

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Implications for the Security of Human Lives

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Abstract:

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) poses a severe threat to human security in Nigeria. The availability of SALW enables armed violence by groups like Boko Haram, militants, and ethnic militias, fueling conflicts, human rights abuses, and undermining economic activities, essential services, and political stability. This study investigates the impact of SALW proliferation on human security in Nigeria, aiming to identify affected populations and vulnerabilities, assess existing legal and policy frameworks, and provide evidence-based recommendations for addressing SALW proliferation and safeguarding human security. Case studies demonstrate the devastating effects of SALW proliferation, including indiscriminate attacks on civilians, disrupted livelihoods, human rights violations, exacerbated resource conflicts, and disproportionate threats to vulnerable groups like women and children. Weak enforcement, corruption, and non-state armed group involvement limit current legal and policy measures. Recommendations from this research include strengthening laws and enforcement, promoting disarmament, reintegration, and conflict resolution, addressing socioeconomic drivers, empowering civil society, and ensuring the protection of vulnerable populations. In conclusion, curbing SALW proliferation requires political commitment, adequate resources, and a comprehensive approach tackling the root causes of violence through effective arms control, human rights protection, and sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

Keywords: Armed violence, conflict resolution, human security, proliferation, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has severely undermined human security across Nigeria, enabling the rise of insurgencies, militant groups, and ethnic militias that perpetrate violence against civilian populations. The availability of illicit weapons has empowered non-state armed actors like Boko Haram to sustain insurgency by seizing arms from military stockpiles, as highlighted by Iroegbu (2022). Boko Haram's acquisition of a vast SALW arsenal has allowed the group to carry out indiscriminate attacks and human rights abuses that threaten the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of local populations in the northeast. Similarly, the proliferation of SALW among militants in the Niger Delta region has fueled insecurity and instability, with armed groups exploiting these weapons to attack oil facilities, perpetrate kidnappings, and undermine development efforts, reflecting the link between militants' insurgency and security noted by Akinola (2011, p. 65). Furthermore, the widespread availability of SALW has exacerbated deadly conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria's Middle Belt, as documented by the International Crisis Group (2021), with both sides acquiring arms to carry out retaliatory attacks over land and resource disputes.

The possession of SALW by civilian joint task forces and vigilante groups formed to combat Boko Haram has also raised concerns over human rights violations and lack of accountability, as reported by Ibrahim and Bala (2018). These armed civilian groups have been implicated in extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions, undermining efforts to restore human security in affected regions. The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria stems from multiple factors, including the aftermath of violent conflicts, porous borders enabling cross-border trafficking, activities of illicit arms marketers, and socioeconomic drivers that fuel demand for these weapons among various actors.

This research aims to conduct an in-depth investigation on the impacts of SALW proliferation on human security in Nigeria. The key objectives are to identify the populations most affected and their specific vulnerabilities, as well as critically assess the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks at national and international levels within the Nigerian context. Also, the study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for a comprehensive strategy to address SALW proliferation and safeguard human security in Nigeria. This research is essential as it enhances the discourse on policy interventions required to tackle the far-reaching repercussions of unchecked SALW proliferation on human security, stability, human rights protection, and sustainable development efforts in the country.

2. Overview of SALW proliferation, legal and policy frameworks

Illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) are a clear threat to human security globally. And their wide availability combined with their lethality has made them weapons of choice for non-state armed groups and criminal organizations involved in organized violence (UNODC, 2015). Significantly, the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW affects

various dimensions of security; including economic, food, health, personal, community, and political frameworks. It obstructs economic activities and agricultural production, access to healthcare, ignites communal tensions, displaces communities, and allows armed groups to challenge state authority (Iroegbu, 2022). The diversion of legal weapons into illicit markets, transnational criminal networks, past conflicts, weak regulations, porous borders, and corruption facilitate SALW proliferation, perpetuating insecurity (United Nations Press Release, 2021). In Nigeria, conditions fueling the proliferation of SALW include armed conflict, porous borders, and criminal activities leading to insurgencies, communal clashes, and crime. All these underpin violence in Nigeria that undermines human security (Bashir, 2014). Although regional and global efforts have been made to control the proliferation of arms through the Arms Trade Treaty, challenges in its implementation continue to be rife across regions with weak governance, further characterized by non-state armed groups.

To address the far-reaching impacts of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation, various legal and policy frameworks have been developed at the international, regional, and national levels. These instruments aim to regulate the trade, transfer, and circulation of SALW, while promoting cooperation and accountability among states and other relevant stakeholders. At the global level, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted by the United Nations in 2013, represents a significant milestone in efforts to regulate the international trade in conventional arms. The ATT establishes common international standards for the transfer of conventional arms, including SALW, and requires state parties to assess the potential risk of human rights violations or diversion to the illicit market before authorizing arms exports (Arms Trade Treaty, 2024). Regional initiatives have also played a crucial role in addressing SALW proliferation. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, adopted in 2006, aims to prevent and combat the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of SALW in the region (ECOWAS, 2006).

At the national level, many countries have enacted domestic legislation and established regulatory frameworks to control the manufacture, possession, and transfer of SALW. These measures often include licensing systems, record-keeping requirements, and provisions for marking and tracing weapons to promote accountability and prevent diversion to illicit markets (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). In Nigeria, the primary legal instrument governing SALW is the Firearms Act of 1990, which regulates the possession, manufacture, and transfer of firearms and ammunition (Legalnaija, 2013; Oyetola, 2023). Despite these frameworks, significant gaps and challenges exist in their implementation and enforcement. Weak governance, corruption, porous borders, and the involvement of non-state actors in the illicit trade of SALW have undermined the effectiveness of these measures (Usman et al., 2020). Additionally, the lack of harmonization and coordination among different legal and policy instruments at various levels has limited their impact.

3. Methodology

This study adopts secondary data and a qualitative research design, to investigate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and its implications for human security in Nigeria. Data was gathered through a systematic review of existing literature, including academic publications, reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations. The analysis will focus on identifying the various dimensions of human security impacted by SALW proliferation. The analysis will synthesize theoretical perspectives, policies, and case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the link between SALW proliferation and human security threats in Nigerian.

4. Case studies

Analysis of key cases

To understand the implications of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation on human security in Nigeria, it is crucial to examine specific case studies that illustrate the real-world impacts and challenges.

Case 1: The Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria exemplifies the devastating impact of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation on human security. Since escalating its violent campaign in 2009, the terrorist group has acquired a formidable arsenal through looting military stockpiles, cross-border trafficking, and illicit procurement networks (Iroegbu, 2022). This access to SALW has enabled Boko Haram to unleash a reign of terror, perpetrating indiscriminate attacks against civilians, security forces, and infrastructure in states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. The widespread availability of these illicit weapons has empowered the insurgents to employ tactics such as suicide bombings, assassinations, and assaults on civilian targets, resulting in numerous casualties, massive displacement, and a pervasive climate of fear. Boko Haram's ideology has also led to the targeting of schools, depriving countless children, especially girls, of their fundamental right to education (Usang & Enemuoh, 2021).

Moreover, the group has been implicated in grave human rights violations, including the recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence against women and girls, and abductions. The government's military response has been marred by allegations of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings, further compounding the human security challenges posed by the conflict (Ibrahim & Bala, 2018). The Boko Haram insurgency exemplifies how SALW proliferation can catalyze cycles of violence, deprivation, and human rights abuses that undermine the core dimensions of human security.

Case 2: The Niger Delta militancy and environmental degradation

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has been a major driving force behind the militancy and environmental degradation in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The

widespread availability of these illicit weapons has enabled militant groups to exploit long-standing grievances over environmental pollution, marginalization, and lack of development in the oil-rich region (Akinola, 2011). Armed with SALW, these groups have carried out attacks on oil facilities, perpetrated kidnappings, and undermined efforts to address the region's environmental and socioeconomic challenges. The climate of insecurity perpetuated by SALW proliferation has had severe implications for human security in the Niger Delta. Militant groups have used the threat of violence to assert their demands, resulting in disruptions to economic activities, displacement of communities, and human rights violations against local populations. The environmental degradation caused by oil spills and gas flaring has compromised access to clean water, air, and land, undermining the health and livelihoods of residents (Akinola, 2011).

Moreover, the Niger Delta militancy has exacerbated inter-communal tensions and conflicts over resource control, with various groups acquiring SALW to assert their claims through force. This cycle of violence and retaliation has eroded community security, disrupted essential services, and hampered efforts to address the root causes of the crisis through inclusive dialogue and sustainable development initiatives. The Niger Delta case shows how SALW proliferation can exacerbate pre-existing grievances, fuel armed conflicts, and undermine human security by enabling environmental degradation, economic disruption, and human rights violations against vulnerable populations.

Case 3: Communal clashes in the Middle Belt region

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) among nomadic herdsman and farming communities has exacerbated long-standing ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria's Middle Belt region, posing grave threats to human security. The widespread availability of these illicit weapons has enabled both sides to engage in cycles of retaliatory violence over land and water resources, escalating conflicts that were once resolved through traditional dispute mechanisms. One of the most shocking incidents was the Agatu massacre, where heavily armed herdsman attacked farming communities, resulting in numerous casualties and displacements (International Crisis Group, 2021). Such indiscriminate attacks have become increasingly lethal due to the possession of sophisticated SALW by both parties, undermining the personal security and right to life of civilians caught in the crossfire.

The climate of insecurity created by SALW proliferation has disrupted essential services, economic activities, and access to vital resources like water and grazing lands in the region. Farming communities have faced threats to their livelihoods and food security, while pastoralists have struggled to maintain their traditional migratory patterns, fueling further tensions and violence. Furthermore, the communal clashes have led to the displacement of thousands of people, depriving them of access to shelter, healthcare, and education, and increasing their vulnerability to human rights abuses and exploitation. The involvement of armed ethnic militias and vigilante groups has further complicated efforts to resolve the conflicts through peaceful means, perpetuating the cycle of violence and undermining community security.

Case 4: The Civilian Joint Task Force and Vigilante Groups

The formation of civilian joint task forces and vigilante groups to counter the Boko Haram insurgency has raised significant concerns regarding the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and its implications for human security. While these groups have played a role in supporting security operations, their possession of SALW and lack of adequate training and oversight have contributed to human rights violations and undermined efforts to restore stability in affected regions. Reports have documented instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and excessive use of force by these armed civilian elements against suspected insurgents and civilians (Ibrahim & Bala, 2018). The availability of SALW has empowered these groups to operate with impunity, fostering a climate of fear and insecurity among local populations who may become targets of their vigilantism.

Furthermore, the involvement of armed civilian groups has complicated the legal and operational framework for counterterrorism efforts, blurring the lines between legitimate security forces and unregulated armed actors. This lack of accountability and clear command structures has increased the risks of human rights abuses, exacerbating the erosion of human security in regions already grappling with the impacts of Boko Haram's violence. The proliferation of SALW among civilian joint task forces and vigilante groups highlights the need for robust disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, as well as comprehensive security sector reforms to ensure effective oversight, training, and adherence to human rights standards.

Case 5: Armed banditry and kidnappings in the northwest

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has fueled a surge in armed banditry and kidnapping incidents in northwestern Nigeria, posing grave threats to human security in the region. Organized criminal gangs have exploited access to SALW to conduct brazen raids on villages, steal livestock, loot properties, and abduct residents for ransom payments. These armed attacks have resulted in numerous casualties, massive displacement of communities, and a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity that has disrupted the daily lives and livelihoods of local populations (Idris, 2021). The mere presence of these illicit weapons has empowered the bandits to overpower security forces, emboldening them to carry out their criminal activities with impunity. The consequences of armed banditry have been far-reaching, undermining various dimensions of human security. Families have been torn apart, with breadwinners abducted or killed, plunging households into economic hardship and food insecurity. Children's access to education has been disrupted, as schools have become targets for attacks and kidnappings, depriving them of their fundamental right to learning (Odia, 2023).

Moreover, the erosion of personal security and the constant threat of violence have had profound psychological impacts on affected communities, with residents living in a state of perpetual fear and trauma. This climate of insecurity has also hindered the delivery of

essential services, such as healthcare and humanitarian aid, further compounding the vulnerabilities of displaced and marginalized populations.

Case 6: Cult Violence and Gang Rivalries in Urban Centers

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) among cult groups and criminal gangs in urban centers has severely undermined human security, turning public spaces into insecure zones plagued by violence and intimidation. These armed groups exploit access to SALW to perpetrate crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and drug trafficking, using force to assert their control over territories and illicit activities (Waila & Tini, 2011). Violent turf wars and retaliatory attacks between rival armed factions have become commonplace, with innocent bystanders often caught in the crossfire (Bashir, 2014). The indiscriminate use of firearms has claimed numerous civilian lives and restricted freedom of movement, a fundamental aspect of human security, as residents fear venturing into areas controlled by these armed groups.

Furthermore, the presence of SALW has empowered cult groups and gangs to undermine democratic processes and the rule of law, as they use violence and intimidation to influence political outcomes and challenge state authority. This erosion of political security has implications for the protection of human rights and the ability of citizens to participate fully in democratic processes without fear of reprisal. The impact of cult violence and gang rivalries extends beyond physical harm, as the climate of insecurity has disrupted economic activities, deterred investment, and hindered access to education and essential services in affected urban areas. This has exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities and perpetuated cycles of marginalization and vulnerability, further fueling the conditions that enable the proliferation of armed groups.

Case 7: SALW Proliferation and Gender-Based Violence

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has had particularly devastating impacts on human security from a gendered perspective. In conflict zones, SALW have been used as instruments to perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, exploitation, and domestic abuse against women and girls (Phillip 2018). The mere presence and threat of these illicit weapons have deterred SGBV survivors from seeking essential services, such as medical care, legal aid, or psychosocial support, compounding their trauma and undermining their human security (Phillip, 2018). The climate of fear and insecurity created by SALW proliferation has also increased the risks of human trafficking, abduction, and other forms of gender-based violence, even in non-conflict settings. Furthermore, the disproportionate impact of SALW proliferation on women and girls extends beyond physical and sexual violence. The displacement and disruption of livelihoods caused by armed conflicts and instability have exacerbated economic insecurity, food insecurity, and limited access to education and healthcare for many women and their families.

The gendered implications of SALW proliferation also highlight the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and those living with disabilities. These populations often lack access to adequate protection, support systems, and resources, leaving them particularly susceptible to the risks posed by the availability of illicit weapons. These case studies highlight the diverse and far-reaching impacts of SALW proliferation on human security in Nigeria, ranging from terrorist activities to gender-based violence. They underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of violence, promote sustainable development, and strengthen human rights protection mechanisms, while also implementing effective disarmament and arms control measures.

5. Implications of SALW on human security

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has far-reaching implications for human security in Nigeria, undermining various dimensions of security and exacerbating vulnerabilities for civilian populations. The case studies presented in the research provides empirical evidence of the threats posed by SALW. The availability of SALW has enabled armed groups, such as Boko Haram, militants, and bandits, to perpetrate indiscriminate violence against civilians, resulting in loss of life, displacement, and disruption of essential services (Iroegbu, 2022; Idris, 2021). This directly undermines personal security and the fundamental right to life. Additionally, SALW proliferation has eroded human rights and the rule of law, empowering non-state actors to commit violations like extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and gender-based violence with impunity (Ibrahim & Bala, 2018; Phillip, 2018).

The climate of insecurity created by SALW proliferation has disrupted economic activities, trade, and agricultural production, jeopardizing the economic security and livelihoods of communities reliant on these sectors (Akinola, 2011). Furthermore, the availability of SALW has exacerbated conflicts over land, water, and natural resources, leading to cycles of retaliatory violence that undermine community security and the ability to access essential resources for survival (International Crisis Group, 2021). SALW proliferation has also posed disproportionate threats to vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and marginalized communities, compromising their human security through gender-based violence, human trafficking, and displacement (Phillip, 2018). This indicates the gendered dimensions of the human security challenges posed by SALW. Additionally, the widespread possession of SALW among civilian populations and armed groups has complicated disarmament efforts and the reintegration of former combatants, perpetuating the cycle of insecurity (Bashir, 2014). This reinforces the need for comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of armed violence and promote sustainable reintegration initiatives.

6. Local and international legal and policy responses

The Nigerian government has implemented various legal and policy measures aimed at regulating small arms and light weapons (SALW), but their effectiveness has been hampered by challenges like weak enforcement, limited resources, and complex dynamics driving SALW proliferation. The primary legal instrument is the Firearms Act of 1990,

which regulates possession, manufacture, and transfer of firearms and ammunition (Legalnaija, 2013). Critics argue that it lacks comprehensive provisions to address contemporary SALW challenges (Oyetola, 2023).

Recognizing these limitations, on February 2, 2022, the Nigerian Senate read the "Firearms Act Cap F28 LFN (Amendment) Bill 2022 (SB. 889)," which seeks to strengthen firearms control and reduce the proliferation of illegal arms by aligning regulations with global best practices. This bill addresses contemporary security challenges by aiming to restrict access to small arms, particularly those capable of causing significant damage and easily concealed, such as handguns and short-barreled weapons. It proposes stricter criteria for firearm licenses, denying them to individuals under a certain age or with criminal records, and those deemed at risk of harming themselves or others due to issues like domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, or a history of suicidal behavior (Oyetola, 2023). Nigeria has ratified regional instruments like the Nairobi Protocol and ECOWAS Convention on SALW to foster cooperation and harmonize efforts. Operationally, the government established the Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM) in 2013 to coordinate SALW policies, disarmament strategies, and stockpile management.

Disarmament campaigns and weapons collection programs, particularly in conflict zones like the Niger Delta, have yielded some success in reducing illicit weapons circulation. However, these initiatives face criticism for limited scope, lack of sustainable reintegration programs, and failure to address root causes of armed violence comprehensively. Overall, robust implementation of existing frameworks remains crucial for curbing SALW proliferation. Various global and regional organizations have engaged with the Nigerian government and stakeholders to promote disarmament, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and enhance capacity-building initiatives related to small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation. At the global level, the United Nations has facilitated cooperation and technical assistance through frameworks like the Program of Action on Small Arms and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. Regionally, the Economic Community of West African States (2006) Convention on Small Arms has provided a legal basis for member states, including Nigeria, to harmonize laws and implement control measures. The African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative also aims to address drivers of conflict like SALW proliferation across the continent (African Union, 2023). Nigeria has participated in these initiatives, collaborating on information exchange, joint operations against illicit arms trafficking, and capacity building programs like the U.S. Export Control and Border Security program. However, challenges persist due to inconsistent implementation, limited resources, and lack of coordination among various efforts. Continuous engagement, political commitment, and sustained international support remain crucial to effectively curb SALW proliferation and its impact on human security in Nigeria.

7. Role of civil society and advocacy

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a crucial role in advocating for measures to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria. These organizations have raised awareness about the devastating impacts of SALW on human

security, pushed for policy reforms, and monitored the implementation of existing legal frameworks (UN Press, 2023). Organizations like the Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM) and the National Committee on the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons have engaged with stakeholders, including government agencies, security forces, and local communities, to promote disarmament initiatives and strengthen regulatory mechanisms. CSOs have also been at the forefront of advocating for the protection of human security in the context of SALW proliferation. They have documented and highlighted the multifaceted threats posed by SALW to various dimensions of human security, including economic, food, health, personal, community, and political aspects. Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have extensively reported on human rights violations, civilian casualties, and the humanitarian consequences of armed violence fueled by SALW availability (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

CSOs have also played a crucial role in promoting the participation of affected communities and vulnerable groups in decision-making processes related to SALW control and disarmament efforts. They have amplified the voices of women, children, and marginalized populations disproportionately affected by the proliferation of SALW, advocating for their protection and empowerment as a critical aspect of ensuring human security. Furthermore, CSOs have engaged in capacity-building initiatives, providing training and resources to local communities, law enforcement agencies, and government institutions to enhance their understanding of human security challenges related to SALW and develop effective strategies to address them.

8. Recommendations

Strengthen legal and policy frameworks: Review and update existing legislation, such as the Firearms Act of 1990, to align with contemporary challenges and international standards. Develop and effectively implement a comprehensive National Action Plan on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) that addresses all aspects of the issue, including regulation, disarmament, stockpile management, and regional cooperation.

Enhance enforcement and institutional capacity: Allocate adequate resources and training to law enforcement agencies and security forces to improve their ability to monitor, regulate, and combat the illicit trade and use of SALW. Strengthen border control measures and cross-border cooperation to disrupt trafficking routes. Address corruption and governance issues that undermine effective implementation of arms control measures.

Promote disarmament and reintegration initiatives: Implement community-based disarmament programs that address the root causes of armed violence and provide sustainable livelihood alternatives for former combatants and at-risk populations. Ensure these initiatives are accompanied by comprehensive reintegration support, including vocational training, psychosocial assistance, and community reconciliation efforts.

Prioritize conflict resolution and peacebuilding: Invest in conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms to address the underlying drivers of violence, such as resource conflicts, marginalization, and grievances. Promote inclusive dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation processes that involve all stakeholders, including affected communities, civil society, and relevant armed groups.

Foster regional and international cooperation: Strengthen collaboration with regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, as well as international organizations like the United Nations, to harmonize arms control efforts, share intelligence, and enhance capacity-building initiatives. Ratify and effectively implement relevant international instruments like the Arms Trade Treaty.

Address socioeconomic factors: Implement development programs and policies that address poverty, unemployment, and economic marginalization, which can fuel the demand for SALW and contribute to cycles of armed violence. Promote inclusive economic opportunities, access to education, and equitable resource distribution, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

Empower civil society and community engagement: Support the active involvement of civil society organizations, community leaders, and grassroots initiatives in SALW control efforts. Facilitate their participation in policymaking, awareness-raising campaigns, and monitoring of disarmament programs to ensure accountability and community ownership.

Prioritize protection and assistance for vulnerable groups: Develop targeted strategies to address the disproportionate impact of SALW proliferation on women, children, and marginalized communities. Ensure their protection, access to essential services, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to disarmament and human security.

Promote research and data collection: Invest in research and data collection efforts to better understand the dynamics, patterns, and impacts of SALW proliferation in Nigeria. This evidence-based approach can inform more effective policies, interventions, and resource allocation.

9. Conclusion

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria poses a grave threat to human security, undermining various dimensions including economic, food, health, personal, community, and political security. This challenge is fueled by interplay of internal and external factors, such as armed conflicts, porous borders, illicit arms trafficking networks, and socioeconomic drivers. Nigeria has implemented various legal and policy measures to address SALW proliferation, including domestic legislation, regional instruments, and international cooperation efforts. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives has been hampered by challenges such as weak enforcement,

inadequate resources, corruption, and the involvement of non-state armed groups in the illicit arms trade.

Case studies from regions like the Northeast, Niger Delta, and Middle Belt illustrate the devastating impacts of SALW proliferation on civilian populations, including indiscriminate violence, human rights violations, disruption of livelihoods, and exacerbation of resource conflicts. Vulnerable groups, such as women and children, have faced disproportionate threats, including gender-based violence and displacement. Addressing the scourge of SALW proliferation and its consequences on human security in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach. This includes strengthening legal and policy frameworks, enhancing enforcement and institutional capacity, promoting disarmament and reintegration initiatives, prioritizing conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, fostering regional and international cooperation, addressing socioeconomic factors, empowering civil society, and prioritizing the protection and assistance for vulnerable groups. Ultimately, curbing SALW proliferation and safeguarding human security in Nigeria demands sustained political commitment, adequate resources, and a holistic approach that tackles the root causes of armed violence while implementing effective arms control measures. Only through concerted efforts at the national, regional, and international levels can Nigeria overcome this challenge and pave the way for sustainable peace, development, and the protection of human secure and rights for all its citizens.

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