



Centre for
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Armed violence and poverty in Nigeria

Mini case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK

The Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at Bradford University to carry out research to promote understanding of how and when poverty and vulnerability is exacerbated by armed violence. This study programme, which forms one element in a broader “Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative”, aims to provide the full documentation of that correlation which DFID feels is widely accepted but not confirmed. It also aims to analyse the processes through which such impacts occur and the circumstances which exacerbate or moderate them. In addition it has a practical policy-oriented purpose and concludes with programming and policy recommendations to donor government agencies.

This mini report on Nigeria is one of 13 case studies (all of the case studies can be found at www.bradford.ac.uk/cics). This research draws upon research studies, reports and evaluations commissioned by operational agencies, and survey data where this has been available. These sources have been complemented by interviews with government officers, aid policymakers and practitioners, and researchers. The analysis and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policy of DFID or the UK government.

Executive summary

Armed violence in many areas of Nigeria has escalated since 1999 and is destabilising and impoverishing communities. Vigilante groups have sprung up that both protect and extort from local communities. Rival gangs in towns such as Lagos are engaged in armed violence against each other and also against state security forces with civilians caught in the cross fire. Further, a gun culture has been established and there has been a progressive militarization of society. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are freely available and both regional and state controls are minimal. The state is doing little to protect civilians against armed violence and in fact some state agencies are involved or complicit in robbing and persecuting sections of the population. All this has contributed to an insecure environment where mass displacements are taking place, communities are targeted on ethno-religious lines, where livelihoods are difficult to maintain, and extortion and insecurity are leading to a growth in private security.

Key research findings

- ❑ SALW are becoming endemic in Nigeria and the pace of acquisition and the lethality of weapons are increasing.
- ❑ There is neither sufficient programming to directly address SALW possession, nor the will or capacity within the state security services, to fully deal with this problem.
- ❑ State security services are part of the problem often reacting disproportionately to sub-state violence or targeting certain communities for reprisals.
- ❑ SSR has been minimal. Limited measures took place in 1999, for example, when the government retired large numbers of senior and middle ranking officers. However, there has been little follow-up and measures that address some of the deep-rooted problems in the security sector.
- ❑ “Arms racing” patterns have been established in Nigeria, where armed groups and the security sector seek to acquire more sophisticated and lethal weapons to counter acquisitions by rival groups.
- ❑ SALW display has created a climate of fear and coercion, while at the same time, there is fear of hidden weapons and the fact that in many areas anyone can be carrying a gun and that violence might suddenly erupt.
- ❑ A gun culture and impunity has increasingly been established in Nigeria since 1999, particularly among the young.
- ❑ Much of civil society living in certain conflict zones exists in a state of fear particularly given the possession of SALW by virtually all sectors of society including the young, students, vigilantes, militias, armed groups, politicians, and religious movements.
- ❑ Severe poverty impacts have followed SALW possession and usage:
 - *Massive displacement* has taken place in many conflict arenas and after months or even years many civilians have not regarded it as safe to return. As a consequence, many markets are no longer operating and fleeing civilians have been reliant on subsistence living.
 - Towns, particularly in the Delta region, are open to frequent attacks by armed gangs or the security services. This has led to severe *interruptions to economic*

activities and the fear of imminent future attacks has disrupted normal trade including fishing.

- Large areas of farmland in places such as Benue, which has been considered the food basket of Nigeria, have been abandoned with consequences, not just for that area, but for the rest of Nigeria.
- The practice of *extorting 'taxes'* on highways coming in and out of places such as Lagos has led to traders raising their prices for key goods such as food produce and consequently contributing to the further impoverishment of the poor.
- The threat and actual use of armed violence by armed groups, vigilantes, and robbers, has led to communities retreating into themselves and often has stimulated the growth of *private security services* (for those who can afford them) and vigilante 'protection' for the poor.
- *Social capital* has been severely eroded by SALW possession and usage. Communities have split along ethnic and religious divisions in the face of increasing insecurity and attacks by armed groups and security forces.

Programming and related findings

- State and regional control of flows of SALW, both internally and externally, need to be significantly improved if any brake on rampant armed violence in Nigeria is to be exerted.
- Measures need to be taken to address security sector dissemination of weaponry to armed gangs and other actors. This should include prosecution of individuals involved. However, action in this area will be difficult given current networks of corruption within the system. It is also believed that ex-security sector personnel have diffused knowledge/expertise of how to use and maintain SALW. Measures to address this are required.
- The security sector needs to respond in a more proportionate way to challenges to state authority and outbreaks of armed violence.
- Programming which addresses SALW possession needs to be urgently set in motion. Existing programming does not, in the main, seem to be directly addressing this issue. This programming might include Arms for Development (AfD) type programming that actually offers incentives for communities to hand in arms, as well as programming that addresses the fractures between communities. Extensive confidence-building measures will also be required, quite possibly involving regional and international connections, in cooperation with the Nigerian government, as well as civil society.
- Reversing the gun culture and militarization of society is an urgent, albeit extremely problematic, priority in Nigeria. The rapid pace of the militarization of society since 1999 is startling and shows signs of deepening. Sensitisation measures would be a good starting point, but gun culture seems so entrenched that this will be difficult to reverse. Unless the state security forces are able to extend security to its citizens SALW will continue to have utility.
- Security sector reform is urgently required to construct faith in military forces and in the police.

1. Introduction

This case study analyses how, and through which processes, small arms and light weapons (SALW) and armed violence¹ impact upon community security in urban and rural contexts in Nigeria and the type of knock-on impacts this has on poverty. It particularly focuses on the availability, proliferation, and use of SALW at the level of non-state armed groups. However, it also examines the highly significant role of the state security sector in armed violence in Nigeria.

The province of Lagos is a principal focus of the study. Lagos is a ‘mega-city’, with a population over 12 million people and extensive SALW possession. It is also the economic hub of the country, and embodies the complexities of the wider Nigerian State in terms of its multi-ethnic divisions. However, a variety of other contexts – some rural and some urban – are also analysed.

The so-called “new wars” and emergence of other contexts of armed violence in Africa and other developing regions since 1990 have involved the overwhelming use of SALW as the exclusive weapons in 90% of the 49 conflicts during this period, contributing to over 6m deaths, of which civilians comprised between 30% and 90%.² The presence of SALW, it has been suggested, has the capacity to transform existing social, cultural, ethnic, political and environmental cleavages into violent confrontations. In the case of Nigeria, this has been borne out, with the widespread availability and misuse of SALW acting as a significant impediment to the peaceful resolution of the underlining socio-economic and political issues increasingly difficult.³ Further, SALW use in Nigeria has increased the scale of lethality, the degree of intensity, casualties, and the extent of livelihood destruction and wider developmental impacts. Small arms from local and imported sources have been freely used in the more than 50 identifiable outbreaks of ethno-religious violence that have broken out since 1999, in which more than 100,000 people are thought to have died.⁴

Armed violence has been exacerbated by the fact that older variants of locally-produced guns have in the past few years been replaced by more modern weaponry, including semi-automatic guns. Many of these are licitly and illicitly imported and these weapons are usually second-hand rather than new. Among the weapons now in use in Nigeria are: AK47 assault rifles, automatic pump actions shotguns, bazookas, Beretta pistols, Browning pistols, carbine rifles, double-barrelled shotguns, G3 rifles, general purpose machine guns, and sub-machine guns. At the same time, traditional weapons such as machetes, spears, cutlasses and knives are also in use.

¹ In the context of this study ‘light weapons’ are defined in terms of heavy machine guns and mortars of up to 100mm, and portable anti-tank or aircraft systems. Small arms can be said to comprise automatic or semi-automatic weapons including self-loading pistols, revolvers, carbines, rifles, machine-guns, ammunitions, and explosives.

² Small Arms Survey (2001), p. 210.

³ Human Rights Watch (November 2003), p. 1.

⁴ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 7.

One estimate is that Nigeria accounts for one million of the seven million SALW estimated to be in circulation in the West African sub region.⁵ Another estimate suggests that over three million illegal SALW were possessed by Nigerians in 2002.⁶

1.1 Why Nigeria?

Nigeria was selected as a case study for the following reasons.

First, it presented an opportunity to examine urban contexts of SALW possession and usage, as well as some rural contexts.

Second, it enabled the study to investigate how the myriad of non-state armed groups⁷ that have sprung up in Nigeria have used SALW to, in effect, militarise society with the subsequent impact on poverty and development. This despite the fact that Nigeria is not engaged in an internal conflict. Nigeria serves, in part, to demonstrate what happens when the state is unable or unwilling to control SALW possession and provide security to large sections of the population.

Third, it provides a case study for examining the role of the state security sector itself in armed violence. Democratisation – the 1999 transition from a military dictatorship to democratic governance – has coincided with an increase in SALW usage and armed violence. A recent assessment puts the number of armed violence outbreaks recorded between 1999 and 2003 at over 50, with Lagos accounting for at least 15 cases of armed violence.⁸ The state security sector has been heavily implicated in armed violence in Lagos and elsewhere.

Fourth, Nigeria presents evidence of the impact of cross-border SALW flows. Nigeria has a 1,500 km land border with the Republic of Niger and Chad in the North; a 1,000 km land border with Benin in the West; a 1,700 km border with Cameroon in the East; and a 700 km coastline off the Atlantic Ocean.⁹ This presents serious problems with regard to border policing, exposing the country to cross-border smuggling and trafficking in SALW, especially when seen in the regional context of civil wars in other West African States such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire.

Last, Nigeria is a poor country that mirrors many of the problems of countless other African states in terms of its destabilization by armed violence and SALW usage, and its increasing impoverishment, making this case study useful for drawing some potentially important lessons for other African states. Nigeria has Africa's largest population with a World Bank estimate putting the number at 135.7 million, with an annual growth rate of 2.4%.¹⁰ The country mirrors the complexities of many African countries with over 70%

⁵ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 2.

⁶ Obasi (2002), p. 9.

⁷ Armed groups in this study are taken to encompass non-state actors such as vigilantes, militias, and student groups.

For a definition of what constitutes an armed group see: Pablo Policzer (2004), pp. 9-10.

⁸ See Adebani (October 2003), p. 22.

⁹ Agboton-Johnson, Ebo and Mazal (March 2004), p. 21.

¹⁰ See World Bank, "Nigeria at a Glance", www.worldbank.org.

of the population living below the \$1 per day threshold, despite huge revenues from oil and gas exploration.¹¹ It has an average gross domestic per capita of US \$896, and a life expectancy rate of 44 years.¹²

2. Sources of SALW

There are multiple sources of illicit SALW in Nigeria including:

Arms collection shortfalls An example is the failure of the Nigerian government to implement an arms collection programme after the country's civil war (1967-1970). It appears that despite rising armed violence including ethno-religious clashes and armed criminality since 1999, there is limited information available on how weapons are acquired, and limited Nigerian government activity aimed at checking their spread. Further, external programming to address SALW is limited and tends to focus on reconciliation and conflict prevention rather than on SALW specifically.

Cross-border smuggling. Civil wars in the West-African sub-region since 1990 and the deployment of Nigerian military forces in Liberia and Sierra Leone have led to the proliferation of SALW into Nigeria. This is facilitated by huge cross-border smuggling and mercenary activities (from Chad and Niger for example)¹³ and the country's long, porous borders that are poorly policed due to inadequate resources and the lack of capacity of the security agencies. The three most notorious border posts for illicit smuggling of SALW are the Idi-Iroko and Seme (in the south-western States of Lagos and Ogun); Warri (in Delta State); and border posts in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in the north-eastern area. Border guards, in a rare successful operation in August 2002, announced the seizure of SALW including 510 shotguns rounds along the Lagos-Benin border, as part of a total haul of SALW worth US\$30m seized in the first six months of 2002¹⁴. This development prompted the country's Justice Minister to declare that:

the smuggling into the country of light weapons and small arms [had] reached an alarming situation.¹⁵

Arms supplies from the Niger Delta region. The increasing sophistication of organized piracy, oil-bunkering¹⁶ and hostage-taking in the oil-producing Niger Delta region, coupled with the region's peculiar swampy geography and extensive access to international waterways, combine to make the region an important conduit for SALW availability and proliferation in Nigeria.

Security Sector black marketeering. The extensive black marketeering of the country's arsenal of SALW by serving and retired security personnel is a major problem. The Nigerian President publicly acknowledged this in December 2002, stating that the

¹¹ Christian Aid (October 2004), p. 1.

¹² See UNDP (2002), pp. 151-160.

¹³ Federal Government of Nigeria (2003), p. 21.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch (November 2003), p. 1.

¹⁵ AFP (7 August 2002).

¹⁶ 'Bunkering' can be understood as the unauthorised or illegal diversion or stealing of oil or other economic resources.

majority of SALW circulating in Nigeria were either sold or rented out by, or stolen from, the country's security agencies.¹⁷ It is also believed that ex-security sector personnel have diffused knowledge/expertise of how to use and maintain SALW.

Local production. SALW availability is aided by local production by blacksmiths, especially in the industrial cities of Aba and Akwa in the south-eastern region.¹⁸ Although the state-owned Defence Industry Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) produces SALW, especially rifles, they are mostly used by the police service rather than for domestic supply to the civilian population.

3. Motivations for SALW possession

Complex socio-economic factors have fuelled the demand and supply for SALW in Nigeria. These include:

- inter-ethnic rivalries;
- political competition, especially electoral violence;
- domestic agitation for resource control;
- militant agitation against environmental degradation resulting from oil and gas exploration;
- the politicization of ethno-religious differences;
- the large mass of unemployed youths;
- the increasing profitability, and socio-economic utility of SALW, especially with the increase in kidnapping, hostage and ransom-taking.

4. Typologies of armed violence

Across Nigeria, SALW are used in the following activities:

4.1. Inter and intra-communal violence

These forms of armed violence involve social or often ethnic movements, purporting to represent particular communities and seeking to protect the covert and overt interest of such communities, often through SALW usage. These communities are often built around the ancestral origin of a person, rather than where he/she is born. In the Lagos area, the Yorubas, for example, consider themselves as the host community (indigenes), with other ethnic-based communities considered as settlers and potentially hostile.

Examples of inter-communal violence in Lagos include the Yoruba versus non-Yoruba dock workers clashes in Apapa and Tin Island (September 1999); Yoruba versus Hausa (Shukura) and Yam sellers (November 1999); Yoruba-Hausa clashes in Bariga (January 2000); and armed violence between Yorubas and Hausas in Idi-Araba in 2002. There are also cases of armed violence resulting from intra-group power struggles, especially

¹⁷ The President stated this in his Presidential monthly chat with the media in December 2001, cited in Agboton-Johnson, A., Ebo, A., and Mazal, L. (March 2004), p. 23.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch (November 2003), p. 1.

within the Yoruba group whose representative social movement (Odua's People's Congress: OPC) is factionalized.

Elsewhere in Nigeria there were Tiv versus Jukun clashes in Benue and Taraba States (October 2001); Inyimagu versus Agbaja clashes in Ebonyi State (May 2003); and the protracted clashes between Ijaws and Itshekiris in Warri – to mention but a few.

Much of this inter-communal violence is underpinned by claims and counter-claims of socio-economic deprivations and political marginalization, and attempts to assert control by a particular community, including rights over land ownership.

4.2 Ethnic militia and vigilante violence

The rise in ethnic nationalism and ethnic movements, coupled with the lack of state capacity to discharge its security functions, especially policing, has often devolved the function of local policing and security to self-styled vigilante groups. Ethnic movements are “double-hatted” as vigilante groups, and often enjoy the tacit support of locals, because of the security function they perform. In Lagos, the OPC is the main vigilante group. However, in the discharge of vigilante functions, there is a huge degree of unregulated, extra-judicial use of SALW and violence on both defenceless civilians and targeted individuals and groups. The January 2000, extra-legal killings by the OPC against alleged armed robbers and touts in the Akala area of Lagos and several other unreported cases in other parts of Lagos are significant examples.

This trend is reproduced across Nigeria where even political establishments and elected public officers give ‘legitimacy’ to the activities of vigilante groups, deflecting from the need to address the logistical and operational inadequacies of the police service. A clear example of this was the 2000 formal adoption of the Bakassi Boys as the state vigilante service in Imo, Abia and Anambra States in the south-east region.

4.3 Political and electoral violence

The transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance has occurred in parallel with the upsurge in armed violence in Nigeria. This illustrates the close connection between political competition, especially elections, and SALW and armed violence. The political process has heightened the potential for violence at every level of government.¹⁹ This trend percolates the entire Nigerian State where political elites mobilize the pool of unemployed youths, often along ethnic, religious and party affiliations, as a vital political resource. This underscores the great value attached to the utility of violence in politics, with political and electoral success often indexed to the capacity to threaten or unleash violence. It is alleged that incumbents of power, in the run-up to the 2003 elections, aided the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria by arming youths and political thugs to manipulate electoral outcomes by kidnapping or killing political opponents, threatening and intimidating electorates, destroying lives and properties, and disrupting election campaigns.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (2003), p. 4.

4.4. Armed criminality and 'gangsterism'

Another consequence of the increase in SALW in Lagos and Nigeria at large is the rise in all forms of criminality, especially armed robberies in residential neighbourhoods and along motorways both during the day and night. The failure of the police service, in spite of a series of highly publicized police actions ('Operation-Fire-For Fire', for instance) and force expansion, and the subsequent rise in self-help security measures by the citizenry through vigilante groups, is an acknowledgement of the escalating rise in armed criminality. Over the past five years, armed criminality has been transformed into organized banditry, piracy, bunkering and hostage-taking in the oil rich Niger-Delta region. Further, there has been a rise in gangster violence evidenced by the proliferation of 'secret cults' in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Armed criminals and secret cultists are known to possess and use sophisticated SALW, especially pistols, assault rifles (commonly AK-47), and sub-machine guns.

Lagos has borne the brunt of armed criminality. In 2001, for example, there were 186 reported armed robberies in the city, and 486 robbers were killed and 845 were arrested. At the same time, 16 police and 70 civilians were killed.²⁰

4.5 State armed violence

The state has been ineffective in reining in SALW possession and usage. Elements of the security sector, in fact, have aided SALW-violence. The State and its security agents are seen as partial, supporting rival groups or factions that are best connected to the seat of political power.²¹

The state, in fact, is involved in armed violence at two levels: first, in its often violent attempts to restore law and order; and second, in this perception (sometimes mistaken) that it is intervening on one side. In the southern region (including Lagos) for example, the state is often perceived as supporting northern (Hausa) interests, a fact that regularly invites armed confrontation between the security services and ethnic movements, especially the OPC.

Across Nigeria, state forces have also been embroiled in armed violence with sub-state groups in Warri, Rivers (Buguma and Ogoni) and Bayelsa (Odi) with groups such as the Ijaws, Itshekiris, and others. Also, it has been involved in Benue, Taraba and Plateau States with Tivs, Jukuns, and Taroks, and in Kano, Kaduna, Yobe, Kebbi and Maiduguri Borno States, with ethno-religious groups, including the 'Nigerian Taliban'.

4.6 State-sponsored violence

Security forces have exercised violence against groups and citizens considered to be challenging their monopoly of violence. The harassment, arbitrary arrests, and physical abuse of suspected and actual OPC members in Lagos and across the south-west region

²⁰ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 9.

²¹ See Ibeanu (1999), pp. 161-179.

exemplify this. This trend is even more visible in other parts of Nigeria, such as in the November 1999 military invasion and destruction of the Odi community in Bayelsa, and the October 2001 punitive military attacks against the Tivs of Zaki Diem in Benue.

The use of SALW by elements in the security services to take over and maintain power has led to a 'militarised national psyche and culture of violence'.²² The impression has been created that power flows from the barrel of a gun, and the military has lost its monopoly on the use of armed force with elements in society and various groups seeing armed violence as a legitimate way of settling disputes or maintaining security.²³

4.7 Ethno-religious violence

Ethno-religious violence appears to be the most common form of armed violence in post-military Nigeria, although less so in Lagos. The reoccurrence of ethno-religious armed violence in the northern region has led to extensive killings and material destruction. The outbreak of violence is strongly linked to the growth of the Sharia criminal code/movement, which swept through the northern region immediately after the return to democratic governance in 1999 and which has led to clashes in Jos between the native Christian Boroms/Anaguta/Izere and the Muslim Hausa/Fulani in September 2001; clashes in Kano over the American war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (October 2001); and the clashes over the aborted Miss World Beauty contest (November 2002). There has also been the emergence of a Nigerian Taliban movement that has engaged in violent activities in Yobe and Borno states.

4.8 Arms racing

The ready availability of arms and their use has generated cycles of violence where both civilians need to defend themselves and where various armed groups see the necessity of acquiring more and more arms to protect themselves or to launch attacks. This is leading to the militarization of security and also a demand for more and more powerful and sophisticated weapons in order to keep up or maintain some form of parity.

5. Armed violent actors

The main actors involved in armed violence and possessing and using SALW are:

5.1 Ethnic militias

In Lagos and across the south-west region, the dominant ethnic militia-cum-vigilante group is the OPC. In the south-east region, it is predominantly the Bakassi Boys, but other micro level militia groups have been formed in response to inter-communal violence in Umuleri, Aguleri, Inyimagu, Agbaja, Mbiakong and Ifiyong among others. In the south-south region, the major militia groups include the Ijaw Youth Congress and Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC),

²² Ebo, A., (2003), p. 3.

²³ Small Arms Survey (2003), p. 3.

and militias from the Urhobos and Itshekiris. In the northern region, there are the Arewa People's Congress, the Al-Sunnah Wal Jamma (Nigerian Taliban), and militia groups from the Taroks, Tivs, Igede and Jukuns. These militia groups often double as ethno-religious groups involved in armed violence.

5.2 'Area Boys'

This description embraces often unemployed opportunistic young persons, mostly males, many of whom are taking drugs, that abound in Lagos. They are easily mobilized for armed violence, and are known to be efficient in unleashing violence with SALW and traditional weapons. There is no data on their number, but there are probably several thousand of them scattered across Lagos. Area Boys have traditionally had some positive connotations and have been seen by some communities as providing services to the community. But they started to turn into a negative phenomenon in the late 1980s as a result, in part, of government economic adjustment programmes that exacerbated unemployment and resulted in cut-backs on social service provision, and of the increase in narcotic trading and consumption in Lagos. Area Boys can be found in other parts of Nigeria, especially in the northern region where the activities of the Al-Majiris parallel area boys in Lagos.

5.3 Youths and students

Youths and students are the main perpetrators of armed criminality and gangsterism. In fact, the huge youth population in Nigeria, estimated by the UN to be 25 million²⁴, that is economically, socially and politically deprived, have taken up and invested in armed violence-related skills. The youth crisis is strongly linked to armed violence in Nigeria.

5.4 Criminal gangs

Criminal gangs are involved, among other things, in armed robberies, piracy, oil-bunkering, hostage-taking, and gangster violence. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), for example, has been involved in oil-bunkering activities.²⁵

5.5 State security agencies

This includes the police, paramilitaries, special security elements, and the armed forces involved in internal security operations. Many of these are involved in illicit activities backed up by the threat of, or actual use, of armed violence.

²⁴ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2003), p. 93.

²⁵ See 'Nigeria' (20 July 2004).

6. The tactics and strategies of SALW-armed violence

SALW are used in Nigeria for, among other things:

6.1 Threats and intimidation

The public display of SALW by armed groups and the security services is used to deter and to secure compliance: for example, to rob civilians of their possessions. The OPC undertakes patrols and marches brandishing traditional weapons and charms, and SALW. These 'confidence-patrols' serve to perpetuate a psychology of fear and instil a culture of impunity. The threat and intimidation from SALW possession is also linked to past acts of SALW related armed violence undertaken with impunity. The state security service use their legal possession of SALW to instil fear and secure compliance with extra-legal demands, not least the collection of illegal taxes (kola) at check-points and for extra-judicial arrests. Those on low incomes are among the most vulnerable to illegal taxation and rising prices of key items such as food.

6.2. Active use of SALW

The extensive destruction of lives, properties and displacement of civilians through threats (for example, enforced departures from communities) and the actual use of SALW to kill and injure is quite common across SALW-armed elements in Nigeria.

6.3 Disproportionate force

In Lagos there are regular occurrences of killings, arrests, and detention, and injuries to defenceless civilians in operations conducted by state security organisations that are supposed to be restoring law and order. This trend is reproduced across Nigeria as with, for example, the attacks on the Odi Community and the military invasion of Wase. Underpinning the massive punitive actions by security agencies are their attempts to 'teach trouble makers a lesson' and to demonstrate the power of the state. However, this often seems to undermine rather than buttress law and order.

6.4 Illegal detention and hostage-taking

The OPC, for example, has often detained individuals and executed suspected criminals with impunity. This activity occurs in other regions of Nigeria, especially in the south-south, where hostage-taking with a view to extracting ransom, mostly from multi-national oil companies operating in the Niger Delta region, has been occurring. Even the state security services are engaged in this, with a spate of extra-judicial arrests and executions of both suspected criminals and defenceless civilians. Most residents of Lagos complain that ordinary civilians are arrested in numerous illegal raids by the police. The raids are perceived as 'fundraising' endeavours by the local population. In most cases, detainees released are neither charged, nor on formal bail, but are allowed to leave detention when their families pay a ransom.

7. Variations in armed violence and SALW possession/usage

7.1. Urban-rural divide

SALW usage is widespread and developed in both urban and rural areas. Lagos is an urban centre, with hardly any rural areas, but even the outskirt settlements in Oko-Baba, Epe, Ipaja, and Agege among others that could be considered relatively rural, hardly differ from the more urban centre in terms of the patterns of armed violence.

The OPC, for example, is stronger and more popular in 'less-urban' areas because of their neighbourhood security functions, and because of a reduced government presence. Even when armed violence takes place in rural provinces, it is as well-planned and lethal as in urban centres. The use of sophisticated SALW in inter-communal clashes, such as the Ife-Modakeke crises; the Tiv-Jukun clashes; the Umuleri-Aguleri clashes; and the violent activities of the Nigerian Taliban in rural communities in the northern region; and the extensive SALW-armed violence in the riverine areas of the Niger-Delta region, confirms this. The only real difference in terms of urban and rural contexts might be in the speed of government intervention, with armed violence in urban centres tending to attract faster media coverage and government responses.

7.2. Gender

Armed violence and SALW possession and impacts seem to embrace both male and females. In Lagos, membership of the OPC involves men and women, with women actively involved in the frontline combat activities of the group. Casualties from armed violence in Lagos are both male and female. These developments seem to a lesser extent to be mirrored in other theatres of armed violence in Nigeria, especially in the Delta region where women groups, albeit without SALW, have organized protests and disrupted oil exploration operations.

7.3. The youth issue

Armed violence and SALW use across Nigeria is underpinned by the youth issue. Many of the young are reacting to their deprivation by attacking the existing status quo and turning to violence. The leadership and membership of the OPC and other groups is overwhelmingly youthful. The problems of ethnicity, politics, and religion to an extent obscure the fact that much armed violence is by the young and represents an increasing 'self-help' attitude and 'normalisation' of a gun culture among youths.

7.4. Democratisation and armed violence

The transition in 1999 from military dictatorship to democratic rule has seen a dramatic increase in SALW use and casualties in Lagos and across Nigeria rather than a 'peace' dividend. Although SALW and armed violence predate 1999 there has been increases in the number, diffusion, and sophistication of SALW and an increase in their use compared to traditional weapons. Paradoxically, the transition to democratic rule seems to have

militarized society. At the same time, disillusionment that the possibilities of democratic rule have not been realised has created despair and increased militancy.

8. SALW usage and impacts

This section reviews some of the key contexts in Nigeria where SALW have been used – some rural and some urban – and their security and other impacts. It is clear that a major contributor to armed violence has not just been non-state armed groups, but also state security forces that have responded to armed violence and sometimes engaged in what civil society has regarded as reprisals.²⁶

8.1. Niger Delta

Odi is a town in Nigeria's troubled Niger Delta region. After a number of incidents and the killing of policemen, elements of the Nigerian Army moved in on 20 November 1999. It was alleged that:

...although there was no resistance, the government kept shooting for 14 days and burning the houses of the people, while people were dying and starving (sic) in the bush.²⁷

It was noted by a civil liberties organization that by 14 December 1999 no livestock remained, that the 60,000 inhabitants had either been killed, arrested, or fled into the forest.²⁸ The death toll of the army's 14-day stay was said to be over 1,000. Further, many who fled to avoid the shootings died due to the adverse conditions in the bush. Those who survived and returned found that their sources of livelihood had been destroyed. It was found that over 95% of the Odi population were displaced by the invasion and in 2002 at least 90% of the population were still living in temporary structures.²⁹

Armed violence continued with an 'unprecedented upsurge' in violent clashes and attacks across the waterfronts surrounding the state capital and which has even spread into the streets of Port Harcourt and beyond.³⁰ The measure of the intensity of armed violence in Rivers State can be gauged by events in Ataba (a riverine community in the Andoni Local Government Area) on 15 August 2004 when the community came under heavy gunfire and shelling. The previously peaceful community was turned into a battle ground when rival forces known as 'Nigeria' and 'Biafra' clashed:

AK-47 (sic), dynamites (sic) and grenades were freely used by the forces...Over 60 villagers were killed, houses and properties destroyed, while the town was turned into a ghost town.³¹

²⁶ The majority of the data and analysis presented in this section draws upon OMCT and CLEEN (2002).

²⁷ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 77.

²⁸ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 78.

²⁹ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 80.

³⁰ SAP (October 2004), p. 3.

³¹ SAP (October 2004), p. 3.

Armed clashes in many of the oil-rich cities in Rivers State have left tens of thousands of people internally-displaced. Further, communities, particularly in water-front areas, have been emptied because of fears of imminent attacks and warnings from warlords promising to 'visit' them.³²

At least 1,000 sophisticated arms were collected under The Rivers State Arms-for-Cash Programme in the Niger Delta region. The surrendering of nearly 200 weapons by the NDPVF in October 2004 for cash, for example, was a positive development. However, the militia was said to have over 3,000 guns in its arsenal.³³

8.2. Ife-Modakeke

The Ille-Ife and Modakeke are two neighbouring communities in Osun State in south-west Nigeria. Both communities are so intertwined that it is difficult to delineate a clear-cut boundary between them. Further, the two communities belong to the Yoruba nation. However, both communities have a long history of mutual antipathy that has frequently spilled over into violence.

Some of the most recent clashes occurred between the communities in February 2000. These were over citizenship rights and land-ownership that spilled over into armed violence including the use of differing calibres of guns, machetes, knives, broken bottles and stones.³⁴ In 2002, two years after the conflict, it was found that thousands of people had been internally displaced and 53 houses were counted that had been totally destroyed and remained to be re-built or rehabilitated.³⁵ The Modakeke market only recorded scanty trading on market days, many shops closed early, there was no nightlife, and many businesses had been ruined, looted or destroyed.

8.3. Aguleri-Umuleri

A major feature of the Aguleri/Umuleri/Umuoba-Anam crisis, which has included armed violence, has been increases in poverty levels. In Umuleri, for example, it was reported that in the aftermath of the 1999 violence, there were many people, in a survey undertaken, who could no longer afford food. Economic activities had dramatically slowed down as individuals who had investments had taken them out of the town and security measures taken in the town had further restricted economic activities. Banks had closed down and young people had left the area leaving behind mainly the old and frail. The armed violence also affected the health of those remaining as existing health facilities were destroyed during the crisis and residents had no access to hospitals.³⁶

³² SAP (October 2004), p. 6.

³³ IRIN (2 November 2004), p. 1.

³⁴ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 43.

³⁵ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 45.

³⁶ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 61.

8.4. Jos

Plateau State was regarded as a centre of tourism and peace until 7 September 2001 when armed violence broke out in the state capital, Jos, between indigenes and non-indigenes. This included a religious dimension with both churches and mosques being burnt down. 'Sophisticated' military weapons were used in the killings that were perpetuated by 'Christian and Muslim youths (taking) up arms against each other'.³⁷ More than a thousand people may have been killed before some order was restored by the intervention of soldiers. However, it was reported that:

The crisis...left in its wake mental trauma and a permanent suspicion among the city's dwellers. Three months after the crisis, people were still reluctant to go back to their homes for fear of being attacked.³⁸

Further, many people sought safety by retreating into areas divided along ethnic or religious lines where they thought they were most likely to be protected.

As well as armed violence from factions, the police were alleged to be involved in indiscriminate shootings, and judicial executions. There were reports of the police shooting unarmed civilians not engaged in criminal acts. It was suggested that as many as 50,000 people were displaced in the Jos crisis. Also, thousands of homes, buildings, and other forms of property were destroyed.³⁹ However, the numbers of displaced may be considerably higher than 50,000.

The Jos Market lies in ruins and some traders who have not been able to find capital to re-start in business are said to have committed suicide. At the time of the attacks business at the market was at its peak due to the influx of Igbo traders from the northern cities following concerns regarding the implementation of Sharia codes.

8.5. Benue

In the Middle Belt, longstanding inter-ethnic clashes between the Tiv and Jukun, which were supposed to be mediated by a military peacekeeping contingent, led to the murder of government troops who were, according to some accounts, coming to teach the Tiv a lesson. This spilled over into brutal reprisals by the army. According to a police spokesperson, the army had been called in because they were unable to cope with:

People...being killed daily by masked youths who set up unaccountable roadblocks and are armed with sophisticated weapons.⁴⁰

At Gbeji village in Ukum Local Government Area, soldiers were said to have opened fire on the crowd indiscriminately including shooting women and children fleeing into the

³⁷ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 110.

³⁸ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), pp. 107-8.

³⁹ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 118.

⁴⁰ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 154.

bush. Avenging soldiers were said to have sacked nearly all villages and settlements in Ukum, Katsina-Ala and Logo Local Government Areas.

Zaki Biam lay in ruins after the invasion and Nigeria's largest yam market – Dan Anyacha – was destroyed and the stalls remained closed to business six months later.⁴¹ Displaced persons fleeing conflict in the Middle Belt and seeking to find camps established by the Benue state government and charitable organizations found themselves having to pass through checkpoints manned by the army and police who systemically extorted money from them. Confidence in the army as guarantors of their security was said to be virtually non-existent among displaced persons.⁴²

9. Findings on impacts of armed violence on poverty

9.1. Erosion or reinforcing of social capital

The extensive possession and use of SALW and the attendant explosion in armed violence has eroded positive social capital in Lagos and across some areas of Nigeria. Long years of peaceful co-existence and flourishing socio-economic ties between different ethnic, religious and communal groups has given way to bitter armed confrontation between communities, religions and ethnic groups. In Lagos, for example, the indigenous Yoruba community has clashed frequently with the settler Hausa, Ijaw, and Igbo communities. Positive social capital (marked by inter-group networks, co-operation and trust) has been replaced by negative social capital signposted by bitter mistrust, suspicion and confrontation. Although the strengthening of group solidarity (bonding social capital) has occurred in certain communities – in resisting other group's attacks, for example – this is likely to be a negative development in the long run. Within groups, fractures are also developing such as the widening gap between rebellious youths and adults, which threatens the stability of some groups and society at large. This can be seen in the factionalisation of the OPC and also the emergence of youths as community leaders and spokespersons in the Niger Delta region. Ebbing social capital has in some areas reduced inter-group economic and commercial transactions. Massive internal displacement has also had knock-on impacts upon social capital and economic transactions.

More generally, the widespread possession of guns – in Aba, for example, in south-east Nigeria, one in 10 residents is said to own a gun – has led to a state of fear and mistrust in society. According to a Nigerian newspaper:

...the man or woman you sat next to in a bus minutes ago may have a gun concealed somewhere in his or her body. Whether they are displayed or concealed, guns are almost as common as sachets of 'pure water' in our different environments today, and the result is pervasive anxiety, fear, oppression and violence that seem to have become part of our daily lives.⁴³

⁴¹ OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 154.

⁴² OMCT and CLEEN (2002), p. 161.

⁴³ Punch Newspaper (2004), p. 15.

9.2. Disruption of socio-economic activities

There is massive disruption of socio-economic activities across parts of Nigeria. First, internal displacement was estimated by Nigeria's Vice-President in 2002 to be 750,000⁴⁴, and currently is put at over 800,000⁴⁵. Most displaced people lose their businesses to looting and their homes are often destroyed. They become dependent on assistance and many sink into poverty.

Second, the recurring spate of SALW-armed violence that is now a feature of life in areas of Nigeria engenders an atmosphere of insecurity that discourages formal and informal economic activities. This insecurity derives both from the threat and actual unleashing of violence. In Lagos, the 25 November 1999 and the 15 October 2000 clashes recorded 170 and 100 casualties within 24 hours respectively.⁴⁶ Across Nigeria, an estimated 53,000 people were killed from SALW-armed violence between 2001 and 2004. Insecurity is central to the abandonment of large farmlands in Benue, a state considered the 'food basket' of Nigeria. In the Niger Delta region, the incessant armed maritime attacks that are taking place contributes to Nigeria being allocated an unenviable third position in maritime insecurity,⁴⁷ but also disrupts local fishing and water-based businesses. The government has estimated that Nigeria has lost US\$2 billion to the bunkering activities of sea pirates in the Delta region.⁴⁸

A third factor is the use of SALW to intimidate and unleash violence against civilians in Lagos and across Nigeria for the purpose of collecting illegal taxes and looting, and which contributes to impoverishment. In Lagos, the OPC and the police exercise indirect control over virtually all the motor parks and major markets (Mile 12, Mushin, Ereko, for example) by acting as the 'backbone' or 'guarantors' of the gangs or groups that control the parks. This role attracts considerable financial returns, and contributes to increased overhead costs of transportation and consequently the price of goods. This trend of illegal tax collection is most glaring on the part of the police as evidenced by the many roadblocks and checkpoints that abound in Lagos and across Nigeria. Motorists, especially commercial transporters and haulage vehicles, are regularly targeted for illegal taxes with a minimum of N20 (\$0.15) per journey. A cursory look at the Mile 2-Badary motorway, for example, which is critical for cross border trade with the Republic of Benin, reveals several checkpoints. The kola charges are ultimately borne by the masses. Even where taxes are not directly extorted – long distance buses, for example, are not usually stopped at checkpoints because advance payments are made to the authorities to be given a 'waiver' – the cost is still borne by commuters.⁴⁹ This pattern is repeated across Nigeria as the deployment of security forces to restore law and order becomes a window for extracting money from already impoverished civilians. The 17.5% annual inflation rate for Nigeria over the past four years further exacerbates the poverty of those that fall victim to armed violence.

⁴⁴ See ThisDay (April 4), 2003.

⁴⁵ See IRIN, 'Nigeria: 800,000 internally displaced across country-refugee agency', (internet).

⁴⁶ See Human Rights Watch World Report (2001), (internet).

⁴⁷ See IRIN, 'Nigeria: Piracy report says Nigeria waters the most deadly', (internet).

⁴⁸ Vanguard (9 March 2005), (internet).

⁴⁹ Source: Rev. Selbut Longtau, Development Alternatives, Research & Training (DART) in Nigeria.

Fourth, violence committed with SALW has led to massive destruction. The 2002 Idi-Araba clashes, for example, left several thousand vehicles damaged, burnt houses, and looted businesses. Similarly, the SALW-armed violence in Benue, Taraba, and Jos-Plateau led to the destruction of vast farmlands, the killing of several thousand livestock, and a near-complete ruin of the agricultural sector in the nation's most agriculturally productive region⁵⁰. The deployment of armed personnel, ostensibly to restore law and order, has often led to even greater destruction, especially of infrastructure, farmlands, and livestock.

9.3 Savings, revenue and investments

The disruption of economic activities at the micro level has had negative impacts on savings, investments and earnings. This reality may not be reflected in the national statistics because the national economy is structured and anchored on big business investment in the oil and gas, and telecommunication sectors. Yet, massive displacement, and the destruction of lives and properties limit the ability of the masses to save, invest, or even earn a living. This has knock-on implications for local government authorities responsible for providing local social services from local taxation and other means.

9.4. Social services

A further consequence of SALW-armed violence has been the reduced government capacity to deliver social services that were sub-standard prior to the intensification of SALW possession and usage in 1999. Government services, including schools, health units, and government offices and officials, have been targets of SALW-armed violence. Further, government resources have been directed towards security rather than social provision as armed violence increases.

9.5. Declining security

The involvement of vigilante groups in neighbourhood 'policing' sometimes makes them popular locally and can bring short-term benefits in terms of law and order. However, the overall impact of SALW-armed violence by vigilante groups appears to be negative. Vigilante groups in Nigeria are prone to extra-judicial and politicized killings, and often target police stations thereby further incapacitating those police who might provide some basis for law and order.⁵¹ Further, armed criminals and gangsters are linked to the huge increase in armed robberies and the way-laying of travelling vehicles, including those carrying traders, produce and goods. Further, there is little faith in the security services that are credited with the extra-judicial killing of over 10,000 civilians over the past four years.⁵² Military operations in Odi and Zaki-Biam (Benue), for example, destroyed schools, health centres, and houses, and included the use of rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and mortars.

⁵⁰ See IRIN, 'Nigeria: Villagers running scared despite state of emergency', (internet).

⁵¹ The November-December clashes between the OPC and the Police destroyed 12 police stations.

⁵² See OMCT and CLEEN (2002) for details on the security services' involvement in violence.

9.6. Rises or reductions in armed criminality, banditry and gangsterism

The ready availability, proliferation, and use of SALW, despite strict firearms laws,⁵³ have emboldened criminals, bandits and secret cults, to engage in armed criminality, and armed confrontations with the police are a regular occurrence. This has resulted in considerable deaths and injuries. There have been 273 civilian deaths, and 183 (killed) and 133 (injured) policemen from armed banditry in Lagos between August 2000 and May 2001.⁵⁴

Vigilante groups seem to have stemmed the tide of armed robbery in parts of Lagos, but other forms of criminality including daylight raiding of markets, banks, and shops, way-laying of travelling vehicles and hostage taking, seems to have increased considerably over the past four years. The increase in the sophistication of SALW used by armed criminals and gangsters has overwhelmed the police, prompting the regular use of the army in internal security roles.

Corruption within the legal system had led to the failure of criminals to be brought to justice leading to a mentality of 'self-help' among sections of the population and contributing to the acquisition of small arms by civilians who regard the state apparatus of law and order with suspicion. In fact, the militarization of society has led to a 'gun culture' where small arms are regarded as 'fashionable means of addressing social issues and disagreements'.⁵⁵

In surveys undertaken in Kaduna State, it was found that there was a higher level of small arms possession in urban rather than rural areas, and higher levels of crime in urban contexts. Of those robbed, 71% of city respondents had been robbed with a firearm, compared to 16% in rural areas.⁵⁶ Anecdotally, this trend seems to apply across many parts of Nigeria.

9.7. Growth of private security

The wealthier in Nigeria have used private security companies for protection and have highly fortified their property, but the poor have been unable to do this and have been left to fend for themselves and have proved vulnerable to robbery and as a result have become more impoverished. Some of the poor have come under the wing of vigilante groups but this has left them vulnerable to extortion and abuse.

In Kaduna City, for example, it is said that increased criminality has had significant implications for both corporate organizations and individuals. In Kaduna Metropolis the numbers of clients seeking the services of private security companies had escalated from

⁵³ The penalty for illegal ownership of a firearm is four years imprisonment, or a N100,00 fine, or both. Ebo, A., (2003), p. 5.

⁵⁴ BBC (20 February 2003), (internet).

⁵⁵ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 6.

⁵⁶ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 24.

96 in 1997 to 205 in 2001. Further, the numbers of guards employed had risen dramatically.⁵⁷

In terms of vigilante groups, it was estimated in 2001 that 487 vigilante volunteers were engaged in Kaduna city per annum, covering 4,386 houses. On the basis of a payment of N500 per household, it was estimated that N2,343,000 was spent on the services of vigilante groups per month in Kaduna metropolis in 2001.

10. Conclusions

10.1. Research findings

- SALW are becoming endemic in Nigeria and the pace of acquisition and the lethality of weapons is rapidly increasing.
- There is neither sufficient programming to directly address SALW possession, nor the will or capacity within the state security services, to fully deal with this problem.
- Arms racing patterns have been established in Nigeria where groups and the security sector seek to acquire more sophisticated and lethal weapons to counter acquisitions by rival groups. The police, in particular, have been unable to keep up with the weapons acquired by armed groups. This has frequently led to the army being called in. At times, army units have acted in a disproportionate manner, further exacerbating armed violence.
- Ex-security sector personnel are contributing to the diffusion of SALW and, it is also thought, to the diffusion of knowledge and expertise on how to use and maintain SALW.
- SALW are not the only weapons of concern in Nigeria. Increasingly, heavier weapons are being used in certain conflict zones and 'traditional' weapons are playing a part. However, it is also clear that SALW display has created a climate of fear and coercion, while at the same time, there is fear of hidden weapons and the fact that in many areas anyone can be carrying a gun and that violence might suddenly erupt. This has eroded or damaged social capital.
- A gun culture and a culture of impunity have increasingly been established in Nigeria since 1999, particularly, but not exclusively, among the young. This has grave implications for both civil society and the state.
- Much of civil society living in certain conflict zones exists in a state of fear, particularly given the possession of SALW by virtually all sectors of society including the young, students, vigilantes, militias, armed groups, politicians, and religious movements.
- The prospect of escalating armed violence following the next election in Nigeria cannot be discounted.
- The poverty impacts of SALW in Nigeria have not been well delineated in terms of hard data as yet. However, this study has established the following findings. Massive displacement has taken place in many conflict arenas and after months or

⁵⁷ Ebo, A., (2003), p. 20.

even years many civilians have not regarded it as safe to return. As a consequence, many markets are no longer operating and fleeing civilians have been reliant on subsistence living. This has impoverished whole communities. Towns, as in the Delta region, are open to frequent attacks by armed gangs or the security services. This has led to severe interruptions to economic activities and the fear of imminent future attacks has disrupted normal trade including fishing. Large areas of farmland in places such as Benue, which has been considered the food basket of Nigeria, have been abandoned with consequences, not just for that area, but also other areas of Nigeria. The practice of extorting 'taxes' on highways coming in and out of places such as Lagos has led to traders raising their prices for key goods such as food produce and consequently contributing to the further impoverishment of the poor. The threat and actual use of armed violence by armed groups, vigilantes, and robbers, has led to communities retreating into themselves and often the growth of private security services (for those who can afford them) and vigilante 'protection' for the poorer. Both these have involved material costs for communities and curtailments in trade and normal economic and other forms of cross-community exchanges. The regeneration of communities damaged by armed violence will require the massive injection of funds, which are unlikely to be available, to bring the majority of the population in places such as Mavo and Wase, which have been devastated by ethno-religious crisis, to even a 'bearable' level of poverty. Last, social capital has been severely eroded by SALW possession and usage. Communities have split along ethnic and religious divisions in the face of increasing insecurity and attacks by armed groups and security forces.

10.2. Programming and related findings

- State and regional control of flows of SALW, both internally and externally, needs to be significantly improved if any brake on rampant armed violence in Nigeria is to be exerted. This particularly needs to target the increasingly sophisticated weapons being acquired in Nigeria. SALW controls on Nigeria's long borders are porous or are non-existent or open to abuse. Internally, gun possession or ownership laws exist but are not widely enforced. More robust instruments and measures are required in all these areas, but are unlikely to be initiated any time soon.
- Measures need to be taken to address security sector dissemination of weaponry to armed gangs and other actors. This should include prosecution of individuals involved. However, action in this area will be difficult given current networks of corruption within the system. Further, issues such as poor pay need to be addressed in the security sector to decrease motives to increase income through illicit activities.
- The security sector needs to respond in a more proportionate way to challenges to state authority and outbreaks of armed violence.
- SSR is required. Limited SSR measures took place in 1999 when the government retired large numbers of senior and middle-ranking officers and there has been minor follow up. However, SSR that addresses some of the deep-rooted problems

- in the security sector is required, including measures to deal with retired personnel who are, it appears, diffusing SALW and technical knowledge.
- Programming addressing SALW possession needs urgently to be set in train. Existing programming does not seem in the main to be directly addressing this issue. This programming might include Arms for Development (AfD) type programming that actually offers incentives for communities to give in arms, as well as programming that addresses the fractures between communities. Establishing weapons-free-zones could be a priority in consultation with local communities. However, this will not be straightforward given the rampant insecurity that exists in many conflict zones in Nigeria and the lack of faith in the security services. This implies that extensive confidence-building measures will be required, quite possibly involving regional and international support, in co-operation with the Nigerian government, as well as civil society.
 - Reversing the gun culture and militarization of society is an urgent, but an extremely problematic, priority in Nigeria. The rapid pace of the militarization of society since 1999 is startling and shows signs of deepening. Sensitisation measures would be a good starting point, but gun culture seem so embedded in many youths for example, including students, that this will be extremely difficult to reverse. Elements of civil society are attempting to change perceptions regarding gun possession and usage but appear to be overwhelmed in the prevailing culture of violence and bitterness in many states. Unless security services can provide security across community divides the demand and willingness to use SALW is likely to increase.
 - Conflict resolution initiatives to address differences along ethno-religious lines can make a contribution to defusing violence but face an uphill battle in the face of widespread deprivation and ready access to SALW.

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