The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria and the Implications for Peace and Development in the Benue Valley

By

Andza, Saa-Aondo Moses & Dr. Isaac Iorhen Akuva

Abstract
This paper explores the menace associated with the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria and its implications for the peace and development of the Benue Valley (Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States). The paper found that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has fuelled conflicts and crimes. The paper also found that, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that the 193 member states of the United Nations endorsed in 2015 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the world is committed to achieve may remain unrealizable in the Benue Valley if the menace of proliferation of small arms and light weapons are not addressed. The paper equally discovers that the menace is thwarting the development of the Benue Valley. The paper concluded that, if the governments of the states of the Benue Valley do not address the proliferation of light arms it will affect development. The paper recommends the strengthening of institutions and processes of governance to enhance social security for citizens.

Key Words: Benue Valley, Development, Implication, Light, Nigeria, Peace, Proliferation, Small Arms, and Weapon.

Introduction
The importance of peace in human existence at any point in time cannot be over-emphasized. It was for reasons of peace and development that today’s modern state was established as against Thomas Hobbes’ state of nature where life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Lamartine as cited in Rummel, (1981, p. 1) rightly noted that, “peace has always been among humanity’s highest values...for some supreme”. That explains why it is argued that peace is considered at any price and that the most unjust peace is preferred to the most just war that was ever waged in humanity’s history. This perhaps justifies the huge amount of monies countries invest in security to ensure that their citizens enjoy peace and sustainable development. Nations security budgets the world over have been excessively high especially when they (nations) are confronted with a threatening security challenge and unfortunately, many corrupt people have used this avenue to unjustly enrich themselves sometimes at the detriment of the peace being sought. Hartung (2017) agrees no less in his comment on the US security budget when he asserted that, “there are hundreds of billions...
of dollars in “defence” spending that aren’t even accounted for in the Pentagon budget”.

Development, as O’sullivan and Sheffrin, (2003) noted, includes the process and policies by which a nation improves the economic, political, and social well-being of its people. This certainly cannot be carried out in an atmosphere devoid of peace and tranquility as any meaningful development can only be rooted in a society that is devoid of chaos unlike what is happening in the Benue Valley. The Benue Valley has witnessed kidnappings, assassinations, armed robberies, communal crisis, and the protracted farmers/herders crises that have claimed unimaginable number of lives and properties worth billions of naira. This scenario does not paint a picture of an area that is enjoying peace and development.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria is no longer an issue of speculation as the Nigerian Customs Service has intercepted at different times containers loaded with weapons, arms and ammunitions. According to Sahara Reporters of September 22, 2017, between February and September of 2017 alone, the Nigerian Customs Service intercepted containers loads with assorted weapons for the third time with a total of 2,761 rifles. Basically, what this means is that, for these consignments of weapons that were impounded, there are chances that many more other containers of such weapons have gone through the country as can be seen in the number of arms and ammunitions recovered by security agencies in many of their operations in recent times across the country. These illegally acquired weapons have no doubt fuelled and exacerbated crimes and conflicts that have brought untold hardship on the people of the Benue Valley. This paper therefore, seeks to investigate the implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on peace and development of the Benue Valley.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) defines small arms and light weapons as “any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas. Antique small arms and light weapons and their replicas, the United Nations insists must be defined in accordance with domestic law. In no case will antique small arms and light weapons include those manufactured after 1899.” The definition of small arms and light weapons by the United Nation is very instructive not only that it has explained in great detail what small arms and light weapons are but it has also given us a timeline of what constitute small arms and light weapons. The definition of small arms and light weapons by ECOWAS (2006) as outlined below is not in conflict with the United Nations definition, however, it states in specific terms what constitutes small arms and light weapons.

The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition and other related materials (2006) defines small arms as “arms used by one person and which include notably: firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or a gas bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system or landmine. Others include revolvers and pistols with automatic loading; rifles and carbines; machine guns; assault rifles and light machine guns”. The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition and other related materials
(2006) also defines light weapons as “portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team and which include notably: 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 or rocket launchers; portable anti-aircraft missile launchers; mortars with a calibre of less than 100 millimeters”.

The Benue Valley

The Benue Valley constitutes part of the Central Nigeria area which is located between latitudes 7° 30” North and 11° 15” North and longitudes 4° and 17° East of Greenwich Meridian. It covers an area of 176,395 km² representing 19.1 per cent of Nigeria’s total area of 923,768 km² (NPC, 2017 & NBS, 2017). It is bordered in the East by the Republic of Cameroon and to the West by its sister states of Niger, part of Kogi and the Federal Capital Territory. To the North, the Benue Valley area is bounded by Bauchi, Yobe and Kaduna States; and to the South by Cross River, Ebonyi and Enugu States of Nigeria (Dawan, 2002). By the current geo-political structure, the Benue Valley comprises five states of Benue, part of Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba. However, this study concerns itself with the three states of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba. According to the NPC & NBS (2017), the 2016 projected population of the area was put at twenty million, five thousand, nine hundred (20,005,900) people. There is sharp variation in population density of the states of the Benue Valley, ranging from the least of 56 per/km² to the highest of 168 per/km². On the average, however, the population density is put at 113 per/km². The Benue Valley is one of the least developed in Nigeria despite its huge natural and human resources. Ayua describes the poverty situation in the valley thus:

This is in spite of the region’s very fertile land which is suitable for farming activities with moderate vegetation and climate.

Historical Background of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria

According to Osimen and Akintunde (2015) the first small arms came into general use at the end of the 14th Century. They contend that, initially they were nothing more than small cannon held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch hole. Later a stock was added- the match lock and the first real handgun. Perhaps, gun possession by civilians in Nigeria today, is
not new and predates colonialism. Guns were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa’s resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. The gunboat diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them. The mere sight of fire power and sometimes its demonstration by the imperial powers always had a considerable effect and intimidated the less powerful states into granting concessions. This depicts the efficacy of small arms and light weapons in coercing opponents to submission and the need to acquire same for those who can afford them. This informed the establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British which was used to execute the British-Aro War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

These arms and weapons possibly found their ways to the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism and were subsequently used for tradition and hunting in the rural communities. In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeur, and for deterring aggressors and invaders. Today, arms and weapons are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition.

As Chuma-Okoro, (2011) noted, arms and weapons have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld. The 1959 Firearms Act was enacted supposedly to check the increasing rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards independence which was granted a year following the Firearms Act. The failure of the Nigerian government to carry out a total and complete post Civil War (1967-1970) disarmament and arms destruction program aggravated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. It is also instructive to note that, gun running is the most lucrative legal and illegal business in the world after narcotics. As a result, there are a lot of local and international companies in the business of gun manufacturing who are looking for market for their goods and given the porous nature of Nigeria’s boarders and the country’s elusive security checks as well as weak arms control mechanism, proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria has become real and exacerbated.

An Overview of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria

According to Karp, (2018) out of the global estimate of 857 million small arms and light weapons in circulation at the end of the year 2017, Nigeria alone has 6.2 million of these weapons thereby occupying the 16th position out of the 25 top ranked countries and territories in the world and the first in Africa and the West African sub-region with civilian firearms holdings. Eight years after the Firearms Act of 1959 that was enacted apparently to curb proliferation of small arms and light
weapons at the eve of Nigeria’s independence, there was rather an increased proliferation of small arms and light weapons ostensibly occasioned by the Civil War that lasted for three (3) years between 1967 and 1970. Since the end of the Civil War, Osimen and Akintunde (2015) stated that over 17,000 unexploded bombs were recovered from the South-East zone and an estimated 300 unexploded bombs and improvised explosive devices are still believed to be buried in the region.

According to Osimen and Akintunde (2015), the Niger Delta Amnesty Initiative saw over 15,000 militants surrendered arms at the expiration of the DD Phase of the Amnesty. Weapons recovered during the disarmament process included 2,760 assorted guns, 287,445 ammunitions of different caliber, 18 gun-boats, 763 dynamite sticks, 1,090 dynamite caps, 3,155 magazines and many other military accessories, such as dynamite cables, bulletproof jackets and jack-knives. It is widely believed that the militants only surrendered a small fraction of their arms, as most of them doubted the government’s genuine commitment to the amnesty and as it were, the recent display of firearms and weapons by the Niger Delta militants and their issuance of threats to the Nigerian Government and oil companies operating in the region have affirmed the widely held believe that a large cache of arms is still being held by them. The regular interception of illegal arms trafficking within and across the borders by security agencies also reveals the worrisome dimension that proliferation of small arms and light weapons has assumed in the country.

According to Adenubi (2018), a total of 21,548,608 arms and ammunition were shipped into Nigeria illegally between 2010 and 2017. According to the data obtained from the headquarters of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), the largest cache of live ammunitions of 21,407,933 was intercepted at the Apapa Port in November 2010 while 1,100 pump action guns were seized at Tin-Can Port in September of 2017. A breakdown of arms and ammunitions seized at entry points of the country since 2010 and obtained exclusively by Adenubi (2018) indicates that, one Ak-47 was seized at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport (MMIA) on the 20th of January, 2010. Also, in January of 2010, on the 23rd precisely, one Arg-3 gun and 2,352 quantity of Pepper bullets/Co2 were intercepted at the MMIA Airport in Lagos. 516 Pietro Pistol Barreta with 85 live ammunitions were seized on the 2nd of June 2010 at the Ports & Terminal Multi-service Limited (PTML) facility in Tin-Can Port in Lagos. On November 1st, 2010, 21,407,933 live ammunitions and 34,062 Bomb Mi/Grenhand/Fuze of Rockets were seized.
The year 2013 was not different as arms and ammunitions were seized in different locations at different periods in the year. On the 26th of January, 2013, 1,800 live ammunitions were intercepted at Sahuda border in Adamawa State. Also, on the 2nd of April, 2013, one Barette pistol and 49 live ammunitions were seized at the Murtala Mohammed Airport Command of Customs in Lagos. On the 24th of April, 2013, one Air Soft gun of Zinc Alloy Shell pistol and five rubber bullets pellets were also seized at the Murtala Mohammed Airport Command of Customs and on the 17th of May, 2013, 56,750 live cartridges were seized in Shaki in Oyo State; while 149 jackknives were intercepted at Koko in Kebbi State on the 13th of May, 2013. Three Sniper Rifles and 140 live ammunitions were seized at the PTML terminal in Lagos on the 17th of September, 2013, completing the haul of seizures made in the year 2013. The year 2014 also witnessed several seizures of arms and ammunition as four seizures were made in different locations across the country that year. On the 26th of February, 2014, 1,142 live cartridges of 12 grams were seized at the Murtala Mohammed Airport Customs command in Lagos; while 30,000 live cartridges of 7.2mm were intercepted at Shaki, in Oyo State on the 11th of March, 2014. On the 18th of June, 2014, 120 Jack knives were seized in Sokoto State, while one Remington pistol and 20 cartridges were seized at the Murtala Mohammed Airport Customs Command in Lagos on the 24th of December, 2014.

In 2015, on the 8th of July, two Air Soft guns with ammunition were seized at the Cargo shed of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Abuja; while on the 24th of same month; 2 Ak-47 Rifle and 60 live ammunition were intercepted along Ife-Ilesha expressway in Osun State. Also on the 24th of July, 2015, 20 Jack knives were seized at the Murtala Mohammed Airport Customs command in Lagos. In 2016, 510 live cartridges were intercepted in Agbara, Ogun State on the 9th of January, 2016; while a Revolver gun was seized at Tin-Can Ports on the 26th of July, 2016. On the 10th of November 2016, threeUnnamed Aerial Vehicle Drones were intercepted at the Lagos Airport while two Fighter Jets Helicopters were also intercepted at the same airport on the 30th of December, 2016. On the 16th of December, 2016, 7,504 Premier Hollow Air Gun Pallets/Tactical Rifles were seized at the Tin-Can port in Lagos.

On the 10th of February 2017, 150 live rounds of 9 mm bullets were seized at the Lagos Airport, while 661 Pump Action guns were intercepted along Mile 2 axis of the Apapa-Oshodi express road on the 30th of January, 2017. In May 2017, another 440 Pump Action guns were seized at Tin-Can ports; and in September of 2017, another haul of 1,100 pump action guns were seized at same Tin-Can ports in Lagos and lately, on 10th July, 2018 200,000 live ammunition were intercepted by the Nigerian Custom Service at the Niger state and Benin Republic border. This implies that, for these consignments of weapons that were impounded, there is possibility that many more of these containers of such weapons have passed through the country as can be seen in the number of small arms, light weapons and ammunitions recovered by security operatives in many of their operations in recent times across the
country, especially in the Benue Valley which include but not limited to the over 700 assorted arms, ammunition, grenades, automatic and semi-automatic weapons harvested and destroyed by the Benue State Amnesty Program on Saturday, July 9, 2016 (The Punch Newspaper, July 10, 2016). The 3,000 rounds of ammunition, 26 assorted firearms, anti-aircraft guns, grenades and rocket launchers recovered in a bunker near Gbishe in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State in a joint operation of the Nigeria Military and the police on the 4th of April, 2017 (The Vanguard Newspaper, April 5, 2017); and the four (4) AK47 rifles, five (5) 7.62mm rounds of ammunition and 28 rounds of 7.62 Police special ammunition recovered from 20 militia herdsmen at Ter Guma village, in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State on April 16, 2018 by troops of 72 Special Forces Battalion who were on operation MESA (The Vanguard Newspaper, April 17, 2018).

Implications of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Peace and Development of the Benue Valley

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country and the Benue Valley in particular will continue to fuel conflicts and crimes resulting to a perpetual state or period of crises, violence or crimes of one sort or another. Harmony and the absence of hostility which defines peace will become perpetually lacking and there will be no freedom from the fear of violence between individual’s heterogeneous social groups. The increased and aggravated conflicts, crises, violence and crimes will perpetually make people in the Benue Valley not to live in safety as there will always be fear or threat of violence and all forms of vices. Not everyone will be equal before the law, the system for justice will not be trusted and there will be no fair and effective laws to protect peoples’ rights.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons with its attendant fuelling of conflicts, crises, violence and crimes is capable of ensuring that not everyone participates or is able to participate in shaping political decisions as the fear of arms wielding youths and their sponsors will make many to stay away, thereby bringing about political apathy and so making the government unaccountable to the people. Equally too, not everyone will have an equal opportunity to work and make a living in communities of the Benue Valley as aspects of identity will be highly considered in determining who lives and makes a living in a particular place depending on the aspect of the identity that is the source of conflict which could be political, religious, social or others.

It is instructive to note that, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that the 193 member states of the United Nations (Nigeria inclusive) endorsed in 2015 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the world is committed to achieving may remain elusive in the Benue Valley if the menace of proliferation of small arms and light weapons with its attendant consequences of stoking conflicts, crises and crimes would continue unabated. As it stands now, one cannot risk implementing any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the crises and crime prone communities of Guma, Gwert- West, Logo, Agatu, Katsina-Ala and Kwande Local Government Areas of Benue State, as well as Keana, Obi, Awe, and Domu Local Government Areas of Nasarawa States and Lau, Sardauna, Ardo Kola and Gassol Local Government Areas of Taraba State where people have deserted many of the areas for fear of further attacks by arms herdsmen and other criminal elements.
Proliferation of small arms and light weapons has fuelled conflicts, crises, violence and crimes of different types in the Benue Valley which are capable of thwarting or have thwarted the core values of development. Sustenance as a core value of development is the ability to meet basic needs of food, shelter, health and protection. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has aggravated crises and crimes in the Benue Valley which is capable of reducing to a critical short supply these basic needs. Already, there are 180,000, 25,000, and 12,800 registered Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States respectively and many more seek shelter in other poor, rural communities, straining their already scarce resources (The New Telegraph June 30, 2018, The Punch Newspaper February 14, 2018 and March 18, 2018).

These IDPs definitely cannot boast of achieving sustenance as a core value of development and without sustenance and continuous economic progress, the realization of human potential will be greatly hindered. According to Human Development Report (HDR, 1994), “the purpose of development is to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities, and opportunities can be enlarged for both present and future generation”. In light of the above assertion, it is clear that if the menace of small arms and light weapons proliferation is not curtailed, development in the Benue Valley will continue to be an illusion not just for the present generation but for the generation yet unborn. This is because the crises and crimes that are fueled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons does not create an environment that allow people to expand their capabilities and allow enlarged opportunities for both the present and future generation. Certainly, development cannot be achieved with IDPs in the camps and or are living in perpetual fear of insecurity.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons with its potency to fuel crises and crimes is capable of making nonsense of self-esteem as another core value of development. Self-esteem means to be a person. That is to have a sense of worth and self-respect of not being used as a tool for others’ end. But the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have made many youths of the Benue Valley tools in the hands of politicians and conflict entrepreneurs who equip these youths with arms and weapons to do their biddings. Goulet (1971) believes that development is an important way of gaining Self-Esteem. HDR (2000) also appear to make this link. The cover of HDR (2000) proclaimed that “Human right and human development. Any society committed to improving the lives of its people must also be committed to full and equal rights for all”. The crises and crimes stoked by small arms and light weapons proliferation are capable of creating an army of beggars on the streets and villages of the Benue Valley as well as female destitute who will be susceptible to trafficking with its attendant consequences.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is also capable of thwarting freedom from servitude, another core value of development. Freedom from servitude means to be able to make political and economic choice that does not infringe on other’s rights. Economic growth allows individuals to expand their range of human choice. This certainly cannot be achieved in an environment where proliferation of small arms and light weapons fuel crises and crimes. Political and economic choices may be guided by fear of those that own and possess arms and weapons thereby making people perpetually enslaved. On the other hand, those who own and possess arms and
weapons may be emboldened to make economic and political decisions not minding whether they infringe on others’ rights. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as cited in Owens (1987), “the goal of development is human freedom. And pursuing capabilities and realizing rights, this freedom is vital. People must be free to exercise their choices and to participate in decision-making that affect their lives”. But one cannot effectively participate in decision-making when his or her primary needs are not met. The 180,000, 25,000, and 12,800 registered IDPs in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States respectively and many more who seek shelter in other poor, rural communities cannot be favorably disposed to effectively participate in decisions-making that affect their lives as they are likely to be preoccupied with issues of meeting life’s basic needs.

The continued crises and crimes that are fueled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Benue Valley has the potency of impacting negatively on development in ways of direct cost, indirect cost and obstruction of delivery and access to public goods. The direct human cost of crises and crimes are seen in the form of deaths and injuries of the people of the affected areas. The majority of the arms bearing people in the Benue Valley are male adults or adolescents who are the most productive segment of the region’s population. Their involvement in crises and crimes no doubt records a number of casualties and the lives lost is capable of reducing the number of young people available to work and help their region develop. According to International Crisis Group (2017) 2,500 people are estimated to have died in 2016 from herders/farmers clashes and between January and April 2018 alone over 2,000 lives are estimated to have been lost to violent activities and clashes and several others sustained life threatening injuries that may render them incapacitated in the Benue Valley (Sahara Reporters April 4, 2018). This is collaborated by the governor of Benue State who in his funeral oration at the mass burial of two (2) catholic priests and 17 others killed by armed herdsmen at Mbalom, Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue State held at Sesugh Maria Pilgrimage Centre, Ayati on the 22nd May, 2018 stated that, 492 people were so far killed in Benue by herdsmen since January 1, 2018. It is possible that some of the deaths arising from herder/farmers clashes and other crime may go unreported because of the remoteness of some of these villages and lack of quick access to them. This direct cost of the crises and crimes is capable of impeding the development of the Benue Valley for decades if allowed to continue to fester.

The crises and crimes in the Benue Valley that have been aggravated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is capable of impeding the economic development of the area as it will result in the displacement of a large number of people. The region may therefore lose the most productive age demography in a short term as a result of the displacement and with them the future generation will also be lost. Even though in most cases, those displaced will return to their communities, some proportion of the displaced may settle in places other than their original places of abode.

Another indirect cost of the crises and crimes in the Benue Valley is deterred or disrupted economic investment. As insecurity becomes more prevalent, businesses are shut down as owners flee, burglary and theft will take place resulting in losses of businesses. Already the Local Governments Areas mostly affected by herdsmen attacks such as Guma, Logo,
Agatu, Katsina-Ala and Kwande in Benue State, Keana, Obi, Awe, and Doma in Nasarawa State and Lau, Sardauna, Ardo Kola and Gassol in Taraba State, the aforementioned is the situation. This is capable of sending shivers to both local and foreign investors to be weary of investing in the Benue Valley for fear of losing their investments.

The crises and crimes aggravated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are capable of obstructing delivery and access to public goods. Public goods such as health and education are vital to economic development of any region. With adequate health services, the population is able to maintain a lower death rate and minimize the duration and spread of illnesses among its citizens. This improved health in the population ensures continuous economic development, a characteristic that is not shared in regions with prevalent crises and high crime rate. In the Benue Valley, especially in the Local Government Areas that there are persistent herdsmen attacks and assassinations, there is the likely hood that, health services will not be readily available as workers will be reluctant or unable to work in such communities. The same applies to other public services that help sustain economic development such as education. As a result, the crises and crimes aggravated by proliferation of small arms and light weapons are likely to limit the Benue Valley’s ability to economically develop in both long and short term.

Also the prevalent crises and crimes in the Benue Valley which are aggravated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are capable of over bloating the security and humanitarian budgets of government of the respective states in the Benue Valley to the detriment of developmental projects. In Benue State, the government indicated that it has lost 95 billion naira to herdsmen-farmers clashes in four years between 2012 and 2016 and it spent 100 million naira as at January 13, 2018 on relief materials in five camps in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of the state (Daily Trust Newspaper October 26, 2017, The Vanguard Newspaper, January 14, 2018). Though the Nasarawa and Taraba State Governments have not made pronouncements on how much they have lost and spent on containing the crises, crimes and humanitarian issues arising thereto, there is no doubt that some good fortune must have been spent. The Search for Common Ground (SCG) indicated that Benue, Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa states lose 47 per cent of their internally generated revenue annually to the farmers-herdsmen conflict (Daily Trust Newspaper, December 9, 2017) and the International Crisis Group (2017) stated that the Federal Government is losing $13.7 billion in revenue annually because of herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states which is N4.6 trillion at an exchange rate of N305 per $1 as captured in the 2018 budget representing 45.8 per cent of the said budget of N9.12 trillion. This figure is quite huge and capable of turning the whole of the Benue Valley into a massive construction site if it were to be used for providing infrastructural facilities in the area which would have also attracted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and even Direct Domestic Investment that are lacking in the area as issues of infrastructural development are often cited as reasons for the lack of FDI and DDI not just in the area but the whole country. The 4.6 trillion naira that the Federal Government losses in revenue annually to the herdsmen-farmers clashes is more than eight times the budget of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states put together. The 2018 approved budget of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states are N190.03 billion, N125.4 billion, N146.4 billion and N104.2 billion respectively.
(Vanguard Newspaper April 04, 2018, This Day Newspaper, January 25, 2018, and Daily Trust Newspaper, February 10, 2018) totaling N566.03 billion representing 6.3 per cent of the national budget and by implication, eight years of the budgetary provision of the Benue Valley or 45.8 per cent of the national budget is lost to herders/farmers clashes annually aside other crimes and crises that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have aggravated.

Conclusion

The emergence of new conflicts and crimes, as well as resurgence of unresolved ones among communities in the Benue Valley is as result of the mindless exploitation of the impoverished masses and workers of the region by the ruling class which is fuelled by their insatiable quest for primitive accumulation of wealth. This has created frustrated groups in the Benue Valley which have found small arms and light weapons that are readily available in the country, viable tools to eke out a living by fighting as militia and or engaging in other nefarious activities. From the foregoing analysis, therefore, it is clear that proliferation of small arms and light weapons has fuelled conflicts, crises, violence, and crimes in the Benue Valley which if not curtailed, will or is impeding the peace and development of the area.

The position of this paper is that, the Benue Valley cannot pursue a meaningful, certainly a successful peace and development program (s) removed from its actual status politically, economically and socially. To that extent, the implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the peace and development of the Benue valley appear to be fundamental, not deserving too much of an answer. In other words, the most important ingredients of peace and development are breaking the culture of inequality, access to public goods, steady employment and government effectiveness. So, the governments of the states of the Benue Valley are not likely to achieve much in their peace and development efforts and until Nigeria is able to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country, peace and development may continue to elude the Benue Valley. For a barest conflict, crises, violence and crimes in the Benue Valley that will allow for peace and development therefore, the following recommendations will help in no small measure.

Recommendations

1. The planned and conscious exploitation of the impoverished masses and workers of the Benue Valley by the ruling class under various guise which have made them ashamed of their poverty and feel that it either places them out of sight of mankind or, that if they take any notice of them, they however, scarcely any fellow-feeling with the misery and the distress which they suffer which has lead to the creation of frustrated groups within the region which explains the motivation for criminality amongst the youth population of the Benue Valley must first of all be addressed if the menace of proliferation of small arms and light weapons is to be curbed to pave the way for peace and development.

2. The Federal Government of Nigeria should encapsulate, strengthen institutions and processes of governance to enhance social provisioning for its citizens, who are becoming increasingly frustrated over governance failure, thereby resorting to violent crimes that increase demand for small arms and
light weapons and it must also extend to an aggressive job creation programmes for Nigerian’s teeming and idle youths who are as a result become helpless.

3. There is need for intervention at all levels in the Benue Valley to be strengthened and promote peaceful coexistence among the diverse ethno-religious and political groups in the region. This would help minimize the outbreak and persistence of violent conflicts that stoke arms proliferation.

4. Whistle blowing policy that is yielding fruits in the fight against corruption should be equally extended to the fight against proliferation of illegal arms and light weapons in Nigeria.

5. Adoption of a National Arms Control Strategy (NACS) to guide the clean-up and prevention of small arms and light weapons circulation. The proposed establishment of a National Commission on the control of small arms and light weapons (NATCOM) should be fast-tracked beyond the presidential committee level at which it is now to the actual establishment of the body to lead this effort, involving collaboration with CSOs, NATFORCE and other stakeholders.

6. Traditional rulers should be incorporated as leverage for community policing to ensure a successful mop-up of small arms and light weapons in the Benue Valley, curb their further proliferation and ensure the preservation of peace and security.

7. The Federal Government of Nigeria should implement the ECOWAS convention on small arms and light weapons as a mitigating factor on herders/farmers clashes, as well as other conflicts and crimes in the Benue Valley.

8. The Federal Government should review and update national legislations in line with the convention on small arms and light weapons, including the control of the local manufacture/fabrication of arms by blacksmiths and the civilian possession of arms.

9. The Federal and Governments of the States of the Benue Valley should strengthen the capacity of the justice systems to actively dispense justice in order to prevent self-protection with arms and weapons that stoke their proliferation.

10. The Federal Government should strengthen cross border cooperation on all its borders tying it with control of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

11. The Government of the states of the Benue Valley should use modern technology to identify illegal entrances in their borders so as to reduce the effect of their porosity on insecurity and others.
References


ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other related materials (2006).


Tayebwa, B (1992), Basic Economics, Wesley, Longman Inc.


The Tribune Newspaper- Available at www.tribuneonlineng.com/1293821/

The Vanguard Newspaper January 14, 2018 -Available at http://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/benue-govt-procures-n100m-relief-materials-for-idps/


