

ROLE OF LIBRARY IN PROVIDING RESILIENCE TO THE SOCIETY IN THE ERA OF PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper focused on the role of libraries in providing resilience to the society in the era of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. The sudden increase in the influx of small arms and light weapons in the country calls for urgent attention of all the stakeholders in Nigeria in view of the devastating effect on human lives and the economy. Secondary sources of information and other documented sources were consulted. The incidents of armed robbery, ethno-religious crisis, economic sabotage, kidnappings, banditry and assassinations involving the use of SALWs are now regular phenomena in the country. The paper identified and discussed the various ways through which the society can control SALWs which include education, developmental programmes, awareness-raising, confidence building, campaign, intelligence sharing, weapon collection programme, grassroots committees and cooperation with neighbouring countries. It further identified and explained how library in collaboration with the civil society organizations can exert a special influence over SALWs control activities as they often have the trust of the communities where they are located for providing resilience to the society in the era of small arms proliferation. It was therefore recommended among others that recovered arm need to be immediately and systematically destroyed in order to prevent further proliferation and reduce the risk of collected arms leaking out of the security forces' possession.

Keywords: Library, resilience, proliferation, small arms, light weapons.

Introduction

The paper focuses on the sudden increase in the influx of small arms and light weapons in the country which calls for urgent attention of all the stakeholders in the society including libraries in view of the devastating effect on human lives and the economy. The dictionary of Weapons and Military Terms defines Small Arms (SA) as all arms including automatic weapons up to and including those of 60mm calibre and short guns. According to a study by Utsha (2016) on small arms proliferation and violent crimes in Nigeria as reported in the African Institute for Security Studies, SA is described to include revolvers and self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Hence, the proliferation of these categories of weapons has increased exponentially since the end of the cold war.

This sudden increase brought about the incident of armed robbery, ethnic-religious crisis, economic sabotage and assassinations involving the use of SALWs has become a regular phenomenon in the country. The nation's challenges which emanate from political thuggery, regional agitations, ethnicity and terrorism by miscreants have also been on the rise. In all these criminal acts, SALWs are used with great devastation. The large amount of illegal arms in unauthorized hands contributes immensely to influence SALWs proliferation and insecurity in the society (Obasi, 2000).

Norris, et al (2008) defines resilience as a process of linking a network of adaptive capacities resources with dynamic attributes to adaptation after disturbance or adversity. These adaptive capacities equally provide a strategy for disaster readiness. Resilience is therefore a strategy concern for any community wishing to meet the challenges posed by the proliferation of SALWs food insecurity and potential related disaster. Examples of such scenarios might be economic collapse of Greece or social disorder in British cities in 2011. If resilience is a useful concept for communities in those contexts, it is therefore a concern for libraries whose major role is to provide knowledge, build up the capacity of the people and communities to be a positive force for equality of opportunity for personal development, economic advancements, social transformation that can lead to peaceful co-existence in a society. Information promotes and empowers citizen's participation in the democratic process. It maintains the rule of law and creates a viable outlet for the injection of public opinion (Audu and Ogbonyomi, 2020)

Therefore, this paper attempts to describe what constitutes small and light weapons, challenges posed by the proliferation, and the role libraries can play in providing resilience in the society.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in the Society

The escalating challenges of SA proliferation provide the encouragement for several negative developments which undermine the general security of the country. For instance, criminals and militant groups now take on or even defeat the police in fire fight, such situation calls to question the quality of security the police provides to the citizenry. In light of this, the military is often called in to participate in internal security because the police are incapable of handling such operations. The effect of this constant involvement of the Armed Forces is that the myth of the military invincibility is gradually broken especially where this commitment is prolonged. A good example of this is the South East crisis that involved unknown gun

men/IPOB and the security forces in respect of vandalism of police stations and INEC offices which led to the involvement of soldiers in what should have largely be a police operation but soldiers were brought in to help thereby unleashing terror on the innocent masses. The government should equip the police to enable it handle internal security problems without necessarily involving the military (Utsha, 2016).

Although the proliferation of small arms and light weapons dates back to the civil war (1966-1970), but it has become more alarming in the light of the current security concerns in the country. As at today, the volume of illicit weapons in Nigeria has reached a frightening dimension fuelled by weak security architecture, connivance, corruption, hollow institutions and the near absence of adequate punishment for the traffickers (Ezeobi, 2022). Thus, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons SAWLs occasioned by illegal and porous national borders and a booming business of gun-running, are some of the main factors fuelling Nigeria's security challenges. This of course has been exacerbated by security sector connivance in arms dealing which has given rise to criminal activities across the country.

As explained by the ECOWAS Convention in 2006, Small Arms are arms used by an individual, and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, missile systems or landmines, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons, on the other hand, are portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team, and which include notable heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted portable anti-aircraft cannons, portable anti-tank cannons, non-recoil guns, portable anti-tank missile launchers, and mortars with a calibre of less than 100 millimeters.

The Challenges posed by Proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria

Some of them are:

Economic Challenges: Proliferation of SALWs has placed a serious challenge on both the micro and macro-economic spheres of the country in no small measure because of the activities of people with illegal possession of SA.

For example, the availability of illegal SALWs has emboldened the militant youth in the Niger Delta and increased the rate of economic sabotage they carry out in that area. These include illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism and forceful closure of flow stations and crude oil platforms, especially in reverine areas. In the same vein, foreign Fulani herders killing and maiming of farmers has seriously prevented farmers from going to farm, thereby leading to high cost of farm produce and scarcity of food stuffs.

Social Challenges: The frequency of violent crisis has further given rise to a society already polarized along ethnic and religious lines and has undermined the unity of Nigeria to an almost intolerable ethnically plural society. Also, due to the high rate of unemployment, the youth often indulge in nefarious activities involving the use of SALWs. These include campus mischief, gangsterism, political thuggery, armed robbery and cultism which eventually lead these youths to society menace. Utsha (2016) asserts that Lagos State Police record a total of 4,732 armed robberies from 1998-2000 as against 3000 cases recorded between 1970 and 1989,

80% involving the youth. This indicates that involvement of the youth in violent crimes has been very much on the rise in recent years.

Development Challenges: Socio-economic underdevelopment provides both a breeding ground for and a consequence of the proliferation and misuse of SALWs. The long term challenge and cost of SALWs in terms of human and economic development affect societies as a whole, and the adverse effects of armed violence on poverty, social spending and economic perpetuate human suffering. SALWs can have a negative and destructive impact on human development including health and morality, knowledge and education, income and standard of living and community participation. SALWs also play a key role in criminal activities and damage of property and can become an integral part of day-to-day business and commerce, which have negative impact on employment, investment and growth of post conflict countries. Hence, widespread use of small arms in business activity and employment which in turn fuels poverty. As a result, there may be less opportunity to work and earn an income as investment decline not only large scale foreign direct investment, but also by local or regional entrepreneur who may not want to take the risk (Kofi, 2010)

Role of libraries in providing Resilience to the Society

Libraries can be considered as instruments for building general resilience and the capacity for dealing with community vulnerabilities in general. According to Varhem (2016), it is this general ability that constitutes the core of community resilience. Libraries play a vital role in helping individuals and communities by providing access to information resources and support during period of economic hardship. They are trusted community, organizations with a mission to cultivate healthy minds and healthy bodies; they are flexible to community needs, responding to changing social issues and demands.

The fundamental function of library in the society is to inform, educate and entertain. The role of library in providing resilience to the society cannot be underestimated. Library is established as a focal point for accessing relevant information materials for all categories of users in any community it is situated.

The role libraries can play in addressing the wide spread of SALWs as one of the actors of civil societies cannot be underestimated. This is due to the fact that democracy means that ordinary people should be able to participate in the processes that affect their lives. Library as an entity is one of the active actors of the organizations and there are various roles they can play in controlling the influx and circulation of these weapons. Library in collaboration with civil society organization as well as individuals should have interest in becoming an effective part of SALWs collection and destruction. The reason being that, civil society organization can exert a special influence over SALWs control activities, as they often have the trust of the communities where they work and are seen to be relatively impartial and neutral. Civil society organizations are charity or non profit groups (NGOs) which include community groups, women organization, faith based organization and religious groups, professional associations and representatives of the private sectors, self-help groups, media organization, think tanks, schools and universities, political parties in their capacity as generators of security policy, youth groups, traditional groups such as elders or generational groups etc (Aderinwale, 2005)

It is very important for these institutions to be involved in controlling SALWs because the content in which civil society work and the nature of the problem in the country necessitate the feasible and useful role and activities of the civil society.

Libraries and Civil Societies collaboration on strategies that can be adopted in providing resilience

There are many reasons why it is important for the libraries and civil societies to be engaged in curbing the proliferation of SALWs and providing security control which are stated below:

States have recognised the important role civil societies can play which have been affirmed in many international, regional and national declarations, agreement and guidelines. United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspect (UN POA, 2001) section, 1, 16 of UN POA recognises the important contribution of libraries and civil societies including non-governmental organizations in assisting government to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALWs in every aspect. It also acknowledges the vital role of libraries, civil society and NGOs, especially in the field of public awareness and confidence building on the problem and consequences of the illicit trade in SALWs, with a view to eradicate the illicit trade in SALWs.

Libraries in collaboration with civil societies are sometimes better placed than government or outsiders to identify the genuine/root causes of security, conflict or SALWs problems that are having effect on daily security and the experience of the people. This is as a result that civil society actors often have an in depth and valuable knowledge of the local context and sensitivity to the need of local populations and cultural norms. Moreover, civil society actors often have better access to and understanding of the different conflict and security experiences of men, women and youths in the communities than outsiders or government actors. Civil society actors can also potentially help to reduce mistrust in the security forces by becoming engaged in, for instance, SALWs reduction, community policing, peace committee or other very local conflict prevention capacities. Civil society actors may be able to play a vital role in monitoring tensions and providing early warning of the risks of an outbreak or recurrence of conflict (Aderinwale, 2005)

In the same vein, civil societies are generally autonomous from government interest; it has the potential to become a means of increasing the accountability, credibility and responsiveness of actors such as government, police and the military. The Civil societies which is made up of a wide range of actors' including libraries can adopt several strategies in addressing the proliferation of SALWs in so many ways which include the following:

Research, Assessments and Analysis

Libraries and civil society actors are well-placed to conduct needs assessments, analysis or research into local perceptions of security and root cause of conflict, due to their closeness to specific communities. Such assessments can provide valuable insights and information for local government as well as international organizations to incorporate into their policies and programmes to ensure that responses are addressing the real problems of the people and are sustainable. A survey or campaign on SALWs issues for example, should not only highlight those groups that possess illegal weapons but should also find out reasons why a society has

developed a demand for arms, why people do not feel protected by the government security forces, and why people prefer to protect themselves instead of relying on the government security forces.

Libraries and civil societies are often seen as unthreatening actors that can sometimes be better placed to research and analyse the conflict that affect communities than other actors who may be seen as having been actively engaged in precipitating the conflict. This include documenting and analysing the success and failure of peace processes, reporting on incidents as a means of conflict early warning and recommending preventive measures by informing relevant stakeholders about signs which may trigger violent incident.

Public Awareness Raising and Campaigning

This can be described as a formal or informal information sharing and persuasion which targets a set of specific actors or groups that are meant to change behaviour or values in the short term. Good examples of these are violence free elections, participation in a gun collection exercise and over time changing the values and perception about the utility of cattle raiding/rustling. Public awareness-raising is a key activity of libraries and civil society that is crucial in security provision, conflict prevention and processes for SALWs control. The success of any security, peace and SALWs control action depends to a great extent on making people aware of security and SALWs problems, new policies and laws dealing with these issues, possible solutions to the problem opportunities for people to participate in resolving peace, security and SALWs control issues. Public awareness campaigns are very important in SALWs control. There are many options and forms for undertaking awareness raising by libraries and civil societies as observed by Ngang (2002). These include the following:

- i. Community meeting or public awareness workshop: The major disadvantage of this type of meetings is that they usually do not reach a large number of people. Also, there is problem of criteria for the selection of participants, for instance, only a limited number of people can participate due to the size of the venue. However, if carefully selected, these people can then go back to their various communities and continue to spread the messages.
- ii. Public performances: Dancing, music, theatre and other stage performance. The disadvantage of this is that participation from the audience is usually very limited or non-existent. Notwithstanding, many cultures respond very positively to drama, dancing and music, which is reasonable to the audience, this helps to get the message across.
- iii. Media: Radio jingle, TV shows/soap operas, newspaper opinion piece apart from discussion formats, participation by the audience is very limited, and no immediate feedback or answers to any questions can be given. This is because, the monitoring of broadcasted information can be difficult.
- iv. Sport and events or festival: These are enjoyed and usually attract big crowds of people, which make the dissemination of message very easy, although the message may be lost after the event.
- v. Arts: Civil society organization and libraries can support a public awareness campaign by drawing or printing posters, slogans, stickers or producing a video.

- vi. Working with students and university faculties: This permit organizations to gather resources and support libraries and civil society actions for creating educational events at the grassroots.
- vii. Reaching out to school students: Certain issues could become part of the school curriculum, for example, giving serious warning against cultism and other nefarious activities all geared towards encouraging students to be involved in community projects.

Conclusion

The proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria requires the combined effort of all stakeholders in order to nip it in the bud. This effort should be geared toward identifying the sources of supply, the demand for these arms by both state actors and non state actors. What we are currently witnessing as a nation has left much to be desired. The proliferation of these arms has posed a serious security threat to lives and properties in the country.

There is an urgent need for clean up of all the mess if Nigeria is to remain one and indivisible entity where there is no agitation for secession because certain set of the population are wielding and having free and unhindered access to the spread of SALWs at the expense of other constituents. So, government commitment should be seen to holistically reduce the proliferation or completely eradicate it in order to have a peaceful and secured society.

Recommendations

Below are some of the recommendations put forward by this paper:

The armed forces and security forces should step up their cooperation in order to monitor local production of small arms and light weapons more effectively and if possible halt it.

In order to combat small arms proliferation more effectively, the punishment imposed on offenders should be made more severe so as to have a real deterrent effect.

In order to operate effectively, the armed forces and other security forces should therefore work together.

Nigeria should cry out to the ECOWAS and other regional bodies to give helping hands to combat the influx of these firearms.

Libraries and civil society organization should constantly engage in collaborative effort to discourage the spread or proliferation of SALWs through public enlightenment programmes on both print and social media platforms.

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