

The Implication of Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons on the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria: The Fulani Herdsmen Experience

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Abstract

One of the fundamental obstacles to social and economic development of Nigeria is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). It constitutes a major source of conflict which leads to destruction of lives and properties which in turn hinders development. This phenomenon had taken a serious dimension since the beginning of this political dispensation through the activities of Fulani herdsmen. The incessant attacks of these herdsmen in Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Adamawa, Taraba, Kogi and some parts of Southern Nigeria have caused serious social and economic problems. This paper thus examines the implications of proliferation of small and light weapons on the socio-economic development of Nigeria using the Fulani herdsmen as a reference point and then proffers solutions.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Development, Fulani Herdsmen, Small weapons, light weapons

Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons fuel wars, organized crimes, insurgency and terrorist activities and thereby poses great obstacle to social and economic development of Nigeria. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) can be attributed to failure of governance in Nigeria with its attendant inability to control its numerous porous borders. The ease with which small arms and light weapons are available lead to easy escalation of conflict and pose a major challenge to peace and development.

According to Olayiwola (2017), proliferation of small and light weapons causes conflicts and criminal activities in places where they are used. The wide availability, accumulation and illicit flows of such weapons tend to escalate conflict, undermine peace agreements, intensify violence and impact crime, impede economic and social development, hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance. It is often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or delay development projects and hinder peace keeping and peace building efforts. Small and light weapons are a contributory factor to armed conflict,

displacement of people, organized crime, and thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development (Geneva Declaration Secretariat in Malam, 2014)

The manifestation of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons assumed new dimensions in Nigeria with the outbreak of Islamic extremism which is instanced in the twin bomb blast in Abuja during the Independence day celebrations of October 1, 2010 and the Nyanya motor park bombing that claimed 75 lives and left scores wounded on 14th April 2014 (Osimen and Akintunde, 2015). However in the current political dispensation, the use of small arms and light weapons reached new heights with the activities of Fulani herdsmen putting Nigeria under intense internal security pressure. Stories abound in both electronic and print media of how Fulani herdsmen carry out acts of genocide on local communities in Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Kogi, States with sophisticated assault rifles, hand grenades, shot guns, knives, light machine guns and sub-machine guns.

This paper examines the implications of proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the social and economic development of Nigeria using the Fulani herdsmen as a case study.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this paper, we adopted the failed state theory to explain the subject of discussion. According to Anyanwu (2015), the term “failed state” is used to describe a state perceived to have failed in fulfilling the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government. A failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political, and economic failure. Common features of a failed state include: weak and ineffective central government that is unable to have firm control over much of its territory, non-provision of basic public amenities or services, wide spread criminality and corruption, presence of internally displaced persons (IDPS) and irregular movement of population, and sharp economic decline (Osimen and Akintunde, 2015). According to Anyanwu (2015) failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of power structures providing support for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence.

In the Nigerian context, it is the failure of governance and state institutions of coercion and enforcement especially the police, immigration, customs, and the Army that resulted in the illegal flow of arms and ammunition through the Nigerian borders. This is also evident in the inability of police and the army in safe-guarding life and property in the

face of Fulani herdsmen attacks on defenseless Nigerians. This has resulted to the presence of many internally displaced persons camps in the middle belt region of Nigeria. This is consistent with the position of Osimen and Akintunde (2015) that failed states are characterized by weak and ineffective central government that is unable to have firm control over much of its territory, wide-spread corruption and criminality, presence of internally displaced persons and irregular movement of population. All these are presently happening in Nigeria as the government of the day has failed in providing responsible and effective leadership.

History of Proliferation of Small & Light Weapons in Nigeria

Guns were introduced by Europeans in West Africa through the trans-atlantic trade. In Nigeria, Civilians had the first contact with guns and gun powder when the British backed West African frontier force and the Royal Niger Company used guns, arms, ammunitions and gun-boat diplomacy to force Nigeria into the colonial orbit (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Gradually, guns and gun powder found its way into the hands of Nigerians during colonialism and the post-colonial era. These guns were used for ceremonial events and hunting expeditions.

After independence, the Nigerian-Biafran War broke out in 1967 which exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking in Nigeria. The failure of Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme resulted in geometric progression in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. This in turn ushered in an era that turned gun into instruments of criminality, violence and genocide instead of instrument of prestige and expedition.

The period between the end of 20th century and the dawn of 21st century was a period of conflicts in West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d’voire, Guinea and lately Libya which resulted in illicit flow of arm and ammunition in and out of Nigeria from these troubled countries. Thus, small arms and light weapons turned into a brisk business in West Africa. This turned Nigeria into the source, destination and transit point of small arms and light weapons. Also, the promotion of ethnic and religious consciousness at the expense of class consciousness resulted in the increasing demand for small arms and light weapons which is used in executing ethno-religious violence, election violence and communal wars. This is evident in many sectarian, communal, and ethno-religious clashes that happened in Nigeria since the return of civil rule in Nigeria. Some of the conflicts that erupted in Nigeria during this period include:

Zango Kataf riots (1992), Ife and Modukeke Crisis (1997), Agulueri-Umuleri communal clash (1999), religious riots in Kaduna (2000), sectarian violence in Jos (2004), Tivs and Jukun crisis (2011), Yoruba-Hausa/Fulani (2016), Niger Delta (2009) (Olayiwola, 2017)

In the current political dispensation, the Fulani herdsmen are using small and light weapons to decimate the local population in the north central zones of Nigeria. The herdsmen have turned into an army of occupation as they kill, maim, rape and destroy houses and properties of inhabitants of north central regions. This has serious consequences on social and economic development of Nigeria.

Brief History of Fulani People

The Fulani people are descendants from middle East and North Africa. Their origin began with Berbers of North Africa around the 11th century AD (Anter 2015) They are predominantly Muslims and are found in West Africa with their main base in Futa-Jalo, Guinea (Gundu, 2018). According to him, the Fulanis through Uthman dan Fodio fought a Jihad and established a caliphate that stretched from Nigeria into Chad and Niger Republic. They used the caliphate to maintain an ethnic dominance in most West African states.

Most Fulanis are nomads herding cattle, sheep and goat across the dry grass lands of their environment. In Nigeria, we have five Fulani sub groups namely Fulbe Gombe, Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Mbororo and Fulbe Borgu (Kasarachi, 2016). They are the main breeders of goats, sheeps and cattle in Nigeria. According to Fabiyi and Otunba (2016), they account for one third of Agricultural GDP in Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen usually migrate with their livestock from one destination to the other in search of pasture for their cattle. The Fulani's are of two types namely the farm Fulani and the town or urban Fulani. When the herdsmen (farm Fulani) are migrating, they are often supported by the more educated, rich, articulate and dynamic town Fulanis who provide political and military strategy for the herders to overcome local opposition. However, when the town Fulanis felt the need for ethnic cleansing or Jihad, they use the herdsmen (farm Fulani) as fighting forces (Ajibefun, 2018).

Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons and the Menace of Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria

Nigeria is under severe internal security threat since the beginning of the current political dispensation owing to the activities of Fulani herdsmen. The widespread availability of small and light weapons especially in

northern Nigeria has contributed immensely to this problem. Guns like Ak-47 assault rifle have become what the children of Fulani herdsmen play with in Nigeria raining horror on communities that forbade their nefarious activities. It is difficult to understand how Fulani herdsmen acquire unregistered guns like Ak-47 rifle and move freely with it in Nigeria. The failure of the Nigeria security infrastructure to either prevent or manage the free flow of illicit weapons is one of the reasons responsible for the menace of Fulani herdsmen attack in Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen attack with indigenous communities have left pillaging, rape, killings, kidnapping, destruction of properties, burning of farmlands and burning of houses in its wake. According to Kasarachi (2016) the menace of Fulani herdsmen has led to loss of lives, houses, valuable properties and destruction of vast arable farmland which poses serious threat to food security.

Herdsmen by nature are migrants who leave their traditional abode in search of greener pasture for their livestock. Recently, there has been a migration of these herdsmen down south in search of pasture. This is as a result of deforestation, drought and desertification of the Sahel region of Nigeria (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). According to Adoji (2013), the main cause of migration has been the change in climatic conditions occasioned by absence of adequate rainfall, poor grazing land and lack of coping mechanism. However, instead of the Fulani herdsmen living in peace with their host communities, they carried out brazen and unprovoked attacks on their hosts at night. In the wake of 73 victims of Fulani herdsmen attack in January, a Benue-based Journalist Collins Uma stated that no farmer clashed with herdsmen-they were attacked in the night in their homes (Vanguard News, February 12, 2018). This has made many political commentators to believe that the Fulani herdsmen are being used to propagate an expansionist agenda.

According to Gundu (2018), there is an attempt by Fulanis of the whole world and their Nigerian collaborators to annex land from the indigenous people of Nigeria for use by the Fulanis. This was corroborated by Yakubu (2014) which viewed Fulani herdsmen attack as an attempt to build in roads into central Nigeria, stake claims on their land for effective occupation rather than grazing. Thus, the Fulani herdsmen attack in Nigeria is a war of conquest by Fulani mercenaries from outside who wants to settle in Nigeria. According to Ihekire (2018), there is a plan to "Fulanise" Nigeria. He believes that Fulani herdsmen and their cattle are facilitators to an agenda of Fulani conquest of Nigeria. This assertion was reinforced by Kaduna state governor, Malam Nasir El-Rufuai who admitted that he used state funds to pay Fulani people from outside the country to stop them from

attacking Nigerians. Also, the inspector general of police, Abubakar Idris and minister of agriculture, Audu Ogbeh have argued consistently that the people attacking local communities in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba and Kogi State, are not Nigerians (Gundu, 2018). The plan of the Fulanis with their Nigerian collaborators is to instill fear on the indigenous population so that they will give up their land as a way of stopping the killings. Statistics have shown that in the first quarter of 2018, 1061 lives were lost from 106 attacks of Fulani herdsmen. (CWS Quarterly Report, 2018)

The conflict between the herdsmen and the indigenous people of Nigeria has given Nigeria a bad image in the comity of nations. Sadly, the federal government and security agents have continued to watch with resigned helplessness. According to Gundu (2018), Fulani herdsmen are so bold to the extent that they perpetrate such genocide and go scot free because their Fulani brother is in power and they can do and undo without being sanctioned by security agents.

The case of Benue state is a case in point. The Benue state government through the Benue state House of Assembly made a law for the good people of Benue state that if Fulani herdsmen must graze on their land, it must be in ranches. However, the Miyetti Allah (an association of cattle breeders) refused to abide by laws made by the constituted and recognized authority in Benue state. They went ahead to warn the government of Benue state that if their demands of grazing indiscriminately in Benue is not met there will be no peace. In all this, the federal government has maintained an undignified silence as if Nigeria is running a feudal system.

Therefore, it is the opinion of this paper that Fulani herdsmen attack in Nigeria is a war of conquest aimed at subjugating Nigerians to Fulani rule. It is an expansionist agenda couched in form of a search for pasture in the middle belt communities.

Socio Economic Implications of Fulani Herdsmen Attack

The conflict between herdsmen and indigenous population (mostly farmers) in north central regions and southern parts of the country have reduced the rate of food production in the country, thereby making farmers in those areas not to go to their farmlands for fear of being killing by herdsmen. This is a great threat to Nigeria's food security. The attacks of Fulani herdsmen have resulted in sharp increase in the poverty level of the affected communities. This is due to the over-reliance of our rural communities on the sale of farm produce as a means of survival. When these subsistent farmers are not allowed to go to farm or when their crops are

destroyed, it creates severe hunger and increases the poverty level in Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen attack increases the unemployment rate in the country. Usually, farming absorbs a very large rural population. When such populations are displaced from their farms, they migrate to the city where it is safer to live. This increases the unemployment rate and also increases the rate of rural urban-migration.

Moreover, when people from local communities migrate to the city in search of non-existent jobs, if they are unable to be meaningfully engaged some of them will resort to crime. This also increases the crime rate in the society. The attack of Fulani herdsmen is capable of challenging the very existence of the Nigerian state. The inability of government to arrest and prosecute herdsmen for destruction of crops, properties and acts of genocide is a serious indictment on Nigerians justice system. The law of the land demands that nobody should carry arms without authorization. Also, nobody is allowed by the law to take the live of another. However, the herdsmen are using the arms acquired illegally to take the life of innocent Nigerians but the justice system is not doing anything about it. This is capable of undermining the rule of law and destroying Nigeria's nascent democracy.

Conclusion

This study explored the implication of proliferation of small and light weapons on the socio-economic development of Nigeria with special reference to Fulani herdsmen. It observed that Fulani herdsmen attacks is not a conflict over grazing rights but an attempt by Fulani's to expand south wards and grab a lot of land for themselves because of the unfavorable conditions in the Sahel region of the country. The paper recommends that Fulani herdsmen should be encouraged to embrace modern ways of rearing cattle which is ranching. The paper also advises government to be alive to its responsibilities of safe-guarding lives and properties of Nigeria in the face of the unprovoked and unwarranted attacks from Fulani herdsmen.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government should create and implement a clear cut national policy on small arms and light weapons control. Legislation is crucial in this regard. An effective approach will require coordinated and sustained legislative, administrative, and judicial strategies that will check illegal arms proliferation. The strategies should transcend national boundaries because of the cross-border nature of arms proliferation.

2. A comprehensive mop-up of illegal arms in circulation should be carried out to prevent some Nigerians from harming others. Also, a comprehensive verification should be carried out from time to time to identify criminal elements in our law enforcement agencies that either sell or rent arms to criminal elements from government armoury.
3. The government should encourage Fulani herdsmen to embrace ranching which is a modern method of rearing cattle. The government should provide the needed training to these herdsmen for efficient and effective management of ranches.
4. Lastly the government should demonstrate the political will to protect lives and property that they swore to protect. The government should be ready to arrest and persecute those that violate the laws of the land under whatever guise. They should stop their partisan posture whenever the issue of herdsmen arises and treat everyone as equal before the law.

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