

Analysis of the responses and challenges against regional multilateral mechanisms in combating the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in West Africa

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Abstract

West African region has been bedeviled by incessant and persistent armed violence, which perpetrated mainly by small arms and light weapons as instruments of choice. This resulted in human security crisis, which necessitates multilateral efforts towards containing the crisis, however, the problem persists. This paper examines the trend and nature of small arms and light weapons proliferation in West African, and explores the regional mechanisms adopted in controlling the menace and the challenges been encountered in their implementation. The paper utilizes documentary research as its methodology, and adopts the complex interdependence theory as its theoretical framework. The paper discovers that SALW proliferation in the West African region has assumed worrisome dimension, and given the enormity of their indiscriminate spread and misuse by the various armed groups, have resulted in perpetrating heinous crimes and unleashing violence in the region, the magnitude of which creates serious humanitarian and economic challenges more than what one nation in the region can contain. The paper also discovers that West African region adopts two strategic multilateral mechanisms namely: The ECOWAS Moratorium and the ECOWAS Convention in addressing the challenges of SALW proliferation, however, after two decades the problem escalates and persists. Thus, the paper concludes that the failure of the multilateral efforts to control the proliferation and misuse of SALW is the reason behind the escalation and persistence of the crises as evidenced in the rise of terrorism and Insurgency, transnational crimes, armed banditry, particularly in the half a decade. Hence, the paper recommends the effective review of the multilateral mechanisms to accommodate the current challenges, also member states in ECOWAS region should renew its political commitments to ensure the effective control of the SALW proliferation. There should also be wider public enlightenment campaigns to educate the citizens of ECOWAS region about these multilateral instruments and mechanisms, so as to enable them make their positive contributions toward achieving the desired goals.

Keywords: Arms Proliferation, multilateralism, regional mechanism, small arms and light weapons, West African Region.

1. Introduction

The political landscape of the West African region has been enmeshed in violent

conflict perpetrated by various armed groups that spread across the states in the

region. Consequently, it has been grappling with series of security challenges, which negatively affect the region and its teeming populace. These include transnational criminal activities, terrorism and Insurgency, militancy and banditry, and ethnic violence among others. The common feature of this violence is the small arms and light weapons that have been proliferated and misused by the various armed groups in the region, such as bandits, secessionists, smugglers, drug barons, ethnic militias, cultists, oil bunkerers, terrorists and insurgents, in perpetrating all forms of heinous atrocities, killings, unwanted destruction, displacement, communal raids, human rights abuses and among others. Thus, these types of arms have become central problem in sparking up human and regional security challenges that negatively affect the region and hamper its human and economic development.

The trend above is captured more glaringly by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in its 2010 Annual Report (cited in Darkwa, 2011) Observes that West Africa has become a safe haven offering unbridled condition for transnationally organised criminal activities, and this may not be unconnected with its strategic location, weak political institutions, poor governance, long and porous borders, widespread poverty and corruption.

Consequently, criminal elements in particular terrorist and insurgents are exploiting the region, because it serves as a transit point for over 1 billion dollar deal of cocaine business between Latin America and European countries, and also as well serves as destination for counterfeit drugs and toxic wastes, stolen natural resources, area of international human trafficking for forced labour or sexual exploitation. To carry out these heinous criminal always small arms and light weapons became weapons of choice, and their demands and

accumulation trigger their wide spread. In view of this, Coulibaly (2008) contends that uncontrolled accumulation and the indiscriminate proliferation SALW have been fuelling armed conflict and violence, thus, poses direct threat to peace and security, thereby reducing the prospects for sustainable development throughout the region.

In addition, the excessive and uncontrolled accumulation of these small arms and light weapons has led to the emergence of groups of armed individuals operating across and beyond state borders: rebel movements, private militias, terrorists and insurgents, drug traffickers, arms dealers, subversive movements, guerrilla campaigns, etc. This resulted in undermining the authority of the states in the region and their ability to guarantee the safety of its citizens. Consequently, these negative developments necessitates collective multilateral response by all West African states to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. The enormity of this pervasive security challenges resulting from the wider proliferation and misuse of SALW especially by the various armed groups have become a matter of security urgency of great concern that goes beyond the capacity of any one nation-state in the region, even though, each nation develops its own national mechanism and framework to control the danger within its own area. This necessitates collective effort towards containing the challenges through multilateral mechanism. This paper examines the nature and dynamic of small arm and light weapons proliferation in West African region. It also critically examines the multilateral mechanisms adopted in West Africa in controlling the proliferation of SALW, and assesses the reasons why despite the presence of national and collective regional mechanisms the problem persists.

2. Methodology

This paper utilizes Documentary Research as its methodology. This is a type of research method undertaken to identify and count certain characteristics found in documents. It deals with a systematic examination of currents, records and documents, internet resources, and other related documents, in order, to generate data which may be gathered, classified and also evaluated in accordance with an established criteria. It is often conducted by social scientists to assess a set of documents for historical or social value, or to create a larger narrative through the study of multiple documents surrounding an event or individual (Singh, 2006).

In addition, Scott & Marshall (cited in Iowa state University, 2026), maintain that a documentary research is a type of research that emphasizes using documents such as personal and official documents as a source material. Precisely, these types of documents include: newspapers and magazines, personal diaries, stamps, directories, handbills, maps, government statistical publications, photographs, paintings, gramophone records, tapes, and computer files, among others.

According to Mark (2021) Researchers engaged in this type of study critically evaluate their suitability based on four key criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Authenticity ensures that a document is genuine and complete, while credibility assesses its accuracy and lack of bias. Representativeness evaluates whether the document reflects the broader societal perspectives of its time, and meaning involves interpreting its content, and thus, it is a valuable tool for obtaining insights from various forms of documentation while maintaining a rigorous evaluative process.

This paper utilizes this methodology which is an effective, dynamic and flexible method in the study of social issues and

problems (Creswell, 2012). It was used to study the issues and accordingly analyse the findings from the study. The paper traces the background history and of the various mechanism and international regimes adopted in containing the challenges of arms proliferation in West African region, conceptualizes the issues and reviewed the related literature, and the explored and qualitatively analysed the issues identified in the course of the study.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Complex interdependence theory as its theoretical framework. The theory is associated with Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in the late 1970s. The theory assumes that in International system there exist complex transnational connections and interdependencies between states and societies to tackle global problems, and this have been increasing, while the use of military force and power balancing are decreasing but remains important (Rana, 2015). Interdependence in world politics refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries.”(Keohane & Nye, cited in Rana, 2015). Under this mutual dependence, the relationship between the actors involved, including states as well as other transnational actors, is characterized by both cooperation and competition. Hence, Complex Interdependence is a theory that stresses the complex ways in which as a result of growing ties, the transnational actors (both state and non-state) become mutually dependent, vulnerable to each other’s actions and sensitive to each other’s needs. In this system of ‘Interdependence’, states cooperate because it is in their own common interest and direct result of this cooperation is prosperity and stability in the international system. (Genest cited in Rana, 2015).

One of the most distinctive claims of complex interdependence, its claim that

international politics is not just what exclusively decided by state actors alone, but there are range of non-state actors operating below and beyond the states level that Influence and shape the international outcomes in significant ways, through several mechanisms: For example, through Lobbying and advocacy: Organizations like Amnesty International pressure governments to uphold human rights standards. Greenpeace campaigns to shift environmental policy. Also, through Agenda-setting: NGOs and advocacy networks can force issues onto the international agenda that states might prefer to ignore. The campaign to ban landmines, led largely by NGOs, resulted in the 1997 Ottawa Treaty despite initial resistance from major military powers. And, through ensuring Public Accountability: Non-state actors monitor state behavior, publicize violations, and mobilize public opinion. This "naming and shaming" strategy can impose real reputational costs, (Rana, 2015).

Complex Interdependence Theory

According to Keohane and Nye (cited in Rana 2015), the three main principles of Complex Interdependence Theory include the following.

Multiple Channels of Interactions: In international politics there are multiple channels connecting the societies, including all the interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational transactions. In this context, states do not only communicate to each other through embassies and summit meetings, but, interactions flow through three types of channels: Interstate relations: the traditional government-to-government diplomacy; Trans governmental relations: direct contacts between bureaucratic sub-units, and Transnational relations: connections involving non-state actors like multinational corporations and INGOs, operating across national boundaries. These actors, besides pursuing their own

interests, also act as transmission belts, making government policies in various countries more sensitive to one another.

Absence of Hierarchy among Issues: In the world of Complex interdependence, there is no hierarchy among the issues. The dividing line between domestic and foreign policy becomes blurred and there is no clear agenda in interstate relations. There are multiple issues which are not arranged in a clear or consistent hierarchy. Among other things, "military security does not consistently dominate the agenda." (Keohane & Nye, cited in Rana, 2015). The foreign affairs agendas have become more and more diverse now. In this context, any issue-area might be at the top of the international agenda at any particular time (Rana, 2015).

Minor Role of Military Force: It assumes that in international relations force is of low salience. When Complex Interdependence prevails, military force could be irrelevant in resolving disagreements, because force is no more considered an appropriate way of achieving other goals such as economic and ecological welfare which are becoming more important, and mostly the effects of military force are very costly and uncertain. However, its role as bargaining tool is still important and may vary from one issue to another (Rana, 2015).

Limitations of the Complex Interdependence Theory: The theory focuses on international-level dynamics and gives less attention to how domestic political pressures, nationalism, and populism can override the logic of interdependence. In addition, some security challenges, like terrorism, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns don't fit neatly into the framework, which was designed primarily around economic and institutional interactions.

Relevance of the theory: Despite these limitations, complex interdependence

captures real dynamics that realism struggles to explain. The density of global trade networks, the influence of MNCs and INGOs, and the growing role of international institutions all align with the theory's core claims. The framework is most useful as a lens for analyzing specific relationships rather than the entire international system. However, as global challenges surge like climate change and pandemics, arms proliferation demand, multilateral efforts and institutional cooperation. Hence, in this context, the insights of complex interdependence remain directly relevant to this paper on the ground of its presumption that given the persistent and transnational nature of the challenge of small arms and light weapons proliferation in West African sub-region and the way it defies national solution, hence emphasis on the use of collective actions (Multilateral) efforts both involving West African sovereign nations i.e ECOWAS members, International Agencies, International Organisations and as well several International non-governmental organizations and as well various indigenous Nongovernmental organizations as the only way to contain the menace.

4. Conceptual Clarifications

Multilateralism

According to International Peace Institute and Institute for Economics and Peace (2022) Multilateralism refers to a formal process of coordination of national actions among three or more states, with involvement of various International Nongovernmental Organisations (INGOs) through formal institutions that allow these states to express their interests, set shared goals and take collective action according to agreed rules, associated treaties and conventions, informal structures, alliances, which can be binding or non-binding in nature.

In another submission, Weck and Martens (2020) contend that the world's great

challenges can not be resolved exclusively by national or bilateral states, multilateral cooperation is also needed. Hence, they maintain that multilateralism refers to cooperation under the umbrella of regional or global organizations of three or more states on matters of international policy, in order to achieve one or more specific goals and also common standards and norms that serve as the basis for that umbrella organization and which are shared by its members (Wreck and Martens, 2020). In view of this, Keohane (2006) maintains that s multilateralism is an institutionalized collective action by an inclusively determined set of independent states.

In a similar vein, Ruggie (1992) views multilateralism as a coordinating relations among three or more states, in accordance with certain principles of conduct. Hence, he further observes that, multilateralism is an institutional arrangement that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence. These principles are indivisibility, non-discrimination, and diffuse reciprocity (Ruggie,1992).

In addition, Keohane (1990) maintains that Multilateralism refers to "coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions". Therefore, in this context multilateral institution promote coordination between states' national policies. This coordination may take different forms within the multilateral institution, either the international regime form, at which state actor will establish an institution with explicit rules and procedures agreed upon the different state, or the bureaucratic organizational form, at which employees are assigned specific professional roles to run and manage the multilateral body (Keohane, 1990).

Multilateralism as a doctrine is characterized by set of principles that guide the behaviour of states and international actors in formulating and negotiating multilateral solutions to multitude global, regional or individual issues (Lazaroub et al., 2010). It always involves three or more actors engaging in (more or less) institutionalized and voluntary cooperation governed by norms or rules that apply (more or less) equal to all (Bouchard & Peterson cited in Lazaroub et al., 2010).

The global environment has been bedevilled by numerous political, climates related, economic and humanitarian crises and disasters, ranging from civil wars with spillover effects, the rise of global terrorism and insurgency, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, among others. The intensity of which goes beyond the capacity of any single nation-state, thereby necessitating collective actions among members of the international system towards common problems. This calls for multilateralism vivid picture is captured by The UN General Assembly UNGA (2020) when submits that, our world has been plagued by growing problems ranging from poverty and hunger, armed conflicts, terrorism and insurgency, climate change and pandemics. This trend compels people around the world to make dangerous expedition in search of refuge and safe haven. These problems are interconnected and as such can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism, not as an option, but as a necessary mechanism towards achieving a more resilient and sustainable world (UNGA, cited in Martens, 2023).

In view of the above submission, nowadays, members of international community have been confronting common problems through collective efforts, at both subregional, regional and global levels, and this signifies multilateralism.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Proliferation

In order to have proper understanding of the meaning of small arms and light weapons, always the concept of small arms is treated separately, while light weapons are also treated differently. Small arms are personal weapons that can be operated by only one person. They include revolvers, self-loading pistols, double barrel, short gun, rifles, submachine guns and light machine guns. While, light weapons include weapons such as heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel and mounted grenade launchers, rocket propelled granade, improvised electronic devices, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortar of less than 100mm calibres (Religions for Peace, African Council of Religious Leaders, 2004).

Klare (cited in inInternational Committee of the Red Cross ICRC, 1999) contends that a clear understanding of the trend of arms proliferation, revolves around making a distinction between what is arms proliferation on one hand and arms diffusion on another hand. The first indicates an increase in the number of weapons or weapon systems possessed by state, while, the latter suggests the dispersion of arms within the state, among governments' entities, and private armies, militias, insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and other non-state actors.

In a similar vein, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) (2022) specifically describes small and light weapons proliferation as the excessive accumulations and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons by a state(s), corporation entities and or private individuals within a particular country and between countries across the world. Further, they maintain that this excessive and uncontrolled accumulations may take any of the following forms: i) when a state, whether a supplier or recipient, does not

exercise restraints in the production, transfer and acquisition of such weapons beyond those needed for legitimate national and collective defense and internal security; ii) when a state, whether a supplier or recipient, can not exercise effective control to prevent the illegitimate acquisition, transfer, transit or circulation of such weapons; iii) or when the use of such weapons manifest itself in armed conflicts and in crime activities such as arms and drugs trafficking, or any other actions that is contrary to the norms of national and international laws (IANSA, 2022).

Small Arms and Light Weapons are used both by the government forces (military and police) and by non-state actors (guerillas, ethnic militias, self-defense units and violent criminal gangs) engage in conflicts against each other or against the state, or in violent criminal activities. It has been discovered that all of 49 armed conflicts around the world since 1990, have relied on SALW as the only instruments of war, especially the Soviet/Russian AK-47 and the US made M16, which have been accounting for 35% and 60% of all at the death and injuries in warfare since 1990 (Safeworld, 2012).

The Trend and Impacts of SALW Proliferation in West Africa

It has been discovered that West Africa region has been overspread with millions of SALW, mostly in the hand of non-state actors. Precisely, there were an estimated 3, 625,000 privately owned firearms across the region, as of March, 2011, (GIABA Report, 2013). In addition, the report further identified various channels through which arms proliferate in West Africa, major of which include: domestic Arms production by local craftsmen: these include such weapons like double barrel guns, locally-made pistols, AK 47 rifles & short guns., These are mainly produced in places like Ghana and Nigeria. In addition, there is cases of stolen weapons from

military arsenals by dissident elements among military personnel, and or raid against police barracks and armoury; regional Arms trafficking from one ECOWAS country to another in the sub-region; and ontinental arm trafficking which involves trafficking of arms into West Africa from other parts of the world through mostly sea and land borders, from Mali, Libya, Algeria, South Africa and Europe, by gun runners, tourists, and smugglers. This mainly involves deal in modern sophisticated weapons such as pump action guns, assault rifles (AK 47, AKM, M16), Heavy and Sub Machine guns, hand grenades, mortars, RPG's, among others (GIABA Report, 2013). In a similar vein, Alusala (2016) maintains that the proliferation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons in Africa is partly attributable to weak national controls, the porosity of state borders and ongoing armed conflict on the continent.

In view of the trend above, the United Nations Security Council (cited in Bakke, 2005, p33) submits that the proliferation of SALW and growing mercenary pose complex security, humanitarian and development challenges to West Africa. These resulted in upsurge of intra-state conflicts and violence that further create staggering demand for SALW, and also have contributed to the spread of armed groups such as bandits, rebel, mercenaries, and militias in the sub-region. Indeed, the widespread proliferation of SALW in the region, has significantly contributed to the lethality and prolongation of armed conflicts in the region. The intensity of which has become pervasive, and consequently, there was an estimated lost of almost 500,000 - 2,000,000 lives due to armed conflicts in the region for the past few decades (Bakke, 2005).

In their submission, Ebo and Mazal (2003) argued that the negative effects of SALW are multiple and inter-related. Almost 2 million people have been reported to have

died in conflict involving SALW in West Africa since 1990. These weapons bring devastation to lives, properties and physical environment, exacerbate conflict and spark mass displacement and refugee flows, undermine the rule of law, and promote and sustain a culture of violence. They become the choice instruments of terror and gross human rights abuses in West Africa. The SALW mostly affect the vulnerable segments of the society (women, children and the aged). More than 120,000 African children under the aged of 18 are reported to have engaged in civil wars and wielding small arms as child soldiers. This further exposed them as victims of slavery and rape. Supporting this argument, Religions for Peace, African Council of Religious Leaders (2004) revealed that, The proliferation of SALW such as machine guns, assault rifles, grenade , has been devastating in Africa, as they have been used in deadly conflicts in Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia among others. And they are recycled from one country to another among fighters, security forces and war profiteers. This have resulted in the deaths and displacement of many civilian population across the continent.

In another submission, GIABA Report (2013) describes the collateral damages, and human and materials wound inflicted in West Africa by SALW in terms of fueling conflicts, that results in countless deaths, forced displacement, loss for access to healthcare, destruction of communities including deprivation of sources of income and rights to family, leading to psychological trauma, and creation of refugees that are dependent on humanitarian aids. As witnessed in 2.2 million deaths during civil wars in Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, and other parts of the West African subregion. In particular, the cases of over 200, 000 women victims of

sexual violence and the displacement of over 4.5 million in Sierra Leone.

There are an estimated 8 million small arms in circulation throughout West Africa in particular, playing central role in fostering instability, and fueling insecurity. Indeed, they have been used in armed robberies, intra and inter-communal feuds, local wars, armed insurrections, armed rebel activities and terrorism and transnational criminal activities like drug trafficking and smuggling among others. Hence, these weapons maintain a general state of fear, through which many have killed, many others been made refugees and properties destroyed. In general, almost every country in the West African subregion has experienced widespread violence in which small arms were a factor (Religions for Peace, African Council of Religious Leaders, 2004).

In essence, the spate and intensity of violent conflicts in West Africa have been linked to the proliferation and weak control mechanisms on small arms and light weapons. While \$18 billion is being spent on conflicts in Africa, 60 to 90 percent of deaths associated with conflicts in West Africa are linked to the illegal sale and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The subregion accounts for about 8 million out of the 100 million small arms currently in circulation in Africa (Ahmad, 2012).

Decades of violence and instability in Sierra Leone, Liberia as well as the activities of insurgent groups in Mali, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire were major drivers of proliferation, illicit circulation of SALW and other forms of organized crimes ranging from oil bunkering, armed robbery, money laundering, arms manufacturing, forgery, cigarette smuggling, diamond smuggling, human trafficking, as well as advanced fee and internet fraud in the region. Over the years this has reinforced the sceptre of insecurity, which in turn compromises the

prospects for growth and development. A consequence of this is the fact that people are often the worst victims especially among the rural and urban poor in the region (Kwaja, 2012). Indeed, the spate of attacks and hijack by pirates is largely due to their ability to access SALW. Thus, this position is supported by UN Security Council Report (United Nations, 2012) acknowledges that piracy in the economies of the region has led to an annual loss of revenue of \$2 billion, as the numbers of ships docking at Cotonou, Benin Republic, have declined by 70% as a result of serial attacks .

In his own submission, Nganga (2008) identifies three major impacts of SALW proliferation with particular reference to Sub-Saharan Africa. These are on human rights; International humanitarian law; and governance. On human rights he argues that SALW proliferation intensifies conflict and prolongs its duration, in addition, it is also marked by abuses and violations, displacements, militarization and conscription of child soldiers, torture, rape and forced prostitution, especially against women, children and people with disabilities. The consequences of which is recorded in numbers of death, mutilations, unwanted pregnancy and spread of venereal diseases including HIV/Aids. The impact on development relates directly to the elimination of available human resources (man power) particularly youth and professional talents, and indirectly in hampering economic growth, scaring foreign direct investments and agricultural activities and programmes, and obstruction of delivery and access to public goods. The impacts on governance revolves around the weakening of the state security apparatuses through continuous violence and criminal activities, thus, in turn affects the government and render the state a failed one.

Multilateral Response towards the Proliferation of SALW in West Africa

The enormity of small arms and light weapons proliferation in West Africa, has generated wider regional concerns, thereby necessitating multilateral response, and this is translated in various regional mechanisms adopted in controlling the menace. Three initiatives are worth considering when dealing with analysis on SALW control regime in West Africa, these are: Bamako Declaration, ECOWAS Moratorium, and ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. In view of this, Diarra (2005) maintains that the question of small arms is specifically dealt with in articles 50 and 51 of the ECOWAS protocol relating to mechanism article 50, on control on the proliferation of small arms provides, taking into consideration the legitimate national defence and security needs and those of international peacekeeping operations, ECOWAS shall establish effective measures to: control the Importation, exportation, and manufacture of small arms and eradicate the illegal flow of such arms; register and control the movement and use of legitimate arms stocks; detect, collect and destroy all illicit weapons; and encourage member states to collect and destroy all surplus weapons.

4. Discussions

The Bamako Declaration

This evolved out of the need for a common African approach at the UN Small Arms Conference of 2001, following a ministerial conference in Bamako from 30th November - 1st December, 2000. It recommends some actions to be taken at national level. These include: Creation of national coordination agencies for small arms; Enhancement of the capacity of national law enforcement and security agencies and officials, including training and upgrading of equipment and resources; Destruction of surplus and confiscated weapons; Development and

implementation of public awareness programmes; and Conclusion of bilateral arrangements for small arms control in common frontier zone (Ebo & Mazal, 2003).

ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa

Recognizing the threat to national and regional security posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, West African States have sought to address the challenge through a sub-regional mechanism under the auspice of ECOWAS. This led to declaration of an ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa, which is not a legally binding regime, but rather an expression or proclamation of political will to deal with a matter of SALW proliferation in the region (Seck, 1999).

The idea of moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of SALW was originally presented in 1993 by the then Malian Presidential Alpha Konare, and it was welcomed by ECOWAS, OAU and UNO. After long diplomatic consultation and engagements between African International organisations, INGO's, Civil Society Organisations, and weapons manufacturing countries, the moratorium was signed by all the 16 member states, on 31st October, 1998, for a period of 3 years, in Abuja-Nigeria. And on 10th December, 1999, the member states signed a code of conduct for the effective implementation of this mechanism based on the agreed principles, which encouraged transparency in military and security matters (Bakke, 2005).

The moratorium is a political framework that contains a number of measures, which there necessary implementation could guarantee its success. Among them are: establishment of national commissions;

cooperation with civil society organisations; coordination of legislation; creation of database; dissemination of information and education to police and custom officers regarding surveillance and control; and also a plan of action was made available. But, its major problem is that it is only a politically binding document and not a legally binding instrument, in addition, there is no obligation to abide by the member-states, and no sanction or penalty whatsoever for failure or under-performance against any party (Bakke, 2005).

West African's moratorium regime composed of three main related instruments: The moratorium declaration; The Plan of Action for the implementation of PCASED, a UNDP Programme that provides technical and operational support to the practical development of the moratorium, and was adopted by ECOWAS foreign ministers in March 1999, and The third instrument that constitute the West Africa's moratorium architecture, and sets out its details, is the code of conduct adopted on December 10, 1999, and its main components are: The establishment of National Commission in each member state; The setting up of structures within ECOWAS to support the moratorium and to monitor the compliance of member states; The preparation of reports by member states on the ordering or procurement of weapons, components and ammunitions covered by the moratorium; The development of a regional arms register and database; The harmonization of legislation; The training of security personnel; and The declaration of weapons and ammunitions used for peacekeeping operations (Ebo and Mazal, 2003).

The programme for coordination and assistance for security and development (PCASED) is a designated mechanism for the moratorium, and it is administered by UNDP office in Bamako. It is designed to implement the moratorium regime over an

initial period of five 5 years. In that respect, UNDP in collaboration with Lome centre and other UN's Offices, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat, and ECOWAS member states, will undertake a series of activities in the following nine priority areas: Establishing a culture of peace; Training for military, security and police forces; Enhancing weapons controls at border posts; Establishing a Small Arms and Light Weapons register; Collecting and destroying surplus and unauthorized weapons; Facilitating dialogue with producers/suppliers; Reviewing and harmonizing national legislative and administrative procedures; Mobilizing resources for PCASED objectives and activities; and Enlarging membership of the moratorium. (Seck, 1999; Diarra, 2005; Ebo & Mazal, 2003).

Initially, member states tend to have different interpretation of what the formation and operations of national commission should be. Thus, in 2001 PCASED in consultation with ECOWAS Secretariat and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), published the guidelines on the establishment and functioning of national commissions against the proliferation of small arms. These guidelines include: answering questions which member states may have on the reasons for establishment of national commission; information on the legislation adopted by ECOWAS regarding the

establishment and operations of national commission; advice on the procedures for the establishment of national commission; and outlining the support which Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS and PCASED can provide towards setting up and operationalization of the national commission. (Ebo & Mazal, 2003). Further, they observed that although the moratorium looks promising, however, its likely impact is not revolutionary, but more of evolutionary in nature, because since it was declared in 1998, the necessary mechanism and instruments required for its implementations took couple of years to articulate and operationalized (Ebo & Mazal, 2003).

However, Nganga (2008, p17) opines that of all the sub-regional initiatives around the world, ECOWAS has made the most gigantic strides toward curbing the illicit trade in small arms, with its unprecedented moratorium on the importation and manufacture of SALW in the region. As it calls for harmonized national controls among member states, supporting training programmes for military, police and other security personnel, enhanced border controls, stockpile management, and facilitating dialogue with arms suppliers. Thus, the moratorium is seen as effective and plausible means to end the trafficking in SALW in the region. Hence recorded some successes as presented in table below:

Selected Arms Destruction in West Africa 1996-2003

	Country	Quantity Destroyed
1	Ghana	8 000
2	Liberia	19 000
3	Mali	3 530
4	Niger	1 943
5	Nigeria	1 681
6	Sierra Leone	Nil
7	Togo	2 050

Source: PCASED Annual Programme Report (cited in Ebo & Mazal, 2003).

In particular, Vanguard Newspaper Online (Lagos, Nigeria, March 18, 2013) and The Premium Times Online (2013, March 16) reported a good arms recovery effort with particular reference to Nigeria. This reveals that 39,880 assorted firearms and ammunitions were recovered from ex-militants in the Niger Delta region (Bayelsa and Delta states), by the Inter-Agency Task Force, set up by the federal government, and handed over to the GOC 82 Division of the Nigerian Army, Major General Adebayo Olaniyi. These include 482 automatic arms, 20,132 ammunitions, 295 magazines and 18,971 locally made arms.

In addition, Keili (2009) noted that there is estimated 75 000 illegal craft guns now circulating in Ghana, constituting the vast majority of the 125,000 unregulated weapons in that country. He further observed that around 80% of the Weapons seized by the police and Ghanaian Security Forces in that year were locally manufactured... Atleast, 400 blacksmiths in Southern Ghana are now serving the industry, each capable of making up to 80 guns per year. He maintain that the picture is similar in other parts of West Africa, as craft guns are still widely used in the civil wars that killed hundred of thousands in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and other countries including Mali have been pinpointed as armed manufacturing centres.

In line with the collective effort of the West African states in controlling the menace of small arms proliferation in the region, civil society organizations have also played significant role in evolving the mechanisms particularly the moratorium, through various mediums and engagements, such as workshop on Private Military Intervention and Arms Proliferation 2000, Ecumenical Consultation on Micro-Disarmament in West Africa 1998, Foundation Conference of the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) held in Accra on

20th -21st May, 2002, as well training and capacity building workshops, especially the one held by International Alert in partnership with Safeworld, OXFAM, FOSDA, among others. The most outstanding of these workshops is the WAANSA launched by 27 different NGO's from 10 West African states, and held on 20th and 21st May, 2002. The major goal was to facilitate civil society organizations activities in the campaign against the proliferation of small arms in the West African sub-region. Hence, they issued the following communique:

Extremely concerned about the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, which engender the security of people, communities and nations in West African sub-region; Recognizing that the illicit trade in and easy access to and availability of small arms and light weapons continue to exacerbate the conflicts and insecurity in the region; Aware of the relationship between illicit SALW on one hand, and political instability; the violations of fundamental humility rights; economic underdevelopment; bad governance; social injustice; criminality and violence, on the other hand, and how these negatively impact on the entire society particularly on the survival and protection of women and vulnerable groups such as children; people with disabilities and the elderly; Reaffirming our understanding and appreciation of the fact that ECOWAS member states bear the primary responsibility for peace and security in the sub-region; Convinced that the ECOWAS moratorium on the manufacture, export and import of SALW within the sub-region is the major regional initiative for dealing with the scourge of small arms and light weapons; Committed to supporting the Bamako Declaration, the UN Plan of Action on Small Arms and other relevant international instruments; Conscious of the need for collaborative civil society actions

on the non-proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons; Appreciating the existence and role of the International Action Network on Small Arms as the leading International Civil Society Network on Small Arms; Hereby, decide to transform the organizing committee of the foundation conference plus one other participant into a nine- member steering committee that shall manage the affairs of the network during the next two years... Encourage organizations in every country in West Africa to join WAANSA and became active participant as well as joining and actively participating in IANSA for the effectiveness of the networks at global, sub-regional and national levels (Ebo & Masala, 2003).

Although, this is a very good move, its efforts to monitor states' implementation of small arms measures is hampered by the inability or the various NGOs to meet at regular interval and the financial constraint (Ebo & Mazal, 2003). In a similar vein, in view of the large gap between the promises of the moratorium and the reality of the widespread of the proliferation of small arms and insecurity in the region, West African civil society organizations decided to carry out their own review of the moratorium, in order to complement the evaluation being undertaken by the PCASED/ECOWAS. Thus, Civil society organizations on the evaluation of ECOWAS moratorium was held in Dakar, Senegal, on 27th January, 2003, as organized by WAANSA, CED and MALAO with the following objectives: Review the report of the moratorium evaluation; Develop a draft supplementary protocol that seeks to address the role of non-state actors; Assess the role of ECOWAS, PCASED, National Commissions, Civil Society, and International actors in the implementation of the moratorium, and Devise advocacy campaign to make the moratorium and the proposed protocol binding, with

enforceable sanctions (Ebo & Mazel, 2003).

In essence, the moratorium was essential and pioneering instrument in combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. However, it contains some loopholes and inadequacies that hamper the realization of effective arms control in the region. These were as a result of its voluntary nature as a political document, rather than being a legally binding document, marked by inadequate provisions for controlling non-state arms proliferation. In addition, the moratorium is little known in the sub-region, particularly among the ordinary citizens, (Ebo & Mazal, 2003).

ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms

On June 14, 2006, the fifteen Heads of State and Government West African sub-region signed the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms, which replaces the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium. The ECOWAS Convention is a legally binding mechanism that establishes a new dynamic of cooperation on Small Arms in the sub-region, and empowers national governments to observe unique regulatory role on Small Arms transfers based on human rights and humanitarian laws (Coulibaly, 2008; GIABA Report, 2013).

It covers the following key areas, among others: A ban on transfers of small arms to non-state for approval; Regulations of artisan (local) arms manufacturers. The convention requires member state to create an inventory of the arms made by these local manufacturers; Member states are required to establish national databases or registries of all small arms in their jurisdiction; Encourage dialogue between the sub-region and arms suppliers; Regulations of small arms possession; Management and security of stockpiles (Coulibaly, 2008).

It has been agreed that once the convention is ratified at least by 9 of the 15 ECOWAS member states, it will be applicable in its

entirety, thereby making West Africa, the only region in the world with a very restrictive law for combating SALW. Also, the convention will make West Africa more difficult to be penetrated by arms proliferation and will contribute to strengthening the capacity of governments to control the illegal flow of SALW, and so improve the security of the region.

The Challenges of Multilateral Mechanisms in Response to Small Arms Proliferation in West African Region

According to Ebo and Mazal (2003), the character of SALW proliferation is by no means state-centric. Admittedly, some states are guilty of supporting and often participating in illicit small arms transfers. It is important to emphasize however, that non-state actors are playing more prominent roles in the proliferation of SALW in West Africa. Ethnic militia groups, private security companies, arms smugglers, criminal gangs, bandits, mercenaries, and vigilantes groups all play their respective roles in the proliferation of SALW in West Africa. Indeed, a defining character of the proliferation in the region is the increasing difficulty of states to provide and or guarantee public security. Those states that are not themselves theatres of war, either have their own tensions or are neighbours to countries at war. There is also a problem of spillover of war violence from one country to others in the region, and this play significant role in equally diffusing the already compounded problem.

Similarly, some member states did not show compliance and political will to the moratorium. Thus, Ebo and Mazal (2003) pointed out that:

Not all signatories are complying with spirit of the moratorium and it is suspected that small arms continues to be imported by some countries in violation of the declaration. According to various UN reports, Burkina Faso and Liberia, have facilitated arms deliveries to rebel groups

in Sierra Leone, and UN has also explicitly linked Burkina Faso and Togo to issuance of false end-user certificates for sanctions bursting transfers to UNITA in Angola.

Another key issue is lack of synergy and effective collaboration and coordination between the security apparatus from the member-states implementing the political framework, a security gap which armed traffickers exploit to carry out their nefarious activities. Some of the challenges with regards to the implementation of the regional political framework emanate from among the memberstate themselves. In this respect Dinshak (2020) with reference to Nigeria observed that

The ECOWAS convention came into force during the period of merger of ministry of Cooperation and Integration in Africa (MCIA) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). This led the problem of leadership succession. These coupled with poor funding, made it difficult for any meaningful achievement by the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons, with regards to the implementation of the convention. Eventually, the Commission becomes moribund, so that there was no agency with responsibility for implementation of the ECOWAS convention.

There is also issue of establishing only ad-hoc committees or taskforce that have a temporary mandate. Created out of prerogative orders of the executive organs of government, rather than an act of parliament as stipulated in the convention's requirements of the National Commission. In view of this, Dinshak (2020) opined that, this was the case with Nigeria where the President Good luck Jonathan created what he referred to as 'PRESCOM' Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons on 24th April, 2013. This was just a mere provisional taskforce created out of executive prejudice rather than act of parliament.

In another development, Bah (2004) with reference to Sierra Leone presents another scenario which reflects additional challenge, he noted that a major obstacle to the establishment of a fully functional National Commission for the implementation of ECOWAS moratorium on SALW is the rivalry between key government departments over who control the Commission especially between Army, Police and Public bureaucracies, and the skepticism over what many of the government departments perceived as mere creation and as well duplication of additional commission with same mandate as with the already existing government institution. This seen as mere additional burden on the country's meagre resource. In addition, Seck (1999) identified similar challenge, when he noted that from the beginning there was a battle of supremacy among various conflicting security organisations especially Army, Police, immigrations and Custom assigned to manage borders (Land, Air and Sea) and the agency established and mandated to check, combat and control arms proliferation, this coupled with the idea of even the responsibility should be domicile, who to control it, what mandates it should have and who should be its staff etc. Finally general public whose active support and role is very vital as per as both the moratorium is concerned majority are not aware of it. In this respect, Seck (1999) observed that "it was generally felt that, although five months has already gone by, since the moratorium was signed in Abuja, but only few other than specialists were aware of its existence." This to some extent applies also to the ECOWAS convention. He further noted that the porous nature of the borders increases the likelihood of SALW and drugs to be smuggled from one country to another in the West African sub region (Seck, 1999).

5. Conclusion

The spate at which small arms and light weapons have been indiscriminate sprleead and misuse in the West African sub-region especially amongst various armed groups has become a real humanitarian, security and socio-economic development obstacles to the peace and development of the region. Despite the presence multilateral efforts by the various nation-states with collaborative endeavours and active support from West African and other International Civil Society Organisations and other International Institutions towards the problem, through instruments and mechanisms such as ECOWAS Moratorium and Convention, not much significant positive results have been achieved. It is obviously clear that it persist. Hence, the need to intensify the effort as to contained the challenges.

Policy Actions

1. Addressing the challenges pose by the proliferation SALWs in the region requires the harmonization and standardisation of legislations and policies across the region. In doing this, there is a sense in which the contradictions and tensions that exist between national, regional, continental and the global strategies should be straightened. Hence, definitions about the kind and categories of SALWs, as well as the procedure for their acquisition and sale should be the same across the region.
2. In concert with other multilateral institutions, Member States of ECOWAS should demonstrate strong political commitment and will towards strengthening import and export control policies, mechanisms and practices within their borders and beyond. In this sense, such collaboration should be hinged on ensuring adherence to all the relevant initiatives on SALWs in the region.

3. Another key area of great concern is the need to map out strategy that could combat illegal arms trafficking, which serves as one of the major source of small arms proliferation in the region, and it takes place in a clandestine manner. To that effect strong cooperation and collaboration between West African state and governments should be developed as this may be helpful in tracking down the illicit flow and proliferation in the region.
4. There is a clear evidence of failure in terms of funding and implementation of the regional mechanisms adopted, given the financial incapability of the most member states. And this mainly comes through foreign interventions. Thus, there is need to devise alternative and reliable source of financial support for the successful implementation of the various mechanisms adopted in combating arms proliferation in the region.
5. Member states should desist from double standing of being a party to all regional frameworks adopted in tackling the problem of SALW proliferation, yet supporting and supplying arms to rebel groups in their neighbouring countries, thereby increasing the tempo of violence in the hostile environment.
6. Small arms and light weapons proliferation in most cases is triggered by demands resulting from desire to unleash violence for material gains resulting from chronic poverty and unemployment, ethnic tension and governance failure, hence, unless these bases are addressed through creating atmosphere of economic opportunities and poverty alleviation measures, massive economic empowerment and skills acquisition. The problem would keep on escalating.
7. Partnership and collaboration between national governments, civil society organisations and communities should be strengthened, in order to achieve more positive results.
8. Political marginalisation, isolation and social injustice play vital role in intensifying the proliferation of SALW in the region. Thus, there is need to adopt an integrative political framework that should incorporate all various segments and subsegment of the West African societies in a matter of running the general administration of the state affairs.
9. Governments of various member-states should commit themselves to comprehensive not partial implementation of any peaceful and amnesty approach between government and armed groups. This is because more often lack of sustainability in implementing those reconciliation frameworks lead to their eventual collapse and relapse society back into crisis, sometimes worse than what experience before.
10. Given the magnitude of the problem at hand mere taskforce and or ad-hoc committees that are temporal could not augur well. Therefore, permanent, independent and strong institution should be established by each memberstate to be responsible for combating the proliferation of SALW while implementing the ECOWAS Convention.
11. There should be an extensive mobilization and enlightenment campaign by CSO's, traditional and Community Leaders, professional Associations, Religious Organisations in order to educate and promote understanding and awareness among the civil population about these regional and national frameworks adopted in tackling the menace of Small arms and light weapons proliferation and misuse, so as to allow them give their

meaningful and positive contributions towards their success.

12. Technical skills and capacity building especially of the institutions mandated with implementation of ECOWAS moratorium and convention should be developed and equipped with

modern facilities and equipments for effective operations of identification, trackings, detection and surveillances of weapons and other dangerous materials into or outside the various member states in the region.

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