



# The Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the Proliferation of Armed Group Conflicts in Northeastern Nigeria: Interrogating the Boko Haram Phenomenon

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**Abstract:** The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) worldwide to Africa, specifically, Northern Nigeria heralded the explosion of social crises that culminated in the region's insecurity situation for more than a decade now. This study is a critical and thorough investigation of the SALW in exacerbating armed conflicts in general in the Northeastern part of Nigeria. The problem is the scenario in which the armed conflicts threaten to entirely destabilize the region and how the SALW is increasing despite the global efforts to contain their spread for security reasons. This research used a qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Both the primary and secondary sources were used. The primary source was the interview conducted with selected informants in the relevant area of study. The secondary source was the use of available literature on the subject matter of study, and the discussions were made using thematic analytical interpretations. The research discovered that the rampant armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria are reminiscent of the spread of SALW in the region, which tantamount to the present critical security situation. The work recommends, among other numerous suggestions, that efforts should be intensified in intelligence gathering to detect the networking of the racketeers in the armed business and contain them appropriately.

**Keywords:** *Armed conflict, crisis, Northeastern Nigeria, peace, SALW, security*

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## INTRODUCTION

SALW are firearms, mini bombs, propelled grenades and rifles used for attacks and defense in an armed conflict. The SALW are locally made and are imported from abroad. The locally made include bombs, grenades and firearms that are manufactured locally and illegally sometimes. The imported SALW include rocket launchers, missile systems, light machine guns, revolvers, pistols and other related ones. Small Arms are weapons that can be manipulated by a single fellow while Light Weapons are designed for a collective operation or joint use. Light Weapons are mightier and detrimental than Small Arms (GIABA, 2013).

SALW have an influential effect on the wellbeing, sustenance, existence, security and the survival of mankind worldwide. The spread of SALW is correlated with human suffering and humanitarian crises contemporarily. SALW

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are related to international security issues, border management, terrorism, crimes, issues associated with public health, socioeconomic development, deradicalisation and post-conflict peace reconstruction. A larger percentage of SALW are not government controlled and although; they are being used by the government for defense and security purposes, SALW are mostly operated by illegal mercenaries, violent sects, terrorists, ethnic militias and criminal groups illegally (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006).

A report revealed that SALW worth 100 to 500 million are currently in operation globally apart from the other millions designed for formal security use and civilian utilisation. Even the above figures are tentative and not sacrosanct because SALW are not recorded in valid data on the weapons business making it difficult to determine accurately because they are sometimes produced and distributed clandestinely. Countries that manufactured SALW are above seventy (70) in the globe. An open contact from the developers of weapons to nation-states and private companies are a principal source of supply globally. This type of purchase is often supervised strictly by world countries. Precisely, in 1996 alone, the US State Departments authorised around \$470 million of SALW for export. Cold War period extra stockpiles is the next source of SALW procurement today globally. The participants of the War are unloading and discounting the surplus weapons for the global armed market. The third source is the subterranean armed rackets by producer countries to other nation-states or insurgents and criminal gatherings.

A current information from the United Nation reveals the strategy in which SALW are unofficially distributed, transferred under the watch of representatives of some states in the world to other destinations and then moved into conflict areas. A reasonable percentage of these SALW nearly 59% are possess by non-military, 38% are possessed and controlled and operated by state's security personnel, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups (Global Policy Forum, 2011). Current figures indicated that 640 million SALW circulated globally and out of this figure, one hundred (100) million found their destination in Africa out of which 30 million are spread or obtainable in Sub-Saharan Africa and 10 million of the weapons are estimated to be in West Africa. The conglomeration of SALW in the region resulted in prolonged conflicts, violence, humanitarian crises and human suffering for many decades (Method, 2018). Nigeria is one of the countries with the heavy presence of SALW. In 2016, the United Nations raised the alarm that the SALW circulation had significantly increased in West Africa to about 500 million and that 350 million out of the total is spread in Nigeria alone. The report concluded that Nigeria is being flooded with illegal SALW that were smuggled into the country through unofficial means (Nwachukwu, 2018).

Northern Nigeria represents a main landing base for illegal SALW which are being trafficked through the Lagos border, Cameroon, Niger and Chad borders into the Northern parts of the country for illicit activities. This has been the major explanation behind the proliferation of protracted conflicts across the North in recent years. This research is an investigation of the role of SALW in the escalation of armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The study area was chosen following a thorough academic investigation which discloses inadequate or total lack of works in this area with specific consideration to the Northeastern part of the country.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, relevant and documented works on the subject matter of investigation are reviewed critically to enable for identification of research gap and contribution to knowledge. The literature was reviewed thematically as follows: Small Arms and Light Weapons: a conceptualisation; the global spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons; Emergence of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa; Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria, emergence, causes and spread and the legal and institutional basis against illicit trafficking of SALW.

### *Examining the Meaning and Nature of SALW*

Small Arms are defined as revolvers, automatic pistols, AK47, carbines, mini-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light Weapons are sophisticated automated guns, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, rocket system launcher, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm (Meek & Stott, 2004). Meek and Stott (2004) further submitted that SALW are reserve of countries, non-operative, antiquated, worn out and hijacked mini-automatic and automatic ammunitions and target constructed sniper rifles of a calibre up to and including 12.7 mm.

In another view, Small Arms are conceived as any form of manufactured inimical weapons which are used to repel or attack, or may be easily transformed to ward off attack or launch one, bullet or projectile by the activation of an explosive. These include inter-alia revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles

and light machine guns. Light Weapons are perceived as tools initiated by few individuals serving under a team, but in some circumstances, they may be utilised by a single person. They include heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibre of less than 100 mm. The above explanation indicates that Small Arms differ from light Weapons in their nature, purpose and operation. The Small Arms are usually individualistic in use while Light Arms are operational for group purposes and collective use and strike.

SALW are small arms that are manipulated individually or collectively for both legal and illicit purposes. They include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm. Similar ammunitions and bombs fall within the category of SALW. Comparatively, SALW are affordable, accessible, quick to handle by both state security apparatus legally and other international agencies, but bigger weapons are difficult to handle and operate. It is believed that out of the existing 640 million globally, about 60% are operated illegally by armed groups, insurgents and criminals. The international community is addressing the Small Arms problem from two perspectives; providers and users. On the providers side, strategies are made on surveillance and fostering controls over the manufacturing, branding and transaction in Small Arms. On the users side, efforts have been made in concentrating on understanding what motives those seeking to acquire the weapons have ([United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2008](#)).

Small Arms are identified as ammunitions created for self-use including little automated guns, sub-machine guns, pistols, fully automatic rifles and assault rifles, and semi-automatic rifles. Small Arms also includes firearms as rocket launchers and portable to expel attacks. Small Arms also consists of ammunitions including cartridge cases, primers, propellant powders, bullet or projectiles, that are used in a Small Arms or Light Weapons. Light Weapons are weapons that are initiated for operation by a small group working as a team, heavy machine guns, automatic cannons, howitzers, mortars of less than 100 mm calibre, grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons and air defense weapons ([Saferworld, 2012](#)).

Most of the international organisations and agencies agreed to the above definitions and classifications of SALW conventionally to the extent that the conceptualisation can be officially recognised internationally. For instance, the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other international bodies accepted the above discussed meaning of SALW.

## **THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF SALW AND THE IMPLICATIONS**

SALW are in circulation in the world today more than ever in the history of the globe and are directly associated with conflicts and armed group assault globally. For instance, in the United Nations Conference on combating under the auspice of the Security Council Debate, Francois Delattre, a representative of France and an associate of the European Union stated that there are some 800 SALW in the world and were the reason for 90% of victims of weapons conflicts. He noted that the incidence was continuously emerging, and the unlawful smuggling of those ammunitions was an obstacle to progress in many weak states. In an opening address in the session, David Pressman, a representative of the United States of America, revealed that the conservative estimate of spread of SALW was estimated at \$1 billion annually with black market accounting for an additional \$200 million ([United Nations, 2015](#)).

The Security Council in 2015 reported that Small Arms facilitate the rampant killings of innocent souls, it has also stagnated the productivity and the social cohesion on which societal segments flourish and co-exist peacefully. These are the weapons of terminating lives faster, easy to handle, available in large quantity, most accidental tools of death. The worst suffering of mankind was also made possible by the existence of accessed weapons. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, reiterated that a rampant spread of arms was responsible for 250 conflicts previously, amounting to about 50, 000 deaths each year and records number of internally displaced persons ([United Nations, 2015](#)).

In the Security Council meeting, the President of Cote d'Ivoire Karamoko Diakete recounted the terror that his country underwent during electoral violence when groups were distributed with SALW by politicians. The consequences were the death of thousands of people based on some reports. The Council meeting recognised that after the removal of Mu' ammar Ghaddafi in Libya, arms poured into the Sub-Saharan Africa feeding terrorists activities in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The representative of the Chinese government, Lie Jieyi, said that the emergence of SALW followed by the advancement in technology and internet, had set the world in an unbearable condition. The representative of the Russian Federation, Petr Iliichev, narrated that his state was aware of the increasing spread of

SALW which were used by illegal armed groups and insurgents groups. He suggested that the member states must abide by the United Nations Programme of Action on SALW (United Nations, 2015).

The representative of Chad, Mahamat Zene Cherif, lamented that his country had been shattered by the debilitating impacts of SALW, suffering widespread death, atrocities and displacement. Similarly, the Nigerian representative, U. Joy Ugwu, revealed that his country was plagued by violence, which was facilitated by the easy availability of SALW. The representative of Spain, Roman Oyarzun Marchesi, said that SALW were related to the largest casualties of deaths contemporarily and are one of the factors for expanding terrorist network today. The victims of the illicit trade were the civilians, vulnerable and weak groups are specifically suffered, as victims of force sexual harassment, underage conscription into army or even human protectors. Rafael Damiro Ramirez Carreno from Venezuela, recalled that huge distribution of arms had prolonged violence and abuse of human conditions particularly in Middle East and Northern Africa. Ismael from Angola narrated that the unexpected repercussions of easing possession of SALW fueled terrorism and criminal networks across the globe. Raimonda who represented Lithuania expressed that illegal procurement of SALW globally resulted in 500, 000 loss of lives each year, internally displaced persons and compelled migrations, sexual assault, conscription of underage by violent armed groups and shattering communities around the world (United Nations, 2015).

### **FACTORS THAT AID THE EMERGENCE OF SALW IN AFRICA: THE REPERCUSSIONS**

The major factor that is attributed in the emergence of SALW in Africa is illicit trafficking. Africa is one of the biggest continents with ocean and land borders, porous borders, jungles and widespread deserts which made it easier for trafficking of weapons into the borders of African countries. This is because it is difficult to identify any country or continent in the globe that has the leverage of perfectly monitoring such contiguous borders (Yacubu, 2005). Local arms production is another factor that led to the spread of SALW in Africa in recent years (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2002). In the 1980s, the level of local arms production in Africa was minimal. But, recently, with the emergence of sustained protracted ethnic militias, ethnoreligious crises, armed rebel groups, criminal gangs, terrorists and religious insurgents, local production skyrocketed which fueled armed conflicts in the continents particularly Sub-Saharan Africa (Ohene-Asare, Aklavon, Mossou, & Ikelegbe, 2014).

Theft of arms belonging to individuals or states or organisations led to the arming of armed groups and spread of illicit weapons in Africa in contemporary times. It is also noted that the quest for easy profit and money making led to diversion of SALW in Africa by the supplier countries who do not care about the intent and purpose of the users since they are making billions of dollars from the illegal business. The volatile nature of African politics is another causal factor in which the politicians sponsored ethnic militias and thugs by arming them with sophisticated weapons to help them win an election through the unleashing of violence and terror in intimidating the opposition. After the election, these armed thugs will not return the weapons instead, they divert them towards illegal operations including banditry kidnappings, burglary and communal clashes as obtainable in many African states today (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2008).

Other factors that led to the proliferation of in Africa SALW include the socioeconomic situation in the continent such as poverty, ignorance, unemployment inequality, hunger, disease, malnutrition, injustice, corruption and misgovernance. Many African youth found themselves in a hopeless situation that made them vulnerable and easy prey for recruitment into criminal activities because they felt their lives do not matter and are not beneficial or benefitting from the abundant resources in their countries due to injustice meted on them by the ruling class and pervasive corruption and inequality (Ago & Yang, 2015; Keili, 2009; United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2008).

SALW have many effects on African security. Most of the armed conflicts in Africa are fueled by the presence and accessibility to weapons. This has ranged from insurgency in Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger to ethnoreligious clashes in Central African Republic, ethnic chaos in South Sudan, insurgency in Kenya, Ethiopia and ethnic clashes in Uganda. In addition, in some countries, the nature of the effects of weapons is tremendous as in Nigeria where apart from insurgency, the presence of illicit weapons led to farmers-herders clash, ethnic clashes, armed banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, religious clashes and political militarism. The presence of these weapons displaced millions of Africans into IDPs, led to raping, underage soldiers, violence on women and children, economic crises, health disasters and refugees (United Nations, 2015).

### ***Emergence, Causes and Spread of SALW in Nigeria***

The spread of SALW at the global scale permeated other parts of the world and one of the worst hit regions is the African continent. In Africa, it was estimated that more than half of the illicit weapons found their way into Sub-Saharan Africa via the route of Libya to Mali, Somalia, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Nigeria is believed to be one of the biggest destinations for the illegal weapons in the world. There are two varied positions on the presence of SALW in Nigeria. one of the views suggested that there is a reported 650 million SALW in operation in the globe, 100 million are in Africa and 30 million of the reported arms are in Africa south of the Sahara with an estimated 10 million in Nigeria in which a significant portion of it is circulated in Northern Nigeria. The second view reported by the United Nations indicated that there are about 500 million SALW in Sub-Saharan Africa and 350 million of it is located in Nigeria currently (Method, 2018). This is devastating and outrageous in terms of violent clashes and deaths toll in the area for the previous years.

The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has many causes. A major cause is trafficking through borders. Nigeria has 770 kilometres of land border neighbouring Republic of Benin, around 1, 500 kilometres with the Republic of Niger, 1, 700 kilometres with Cameroon and 90 kilometres with Chad. Nigeria also has 850 kilometres of maritime border in the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the land borders with Benin Republic, Niger, Cameroon and Chad are porous and are difficult to manage effectively. Smugglings and trafficking of illicit goods, contraband materials and SALW easily prevailed untraced. This is how the weapons found their way into Nigeria through an illicit means in most cases (Chigozie, 2010). The demise of the Libyan President, Mu'ammarr Ghaddafi, paved the way for arming of insurgent and armed groups from the Europe and America through the North African borders to the Central Africa and West Africa to Nigeria. weapons influx into Nigeria from Libya through Mali and Niger after the collapse of order and security in Libya (Nowak & Gsell, 2018).

Trafficking in SALW has been ongoing since 1990s in Nigeria which suffice it to say that, the emergence of illicit weapons predated the Northern Nigeria armed group crises. For instance, in August 1999, the Nigerian Customs apprehended six (6) West African nationals in a board in Lagos with a 75, 000 round of ammunition and bags containing rifles. In 2001, 10, 000 magazines were apprehended in Ikeja Lagos. The Nigerian Police also apprehended smugglers in Alabata, near Abeokuta, confiscating 26, 500 cartridges obscured in 106 boxes. The Port of Warri in the Niger-Delta is also identified as a hotspot for arms smugglings and unlawful transaction. The borders in Northern Nigeria between Niger, Cameroon and Chad served as convenient routes for illegal trafficking in weapons and other criminal activities because of the nature of the porous borders (Yacubu, 2005). SALW proliferated in Northern Nigeria when the full-blown insurgency emerged in 2009 in Northeastern Nigeria in which the insurgents took over nearly total control of the Nigerian border in the Northeast between Cameroon and Niger in which the dangerous weapons found their way into Sub-Saharan Africa through the Mali route from Libya (Nowak & Gsell, 2018).

The SALW emerged in Northern Nigeria more pronounced and in abundance when the local production took over the external supply. The insurgents, criminals and other armed groups found their way in Mali, Libya and other terrorists dens and got an intensive training on the manufacture of these weapons which culminated in local production. For instance, in Northern Nigeria specifically in the Northeast, the Boko Haram insurgents produced local propelled grenades, bombs and other weapons for their operation. Another means in which weapons emerged in Northern Nigeria is the theft of state weapons. Sometimes the insurgents attacked the security base in Northern Nigeria unawares and carted sophisticated weapons (Nowak & Gsell, 2018).

The emergence of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria fueled armed conflicts of variant magnitude. It led to a significant rise in crime in various perspectives and ramifications. Another consequence of having an illegal possession to weapons in Northeastern Nigeria is the rise of tribal armed groups in many states. The weapons fueled and escalate ethnoreligious conflicts in Kaduna, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa, Kogi, Plateau and other states. Additionally, the presence of SALW in Northern Nigeria paved the way for the emergence of a full-blown insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. The farmers-herders conflict in Northcentral states of Benue, Plateau, Naasarawa and Taraba States in the Northeast was caused by spread of arms. In other parts of the region such as Northwest, armed banditry emanated which threatened thousands of lives and properties in Zamfara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina. Kidnapping has become rampant in the North because of accessibility to weapons in recent years. The implications of armed groups and armed violence is death of thousands of people annually, displacement of communities, creation of IDPs with terrible conditions, insecurity, food scarcity, economic sabotage and wanton destruction of lives and properties (Nowak & Gsell, 2018). SALW has impacts on sex in terms of violence and gender-based violence in the concerned settlements (Farr, Myrntinen,

& Schnabel, 2009).

### ***The Global Legal and Institutional Response Against Illicit Transaction of SALW***

The rampant spread of illicit weapons in the world compelled for the international community to devise means of containing the spread to minimise illegal armed groups and communal clashes. The United Nations came up with some measurements to prevent the spread of the weapons. Successive reports of the United Nations indicated that there was violation of Security Council embargoes on arms brokering from various nation-states due to insufficient transparency. In 2001, a UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) formed in December as a follow up to General Assembly resolution 54/54 V to further examine the menace of intermediaries in arms trading. Furthermore, the United Nations Protocol against the unlawful production and smuggling of weapons, their assemblies and components and firearms, augmenting the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crimes, agreed in 2001 and which became binding on 3rd July 2005 following the signature by 40 member-states, earmarked critical responsibilities of countries to regulate the transaction of firearms and related parts and ammunition in Article 15(1). In 2001 again, a UN conference of states reached consensus on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in all its aspects (PoA) ([United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006](#)).

Some continental and international organisations have hitherto formed mechanisms to combat the spread of illicit arms. The Organisation of American States (OAS) Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) reached an agreement on the strategy of monitoring to sanction brokers of small arms. In Africa, the brokering of SALW has been made illegal by all the African Union members including horn of Africa (the Nairobi Group), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Although, the conventions in the Continent are lawfully binding, most of the countries failed to adopt the signed convention for operation in their local law. In Europe, the standard for the regulating of transaction of all sophisticated weapons were accepted by the European Union and by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Europe initiated a process of the control of air transport of illicit weapons to minimise their fall into the hands of undesired targets. The Asian and Middle East regions did not designed any standard to monitor illegal transaction in weapons but the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) made an explicit efforts in 2002 to prevent arms smugglings as part of brokering crime and in 2004, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) decided to prohibit the use of unofficial transaction activities for transfers of Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) ([United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006](#)).

The global spread of SALW has not been unaccompanied with containing measures to address the problem at the international and regional level. There were various measures, approaches and actions that are designed and adopted by all stakeholders in security issues to curb the illicit spread. For example, one of the measures taken is that of South Africa in which an institution was established which has the responsibility of identifying illicit weapons and destroying them to avoid further illegal transfer and ownership. The South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) took the giant and bold step to destroy all out of use, antiquated, non-operational and seized semi-automatic and automatic weapons of a calibre up to and including 12.7 mm. the policy has been actualised by the South African National Defense Force (SANDF), which annihilated 260, 000 small weapons as part of operation Mouflon ([Meek & Stott, 2004](#)).

Another effort was the one made by Central African Convention for the Control of SALW. The Convention identified what are SALW, Article 3 of the Convention specified the approval of transaction to state, Article 4 prohibited transfer of weapons to non-nation coercive groups, Article 5 provide the means and procedures for the issuance of transfer of authorisation and Article 7 prohibits ownership by civilians to avoid the emergence of armed groups. In another direction, the United Nations made a great effort in curbing the spread of SALW in West Africa by providing the logistics for training of state armed and security forces on the identification of the illicit weapons, tracing, marking, destruction and prevention of the spread ([Ayissi & Sall, 2005](#)).

There are several collective actions in regulating the spread of illegal weapons. The European Action on SALW in its final report in 2006 presented giant steps towards identifying, tracing and prohibition of illegal sales ([United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006](#)). The regional analysis and national reports of the five year of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on indicated that while, a remarkable achievement has been made, there is still more to do in terms of the area of collaboration by countries and regions ([Kytomaki & Yankey-Wayne, 2006](#)). The United Nations has been guiding states on how to make a legislation on SALW to ensure

compliance and effectiveness. Countries were guided on marking of SALW to ensure that they are easily traceable which will enable for identification of the illicit ones appropriately (Ashkenazi, Beeck, & Isikozlu, 2007). One of the best policy alternatives identified in the prevention of SALW is to prevent diversion by nation-states, manufacturers, multilateral organisations and agencies (Green & Kirkham, 2009). Gikonyo (2012) and Gathaga (2015) argued that most of the East African countries signed a ratification for the control and prevention of the proliferation of SALW to ensure and guarantee peace in Eastern Africa.

The United Nations provided a tool for assistance in recognising and monitoring promptly and in a guaranteed manner, illicit SALW. The organisation also provides set of activities to protect, block and deter the illegal transaction in SALW. This has been done through an agreement against unlawful production and smuggling of weapons, their parts and components and ammunition, augmenting the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crimes and various UN resolutions ratified into law (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2008). However, Bourne (2007) emphasises that the neglect of regional level by the authorities concern is the major problem with the policies, programmes and legal institutions in regulating the emergence and spread of SALW.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This work adopted a major theoretical framework to explain the context of the literature, discussions and findings. The theory is Social Conflict Theory.

### ***Social Conflict Theory***

The theory of Social Conflict has its philosophical root from the works of Karl Marx. The theory basically explains that in every society, there is a competition and struggles for resource control from different classes and this led to conflict of interest. Social Conflict Theory sees struggles to control power, resources and interest as the major causes of conflict in the society (Egbuta, 2018; Raditya, 2018). The competing classes according to Marx struggle for the scarce resource in the society and the struggles are so intense that conflict is inevitable because of exploitation and domination of one class by the other in the process. The ruling class which has the access to the structure used the superstructure to perpetuate their economic interest and keep the proletariat class in a perpetual subservient condition that cannot resist the test of time.

In Northern Nigerian context, social conflict is inevitable as assumed by Marx because of the nature of the Nigerian economy and politics. Access to political power has been turned into a struggle for primitive accumulation and self-enrichment. The working class has been neglected, subsumed, dominated, exploited and impoverished beyond redemption which leads to hopelessness and fear. The implication is the fact that the working class and the peasant were subjected to a critical situation in which they are compelled to take arms and establish criminal ventures to survive the scorch of poverty and the heat of economic suffering.

## **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The research used both primary and secondary sources of data. A qualitative approach was adopted as the research design for the data collection and analysis. The primary source was an in-depth interview conducted with some selected informants that are relevant in the subject matter of study and are in a possession of vital firsthand information on the field of study. Informants were selected from five major categories. Category A is the security personnel in which four (4) senior security officials were interviewed from the military and paramilitary based on accessibility by the researchers. The second category is senior officials from the Ministry of Defense in which three (3) were selected in Defense Headquarters in Abuja based on the officers that are directly related to the subject of study. The third category is the academicians in which four (4) were selected from reputable Northeastern Universities who are specialist in the field of security and strategic studies. The fourth category is international donor agencies that are operating in Northeastern Nigeria in the area of security matters such as Save the Children, UNICEF and other and four (4) informants were selected in this category based on proximity and accessibility by the researchers. The last category is the civil societies in which five (5) members from different civil society organisations were interviewed in Abuja. A total of nineteen (19) informants were interviewed.

The interview questions were designed in a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility of responses. The questions were designed differently for all the categories depending on the nature of information that each of them is expected to provide. Direct and implicating questions were avoided. The interviews were conducted under the oath of

confidentiality against the disclosure of the informants for security purpose and for ethnical value of research.

The secondary sources consist of books, journals, internet sources and reports from agencies and organisations. This source was used for the critical review of literature and for the formation of theoretical framework to enable for the proper identification of research gap and contribution to knowledge.

The data obtained from both primary and secondary sources were discussed using thematic analytical interpretation where some themes were formed from the responses of the informants and the previous knowledge on the field.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***The Role of SALW in Exacerbating Armed Conflicts in Northeastern Nigeria***

In this section, the data obtained from the field were presented, analysed, discussed and interpreted using sub-themes in which the existing literature were connected with the research findings and strengthened by the adopted theoretical framework.

### ***SALW in Northeastern Nigeria: Examining the Spread and Patterns***

There are varieties of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria basically hold and operated by two major groups; the legal possession and illegal possession. The Nigerian security operatives are constitutionally bestowed with the power to hold and operate them in the sustenance of internal tranquility and protection and for external aggression where obtainable. Recently, the security operatives are utilising SALW in the fight against insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. The other group is the illegal possession by armed groups specifically the Boko Haram which obtained or sourced for their weapons through the black market and other illicit means (Nowak & Gsell, 2018). There are varieties of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria including pistol, revolvers, AK 47, automatic machine guns, hand grenades, RPGs, anti-aircraft guns, wired tanks, rocket launchers and other weapons that are classified within this category which are operated by individuals and small groups (Method, 2018). The Boko Haram insurgents secured their weapons or the SALW spread in Northeastern Nigeria and found their way into the hands of the insurgents through various sources including porous borders from the Libyan route into Sub-Saharan Africa, black market or illegal trading of weapons globally, corruption, poor logistics and techniques from the part of the Nigerian security outfit and low level of intelligence gathering (Sule, Ahmed, Yahaya, Alhaji, & Gambarawa, 2019).

The Boko Haram manipulated their access into the available weapons or SALW in Northeastern Nigeria through different strategies. One of them is the attacks against the security personnel in the Northeast in Army and Police Barracks. Sometimes they caught the security operatives unaware and surmounted their resistance to cart away with huge arsenal of weapons (Nwachukwu, 2018). As observed above in the study by Sule et al. (2019), corruption is a determinant factor in how the Boko Haram secured access to SALW in Northeastern Nigeria. It is gathered that the security personnel sometimes out of frustration for delay of their allowances and other entitlements sold weapons to the insurgents. This easily manifested and helped the existence of the weapons in the area of study (Intelligence Briefing, 2015). Besides, the Boko Haram members were externally and internally trained to develop capacity for the production of SALW which they are unleashing in their terror motive.

The Social Conflict Theory can unequivocally explained the above pattern and nature of the spread of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria because the distant and irreconcilable gap between the ruling class or the privilege and the poor led to the precarious situation where the Boko Haram members lost hope in justice in the society and decided to take arms to press home their ideological perception. A society with a decent means of living for the majority and a certain reasonable length of equality can witness relative peace unlike the Nigerian context where the high level of the social conflict ushered in violence and insecurity.

### ***The Boko Haram Phenomenon in Northeastern Nigeria***

The Boko Haram insurgency is one of the deadliest insurgent and armed groups contemporarily across the globe. The Boko Haram insurgency affected nine states in the North and the FCT Abuja with all the six Northeastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The group which started in early 2000s in Borno and Yobe states as a radical movement turned into full armed group in 2009 after the extrajudicial killing of their leader, late Muhammad Yusuf. They later metamorphosed into an insurgent group attacking and killing security personnel, civilians, foreign aid workers and other civil groups (Bowser & Sanders, 2012). Apart from poor socioeconomic and political condition, poverty, unemployment and ignorance in Northern Nigeria, Forest (2012) identified the emergence of SALW in the



zone as another major cause of the insurgency.

The Boko Haram insurgency controlled about 20 local governments in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states from 2010-2015 constituting nearly 30% of the Northeastern region using SALW such as pistols, AK47, machine guns, semi-automatic machine guns, propelled grenades, anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank guns and explosives. They attacked and killed soldiers, police and other security personnel and are also attacking civilians in the mosques, churches, markets, at their residences and everywhere. The Boko Haram terrorism secured Nigeria the rank of 3rd in the Global Terrorism Index in 2018 because of the devastation. The Boko Haram insurgency created a serious humanitarian crisis in Northeastern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria at large with IDPs estimated as 2.5 million, mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims in the country (Omotosho, 2015).

In a field survey in which interviews were conducted with the selected informants, all of the informants agreed that the spread of illegal arms and dangerous weapons across Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the reasons that motivated the emergence and expansion of the Boko Haram armed groups. Specifically, one of the informants disclosed that: "The escape route for illicit weapons through the Trans-Saharan ways after the collapse of Libya paved the way for the dreaded Boko Haram insurgents to have easy access to illegal weapons for attacks and defense. Not only an easy access, it also offered the chance for the insurgents to establish a network which enabled for training in the manufacture and manipulation of SALW. The resultant effect is the fact that today Boko Haram is one of the deadliest armed groups in the world reminiscent of arming of criminal movements and insurgents".

Additionally, the Social Conflict Theory which explains the nature of struggles and competition to control scarce resources leading to conflict is applicable and explanatory here. This is because the Boko Haram insurgents fall within the category of the poor impoverished in Northeastern Nigeria and they are battling for relevance with the ruling elites through a violent protest.

### ***The Repercussions of the Spread of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria***

The humanitarian crisis in Northeastern Nigeria which has transcended into Lake Chad region is considered today as one of the worst living condition of mankind in the globe contemporarily. There are about 8.5 million people in 2017 that are in need of urgent help and life-saving humanitarian assistance in the region, 7.1 million people in 2018 and 6.2 million more are targetted in 2019. The crisis of Boko Haram insurgency is a regional armed group conflict which is the crisis of protection and survival. Civilians are targetted in the crisis by the armed group which created a widespread displacement and violations of human rights and international law in the process (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019).

Since the commencement of the conflict fully in 2009, more than 28, 000 were killed, thousands of women and girls were abducted, thousands of males were conscripted forcefully into insurgency activities, violence was perpetrated and is being perpetrated against children and women including sexual abuse and violence, child trafficking, illegal smuggle and possession of SALW, 2.1 million as at 2019 fled their homes and are living in IDPs camps majority in Borno and Yobe States mostly 80% of them women and children and one in four are under the age of five (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019).

In order to foster the protection of human beings, in 2017, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2349 which strongly condemned all forms of terrorists attacks and activities, all forms of violation of international humanitarian law and human rights abuse by Boko Haram and ISIS and urged all parties to respect human rights, protection of humanitarian personnel, facilities and their means of transport and equipment, and to facilitate rapid and safe access for humanitarian organisations to deliver life-saving assistance to the affected victims (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019).

In the process, an estimated 930, 000 refugees from the crisis remain in hard-to-reach areas and because of that, humanitarian actors were not able to reach them or to assess their situation or to provide them with aid at the end of 2018. The risk of famine had been averted by the activities of the humanitarian actors at the end of 2017 in Northeastern Nigeria where the humanitarian actors had access. The number of people estimated to be facing food insecurity reduced from 5.2 million in June 2017 to 2.6 million during October 2017. An estimated 450, 000 children under the age of five (5) suffered from severe acute malnutrition in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States in the Northeast in 2017. Severe Acute Malnutrition kits were provided in over 30 stabilisation centres to treat more than 7, 000 children and over 150 health professionals from the Ministry of Health and NGOs were trained on in-patient management of Severe Acute Malnutrition (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study concludes that there is an increase globally because of illegal brokering and unlawful smuggling. Unauthorised groups and individuals are continuously having more access to these weapons in larger quantity than ever before worldwide. Africa is one of the regions that are affected most due to weak legal enforcement and regulations that can monitor and control the spread of the arms in the Continent. This scenario, the study concludes affects many African countries especially Nigeria which is believed according to many reports to have been hosting nearly half of these illegal weapons as at 2019. The repercussions of the emergence and spread of SALW in Nigeria is several armed group conflicts and violence across the country. This study examined the Northeastern Nigeria, one of the most volatile geopolitical zones contemporarily in the country. The menace of illegal possession of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria escalates armed group violence such as farmers-herders conflict, ethnic violence and insurgency. The Boko Haram insurgency escalated into terrorism because of ability to acquire, manipulate and operate SALW by the insurgents. The devastation of the spread of SALW and Boko Haram insurgency created serious humanitarian crises in Northeastern Nigeria leading to hunger, malnutrition, IDPs, gang-rape, child labour, prostitution, food insecurity, economic blockage and other issues that are seemingly insurmountable in the region.

The study suggested that the best alternative to the menace of spread of SALW is blockage and a strict convention by West African countries against illegal brokering and possession. A joint task force should be established which would be saddled with the responsibility of tracing and marking of illegal source of weapons and seizing them. Additionally, the centres for local production should be identified and dismantled to avert local production. Furthermore, another way to alleviate the problem of spread of SALW in Northeastern Nigeria is a sound economic policy which will target poverty alleviation, equality, job generation and expansion.

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