria also has its own SALW industry, the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), which is the only legal producer of arms and ammunition in the country. Its products are destined mainly for police use (NISAT Doc., 2008). DICON produces rifles, pistols, sub-machine guns, shotguns, grenades and a whole range of bullets and cartridges. In 2007, DICON reported having produced prototypes of a Nigerian brand of the AK-47 named OBJ-006 after former president Obasanjo (Vanguard, 2007).

Guns have also been produced locally by illegal craft gunsmiths but there is hardly any information on the type, quality and scale of craft production. Sporadic raids against craft producers and seizures of guns produced by them often appear in Nigerian newspapers underlining the threat posed by illegal gun production. In June 2007, Nigeria’s This Day newspaper reported the confiscation of 40 pistols from a local blacksmith in Niger State by the police while investigating a case of armed robbery. One of the arrested armed robbers had confessed having bought his gun from the craftsman. With this kind of businesses operating, it is thus difficult to ascertain the real number of arms circulating and how their proliferation and use could be curbed.

The fact that oil companies have been allowed to import arms into Nigeria or at least that arms they bought were tolerated into the country has also contributed to the massive proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta. Although the Nigerian government rejected claims in newspaper reports that Shell had imported arms for police use into the country in 1996, Shell itself admitted to have done so stating that the arms were exclusively for the police because they did not have enough money to equip themselves (Greenpeace, 2006). Human Right Watch (2004) as well as local Nigerian Newspapers reported on the distribution of guns by politicians for coercion and intimidation of opponents and of the electorate during election times. This constitutes an important source of SALW in Nigeria since politicians mainly arm unemployed youths to work for them as bodyguards during election periods. Nobody knows what happens to the weapons after elections are over.

Finally, corrupt army and police officers constitute a very important source of legal weapons turned illegal. Legal weapons have in fact been taken from the national armory and sold to gangs and to militant groups in the Niger Delta. In January 2008, the Nigerian newspaper, Vanguard reported the arrest of a police superintendent, an inspector an three other high ranking officers in Jos for supplying AK-47 rifles to a gang of armed robbers. According to the newspaper report, the superintendent had agreed on an
equal split of the booty each time the gang struck. This kind of corrupt practice by people in positions of responsibility fans the flames of SALW proliferation.

6. Role and impact

Small arms have continued to play a very important role in armed conflict, crime and thus insecurity in Nigeria. SALW such as AK-47 assault rifles, automatic pump-action shotguns, shoulder launched rockets, Beretta pistols, Browning pistols, carbine rifles, double-barrel shotguns, G-3 rifles, general-purpose machine guns, and sub-machine guns are widely in circulation in Nigeria and are the weapons of choice in armed crime although knives, machetes and other blunt instruments are also used (Hazen & Horner, 2007:61-62). Since 1999, over 100,000 Nigerians have lost their lives in ethno-religious conflicts which have been characterized by an increased involvement of SALW from local and international sources.

As it has already been demonstrated, guns and other SALW are playing an ever increasing role in fomenting violence and insecurity in Nigeria. They are used for criminal activities ranging from petty crimes, through more serious crimes like armed robbery and hostage taking up to homicide, most especially for politically motivated killings around election periods. In December 2001, Federal Justice Minister and Attorney General Bola Ige was shot dead in his home in Ibadan, in the south-western state of Oyo. This was the highest ranking politician assassinated during Obasanjo’s tenure as president. Another high-profile shooting which shook Nigeria was the murder of Marshall Harry, the national vice chairman for the South-South Zone of the largest opposition party on March 5, 2003. Though these were not the first assassinations in Nigeria, the increased use of SALW particularly in the murder of popular figures and in other crime have of course led to an increase in the lethality of attacks and have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in Nigeria. Otu (2003:94) quotes Nigeria’s This Day newspaper to demonstrate the lethality and the degree of fear of armed robbery with firearms as follows:

“Every day, at least three people somewhere in the country will be killed, and as readers go through the paper, a head is being blown away, a stomach is being ripped open and a limb is being shattered by bullets whizzing off the barrels of an armed robber’s gun.

(…)

From Lagos to Abuja, Kaduna to Bida, Onitsha to Yola, armed hoodlums showing neither mercy nor pity have unleashed a reign of terror on Nigerians. They are all-over in towns and villages, in ghettos and GRAs. No one is safe, no place is sacred, and no security is inviolable. The armed hoodlums are not just daring, they are ruthless. They steal, they maim, they rape and they kill…. ”

In a small scale study that was carried out by a group of researchers in a hospital in Kano following the ethno-religious clashes of 2004, it was observed that though the majority of casualties were not due to firearms, the majority of SALW victims (66%), sustained permanent disabilities. The study also revealed that most of the SALW victims were males which would suggest a considerable weakening of economic productivity, since women generally stay at home in Kano.67 The researchers however concluded that the low numbers of patients affected by SALW usage was an under representation of the real picture because in a place like Kano, it is generally considered futile to take people with gunshot wounds to hospital because of the lack of money and also because of the conviction that the victim will die anyway. In addition, custom and tradition dictates that a person be buried immediately after they are confirmed dead and thus Muslim victims are not taken to hospital. Finally, poor record keeping, incorrect coding and incomplete files decrease the reported incidence (JPHP, 2007:426).

Between November 2006 and February 2007, 212 incidents of violent crime were reported in the international press. 189 of these were carried out with firearms, 34 with other tools and 2 even involved bombs. In these incidents, a total of 413 people were killed, 410 were injured, 194 were abducted and 5 were reported missing (Hazen & Horner, 2007:68).

Bearing in mind that this study was carried out on material reported in the international press, the real SALW harm is much higher. The researchers of these incidences also observed that the biggest negative impacts were suffered by unarmed citizens while armed perpetrators did not incur as much serious consequences.
The end result is that unarmed civilians, the majority of the Nigerian population live in perpetual fear and cannot count on the forces of law and order to guarantee a minimal security. And because the latter are incapable and/or unwilling to deliver, the whole situation becomes a vicious cycle as citizens seek to protect themselves from becoming victims through other means. Some turn to forming vigilante groups or arming themselves with small arms as the only way of fighting against armed robbers and thereby contributing to SALW proliferation and the cycle of violence that breeds and sustains fear and insecurity. SALW have made armed banditry in Nigeria much easier for the perpetrators, more lethal for the victims and more complicated for law-enforcement officers to apprehend the gangs with devastating effects on the economy, politics and social life.

7. The Niger Delta, the epicentre of proliferation of the SALW

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is a home of large oil and gas operation, it is flooded with dangerous small arms and light weapons (SALW). The increasing activities of insurgent and militant armed groups pose a threat to residents and the security of the Nigerian State as well as the booming petro-business in the region.

The region suffers so much neglect and dejection from the Federal Government and multinational companies. For example Oloibiri in Bayelsa State where oil was first discovered in Nigeria is now abandoned, after drying up the oil wells and causing so much damage to the natural habitat of the community. Agitation for resource control for the Niger Delta people, manipulation of youth groups by local politicians, poverty, underdevelopment and widespread youth unemployment is the main reason of the emergence of armed crime, proliferation of small arms, and emergency militant group such as the Niger Delta people’s volunteer force (NDPVF), the bush boys and the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV). The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, home to large oil and gas operations, is thus awash with dangerous Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (Wellington, 2007).

From the various police and military raids of the groups’ armories and hide outs, or the government initiated disarmament or cash-for-arms programs, weapons have been recovered in droves. The weapons vary from AK-47s, Czech SAs, Light Machine guns, Czech model 26s, stem MK 2s, Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), MAT-49s, MG 36s, Berettas, HK G3s, FN-FALs, home-made guns, pump-action, shot guns and other sophisticated European-made assault rifles and explosives are in the hands of the militant groups in the Niger Delta (Wellington, Ibid).

These weapons-so called SALWs - are brought into the delta from various locations. Most of the assault rifles-such as the Russian AK-47, the German G3, the Belgian FN-FAL, the Czech machine guns and the Serbian RPGs are supplied by illegal dealers and sellers. Some of the illegal gun dealers are Nigerians (Ibid). In October, 2006, the Rivers State police command arrested Chris Ndudi Njoku, a 45-year-old businessman who specializes in importing prohibited firearms into Nigeria, and supplied to arms groups in the delta (CEHRD, 2006). There are also European dealers who are involved in trafficking illicit SALW into the Niger Delta region, though in recent times none has been caught. Nigeria has very porous borders on both its land and sea edges which make such illegal importations of weapons into the country easier (Op. cit). The smugglers use speed boats to connect with ships on the high seas, and then ferry the arms back to shore. Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVF) confirmed this method to reporters in 2005, “we are very close to international waters, and it’s easy to get weapons from ships” (IRN Quote in Wellington, 2007).

Most of the illegal smuggling of weapons into the Niger Delta region is done through the sea. Additionally, poorly paid Nigerian soldiers who have served in peace keeping missions in other African countries, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, often return home and sell their weapons to non state combatants or gun dealers (Florquin and Berman, 2005). Security operatives are also responsible for the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the region.

On July 9, 2007, about 4.30pm, a Delta state police team arrested a Warrant Officer (WO2) serving with the Nigerian Air Force 33 Logistic section in Makurdi, Benue State, while transferring arms to a location in the Niger Delta. In his Toyota Corolla car with registration No. AJ41 MKD, there were 5 assault rifles, 449 rounds of AK47 live ammunition, 4 brand new live jackets and 5 empty magazines.
When the police interrogated the air force officer turned arms dealer, he mentioned the name of a senator as being the owner of the weapons and that the arms are from the Republic of Chad (Human Rights News, 2007).

At about 1.30am on Saturday 14, 2007, heavily armed soldiers from the second Amphibious Brigade also called Bori camp, a military cantonment in Port Harcourt, Rivers State attacked simultaneously the Mini-Okoro and Elenewo police stations in Port Harcourt, killing 6 police officers on duty and carted away scores of newly supplied AK47 riffles to the stations (CEHRD, 2007). The soldiers who supplied arms to the militants in the region are said to be facing a secret military trial in Port Harcourt. Huge amount of money were allegedly later found in their (the soldiers) bank accounts.

Also, 15 army officers, 3 of them Colonels, 2 Lieutenant – Colonels, I major and 9 non-commissioned officers are facing a court martial in Kaduna over the sudden disappearance of arms and ammunition from the armory. The weapons were allegedly removed from the Nigerian Army Central Ordnance Depot in Kaduna and were subsequently traced to militants in the Niger Delta. The weapons are AK-47 riffles, General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMGs) and boxes of ammunition and grenades (Vanguard, 2008).

Some of the affected soldiers had reportedly confessed to have supplied arms to Henry Okah, a South Africa-based arms dealer and one of the leaders of the Movement for the Emancipations of the Niger Delta (MEND). Dokubo-Asari, Nger Delta militant leader also confirmed this, and said Okah had supplied him arms ranging from AK-47, General Purpose machine guns, cans of bullets, G3 and RPGs (Sahara Reporters, 2007).

Some of the weapons in the armed groups’ stockpiles are acquired after attacks on police and military outposts. During such attacks, the militant groups break into the police or military armories and cart away arms. There are many cases in which armed groups conduct well-coordinated attacks and kill Nigerian security officials (The Punch, 2006). On July 12, 2006, for example, MEND combatants killed four naval personnel and injured 3 soldiers who were escorting a Chevron Oil tanker along Chonomi Creeks in the Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta State and confiscated their weapons (ibid).

On Sunday May 11, 2008, heavily armed gunmen who were carrying out oil bunkering (oil theft) killed 2 of the policemen at a duty post in Bayelsa State, and carted away their weapons (CEHRD, 2008). Apart from the sophisticated European weapons in the hands of the armed groups in the delta region, smaller petty criminal cartels that are at it different embryonic stages also rely on locally fabricated short gun called “Akwa” in the local parlance. The local crafting and manufacturing of small arms is done mostly in Awka, (capital of Anambra State) in South-eastern Nigeria, hence the code-name. And those who find it difficult to obtain weapons from external sources are obliging to the locally called “awka-made” (Florquin & Berman, 2005)

The military and police are also increasing their own stocks of weapons and in an effort to fortify, to able combat the rising armed violence in the country, while illegal civilian importation is also continuing. The problem is demand. The security forces are importing weapons in order to meet the demands of their role to provide security in the country (Hazen and Horner, 2007)

8. Factors contributing to proliferation of small arms in the Niger delta region

Weapons flooded the Niger Delta from various locations over the world. Most of the assault weapons such as the Russian AK-47, the German G3, the Belgian FN-FAL, the Czech machine guns and the Serbian RPGs are supplied by illegal dealers and sellers. Others came in through land, sea and creeks as a result of our porous borders allowing gun smugglers from a variety of African countries. Many of the weapons also come from war-ton countries in Africa. Additionally, poorly paid Nigerian Solders who have served in peace keeping missions in other African countries, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, often return home and sell their weapons to combatants or gun dealers.

Babafemi, Ojuju, a researcher on arms stated that many of the arms smuggling rings operate out of Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Nigeria (IRIN, May 2006). The smugglers use speed boats to connect with ships on the high seas and then ferry the arms back to the shore. This method was confirmed to
reporters by the jailed militant leader Alhaji Dokubo-Asari in 2005, adding that “we are very close to international waters and it is very easy to get weapons from ships”.

Furthermore, (IRIN, May 2006) also added that some weapons in the armed groups stock piles are acquired after attacks on police and military outposts. During such attacks, the militant groups break into the police or military armories and cart away arms. There are also recorded cases of such acts. For example, on July 12, 2006, MFND Combatants killed four naval personnel and injured three soldiers who were escorting a chevron oil tanker along Channon creeks in the Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta State and in turn confiscated their weapons.

According to (punch, July 13th 2006), in Port-Harcourt on the Eve of the Governorship and House of Assembly elections in April 14th armed militants attacked the Mini-Onoroke, Elelenwo, Police Stations and carted away recently arrived AK-47s, killing many police officers during the attacks. (The Midweek Telegraph, April 18-24). Corrupt security officials also sell weapons to militants. For example, before the April elections, politicians in Niger State imported massive amounts of arms for their ‘security detachment’ (which also likely went to thugs hired to help rig the elections (Vanguard, April 13). Additionally, armed groups carried out oil bunkering (Theft) operations, exchanging bunkered oil for weapons or selling oil and then purchasing guns. Oil money is the major force behind the proliferation of weapons in the region.

Major Bunkering groups also supply gangs with weapons and also have them act like armed gangs, while they travel along the water ways and bunkering routes looking for pipe lines from which to pilfer oil. Gangs and criminal groups were also hired to have them provide security, and during election season to help intimidate voters to vote in their favour. Most politicians acquired their weapons from illegal dealers helping to promote the trade.

Arms are also manufactured secretly in our local industries in Awka, the capital city of Anambra State in Eastern Nigeria. There, Local blacksmiths produce weapons popularly called, Awka made”. The Awka guns cannot be classified as automatic weapons because the qualities of the weapons are poor. Nevertheless, the gun can inflict serious injuring or even death on its target at close range. However, in October, 2006, the Rivers State Police command arrested Chris Ndudi Njoku, a 45 years old businessman who specialized in importing prohibited fire arms into Nigeria. In his possession were hundreds of G3s, Ak47s and Berretta automatic rifles. There are also European dealers involved in the trade but on like their Nigerian counterparts, they always escape the wrath of the law, due to their high level connections with powerful figures in various governments. (This Day, February 18, 2003).

8.1 The manipulation of youth groups by local politicians

The transition to Democracy in 1999 accentuated youth militancy as most politicians used hired “thugs” to carry out violence to ensure their victory at the polls. In 1999 to 2003 February, State and local elections, all parties particularly the People’s Democratic Parties (PDP), recruited and armed members of the youth groups to intimidate their opposition. The entire country broke into violence and Hundreds of people were killed during the political violence. According to a local non-governmental organization- The Institute for Humanitarian Law, involved in monitoring the 2003 state and federal elections said the level of violence in Rivers State during the election amounted to a “low intensity armed struggle, where weapons and firearms of various types and sophistication were freely used. Most national and international monitors recorded high levels of violence, fraud and irregularities in Rivers State and other Niger Delta states. Leading European Union election observes to conclude ‘that minimum standards for democratic elections were not met.’ If the 2003 general elections was adjudged to be properly conducted, then the 2007 elections went down in the annals of Nigeria’s history as the worst election ever conducted in terms of shoddy preparation, electoral fraud and exponential violence. The impact of this democratic failure on arms proliferation in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta region in particular.

8.2 Poverty, underdevelopment and widespread youth unemployment

Poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment are some of the reasons why militancy is becoming more and more successful in the Niger Delta. Available statistics show that these indices are quite below the national average and present a dire situation of squalor and deprivation (UNDP, 2006). Tom and Asari were able to recruit from the large pool of unemployed youths, some of whom are believed to be university
graduates, frustrated with extreme poverty, underdevelopment and lack of job opportunities. Although the core Niger Delta States comprising Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta receive the highest allocation of oil revenues of Nigeria’s thirty six states yet many scholars believe that the vast majority of the populace tend not to benefit from these huge federal allocations largely, because of government corruption and the mismanagement of oil revenue. Coastal villages near Port Harcourt lack basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, medical care and roads. Large slums within Port Harcourt are submerged under piles of waste. This gross underdevelopment in the midst of vast oil wealth has bred intense frustration and resentment among the youths in Rivers State.

Sometimes in Rivers State under Governor Peter Odili’s administration, attempts were made to recover arms used by urban terror gangs and cult groups. In what can be vividly described as a dramatic turn of event in Rivers State, the groups were said to have surrendered their deadly weapons to the Government of Rivers State in the wake of the new law and renewed government’s anti-small arms proliferation campaigns against the groups. On Monday, June 28, 2004, the Government made a public display of 3 automatic and 1 locally made pistols, 4 assorted rifles including pump action guns, and a large number of bullets. On Wednesday, July 14, 2004, a local group surrendered another cache of weapons allegedly to have been responsible for the violence and blood letting in the State. The weapons recovered include 122 Russian made AK 47 rifles and 8 sub machine guns. Among the weapons were 2 Nigerian Army weapons with number NA83/37739 and NA83/21 3.

On Wednesday, July 14, 2004 at a colourful ceremony in Okirika, which was well attended by government officials, traditional rulers from the area, community people in their presence, Tom Ateke was said to have handed over 30 AK 47 rifles, 5 dynamites and charms and amulets to the traditional ruler of the town, who handed over same to the Government in the State through the Okrika Local Government Chairman; while receiving the weapons, the Okirika was quoted as saying: “we should express our gratitude to the group led by Ateke for surrendering arms and ammunition in their possession.”

On Friday, July 16, 2004, at Abuloma, another Okirika community in a similar manner to that of Tom Ateke, some youths of the community said to have been involved in violent activities in the country, reportedly handed over 19 sophisticated weapons, including Assault rifles and ammunitions.

On July 23, 2004, a news release signed by the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor of Rivers State, Emma Okah (Esq.) claimed that 137 more rifles were surrendered in Rivers State, bringing the total so far surrendered to about 307. Out of the additional 137 rifles, 130 were AK 47 while 8 were pump-action guns. 30 out of the 130 AK 47 were said to be surrendered by some youths in Asari-Toru Local Government Area, another community in the State that had suffered tremendous violence and destructions of lives and properties linked to the activities of the cult groups. 100 of the AK 47 came from Kula, a rural village in the Degema Local Government Area, while 7 pump action guns were received from youths from Abua/Odual Local Government, another hot bed of violent activities in the State (see The Tide, July 19, Monday, 2004). These arms surrender in Rivers State, although controversial gives an insight into the extent of arms proliferation. The cache of arms tends to grow with time as the recent frightening amount of arms and ammunition surrendered by militants in the recent federal government amnesty deals with the insurgent youths of Niger Delta.

9. Conclusion

Small arms proliferation is a serious problem facing Africa, Nigeria and indeed the Niger Delta region. The proliferation of arms had led to the emergence of armed groups in the Niger Delta. The manipulation of youth groups by local politicians and frequent attracts on government & multinational companies in the Niger Delta. Proliferation of small arms in the Niger Delta is promoted by the porous nature of our Nigerian boarders on land, sea and in creeks. Arms also come in through illegal dealers as well as security military personnel who went for peace keeping operations. Politicians also buy arms for youth in order to intimidate their opposition party. Corrupt police/security officer contributes greatly to the proliferation of illegal arms, because there are cases of illegal arm dealers and militants who were caught and arrested, but was released later after given bribes. However Nigeria has made quality efforts to stop the proliferation of small arms. These efforts are ranging from forming coalition committee that launched the MOP up arms campaign (MAC) aimed at halting the proliferation of arms and ridding the Niger Delta of small arms and light weapon used in growing political violence and criminal activities. in the region. The recent mind
boggling quantity of arms and ammunition surrendered by Niger delta militants is indicative of the scope of the menace of arms proliferation in the country. It behooves every patriotic Nigerian to genuinely contribute to curb this menace, even now.

10. Policy recommendations

First, with 100 million SALW, Africa already has more than its fair share of weapons in circulation. If this and the assertion the assertion that the availability of SALW aggravate and prolong violence are truisms, then these weapons, much of which are in illegal possession should be collected and managed in a more effective and transparent way. This could even be additionally beneficial to the governments as recollected weapons especially those initially stolen from national arsenals can make the purchase of new weapons unnecessary, although recollection schemes usually recommend their immediate destruction to avoid them getting into circulation again. To curb the internal proliferation of SALW, it will only be in the best interest of states and governments to secure stockpiles i.e. making it impossible for the theft of weapons from military or police arsenals. For more effectiveness, countries may be required to take stock of existing stockpiles and match the results with the minimum requirements for police and eventual military use. If survluses do exist, these could under strict conditions.

Second, a radical review and overhauling of gun legislation by way of greater cooperation within the four sub-Saharan regional organizations could be very instrumental in limiting the amount of guns and other SALW in circulation and thus reducing their use. It is true that three of these regional organizations have come together to work out ways of reducing the proliferation of SALW and related materials, two of which are binding, but there has been no attempt to create a common gun legislation. With the major challenge of border porosity in many African countries, gun legislation limiting the legal proliferation of weapons in civilian use can only be successful, if neighboring countries also have similar legislations. In case this does not happen, guns will inevitably flow from countries within a given region with stringent legislation to others with less strict laws. This proposal therefore aims primarily at addressing legal civilian firearms possession as one of the major sources of SALW proliferation as we have seen in most African societies.

Third, efforts should be geared towards gradually reducing the use of guns by police forces and possibly stopping it altogether could also be one other way of reducing small arms proliferation in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Examples from other places like the UK have proven that it is not absolutely necessary for them to bear guns. This is not a proposal for them to completely abandon guns yet, but an attempt to reduce their visibility and creating a new perception of law and order without the current ultimate symbol of police authority which is the gun. The use of firearms will of course continue to be an integral part of police training but they shall not be required to carry guns while going about their daily activities. If need be in case of emergency or for special operations, they could still bear arms. The idea is that if all police guns are kept under tightly secure conditions at police garrisons and only handed out to officers in times of need, control will be more effective and the possibility of theft will be reduced to a minimum. This kind of project will warrant efficient planning and a long time frame to guarantee success given the nature and character of our society and governance.

Civil society is a very dynamic and fast growing sector in most of SSA with a lot of potential and energy in almost any field, be it in education, health, human rights and good governance or any other kind of advocacy. For the implementation of any of the possibilities mentioned above, it will be absolutely vital to tap on the potentials of civil society which can complement governments’ regional and national endeavors with its enormous expertise and nearness to the grassroots. Civil society organizations could, for example, be very useful and effective in carrying out public awareness campaigns on the dangers of gun possession and usage which has endangered the security of the citizenry.

To reduce small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta, some measures are to be taken. There is need to prevent the flow of weapons by illegal dealers into illegal hands in Nigeria. Police should live up to their responsibility and shun bribery and corruption: and arrest anyone found with illegal use of arms. The Government should lighten up security in the boarders of sea creeks and land.

Government should provide employment for unemployed youth and provide scholarship for the less privilege. Government should encourage capacity building that will be aimed at highlighting the need
for a tight security and the dangers of bribery and corruption. Government should provide good working
conditions for the Nigerian Force. Government should see to the needs of the Niger Delta People
(Resource Management albeit Resource Control) and inequitably divide national oil resources according to
the regional oil production capacity.

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