

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Socioeconomic Recovery and Community Resilience in Post-Lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of SALW proliferation socioeconomic activities and community resilience, focusing on the period of COVID-19 lockdown in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study areas. The Failed State theory is the fundamental underpinning of the study. Findings revealed that the availability of SALW has exacerbated armed banditry, communal clashes, and herder-farmer conflicts, leading to displacement, reduced agricultural activities, and a sharp decline in economic output. It was further revealed that porous borders, inadequate enforcement of arms control laws, and socioeconomic deprivation are factors driving SALW proliferation. The study also found that the proliferation of arms undermines community resilience by weakening local conflict resolution mechanisms and fostering a culture of impunity. Despite these challenges, community-based initiatives, such as vigilante groups and peacebuilding efforts, have shown some potentials in mitigating violence and fostering recovery. The study recommends implementing robust, integrated strategies such as disarmament programs, poverty alleviation initiatives, and strengthened border enforcement. Additionally, empowering local conflict resolution mechanisms, promoting social cohesion, and addressing governance deficits are essential steps to break the cycle of SALW proliferation and foster sustainable recovery.

Keywords: Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), Socioeconomic Recovery, Community Resilience, Post-Lockdown, Taraba State, Nigeria

Introduction

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) remains a pressing issue in global security, particularly in fragile states such as Nigeria, including Taraba State. SALW, which include portable weapons like pistols, rifles, and light machine guns, are central to modern conflicts due to their accessibility and ease of use (Small Arms Survey, 2021). In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic disruptions caused by lockdowns exacerbated the spread of these weapons, contributing to a rise in criminal activity and violence. As Nwankpa (2022) notes, the pandemic-induced economic strain led to increased unemployment and poverty, creating fertile ground for the proliferation of SALW and heightening insecurity in Nigeria, especially in states like Taraba. This aligns with previous observations that economic instability and political violence are deeply interconnected (OECD, 2020).

The post-lockdown period in Nigeria, including Taraba State, has seen a sharp increase in armed violence, with the availability of SALW playing a critical role. According to Adebayo (2023), the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is driven by weak border controls, ineffective governance, and the state's inability to provide basic services. These factors are compounded by the loss of livelihoods during the pandemic, which pushed many into criminal activities such as kidnapping,

banditry, and armed robbery. The Nigerian government's inadequate distribution of palliatives during Covid-19 lockdown further inflamed social tensions, leading to violent uprisings and protests, many of which were fueled by the availability of SALW (Amnesty International, 2021). Taraba State, with its unique socioeconomic challenges, has not been immune to these trends.

Furthermore, the rise in SALW has transformed the nature of conflict in Nigeria, including conflicts within Taraba State. This shift has moved from inter-state wars to intra-state violence involving non-state actors such as insurgent groups, militias, and criminal networks. Ero and Ndulu (2022) argue that the widespread availability of SALW has empowered these groups such as Boko Haram, bandits, and ethnic militias to challenge state authority, thereby undermining national security. Empirical evidence from West Africa suggests that the proliferation of SALW has exacerbated conflicts across the region particularly in the sahel and chad basin, destabilizing fragile states, and impeding peacebuilding efforts (UNODC, 2023). Taraba State's proximity to porous borders and its history of communal tensions makes it particularly vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of SALW.

The socioeconomic consequences of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, including Taraba State, are severe. The heightened insecurity deters both domestic and foreign investment, hampers economic recovery, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and violence. According to Olayemi (2022), the persistent threat of armed violence in post-lockdown Nigeria has stifled economic growth and eroded public confidence in the government's ability to maintain law and order. This insecurity extends beyond physical violence to economic and social destabilization, further exacerbating poverty and inequality (World Bank, 2022). For Taraba State, known for its agricultural productivity, the effects are particularly pronounced, as insecurity disrupts farming activities and local markets, compounding economic vulnerabilities.

The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria's post-lockdown era represents a critical challenge to national security, economic stability, and governance. While existing literature has explored the general impact of SALW on conflict, there is a need for more focused studies examining the specific dynamics of SALW proliferation in the post-pandemic context. This study will contribute to filling this gap by analyzing how the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria's post-lockdown era has impacted Nigeria's security landscape and socioeconomic development, with a particular focus on Taraba State. This study examines the impact of the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) on socioeconomic recovery and community resilience in post-lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Muoemenam and Okafor (2022) state that small guns are clearly quite common in Nigeria. It has evolved into actual weapons of aggression and dominance by some groups in Nigeria, surpassing its usage by armed robbers, killers, government security forces, and others. Those little guns have undoubtedly grown to be a significant contributory element to Nigeria's increased insecurity. Its effectiveness and ease of use with little training have made careless use worse. The fatalities, displacements, destructions, and devastation that have resulted from this scenario have affected both the nation's economy and its citizens.

Like jurisprudential terminology, tiny guns have eluded a general definition (Abdullahi, 2016). Although majority of the later regional and international instruments have limited the definition to

focus only on firearms, the United Nations Governmental Experts that examined the issue of small arms and light weapons in 1997, for instance, proposed a definition that included clubs, knives, and machetes. Therefore, until recently, a large portion of the work on weapons and small arms had been done in different directions, with lengthy debates about the meaning of "illicit trafficking" and the destruction of "illicit firearms and small arms." "Revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns" is another definition of small arms provided by the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms" (Abdullahi, 2016). Small Arms and Light Weapons within the context of this study is applied to refer to a range of firearms that are designed for individual or small group use, are easy to carry and operate, and can pose significant security challenges when they are not properly controlled and regulated.

Socioeconomic Recovery

Socioeconomic recovery refers to the multidimensional process of rebuilding and stabilizing economic, social, and infrastructural systems following crises such as conflicts, pandemics, or natural disasters. It involves restoring livelihoods, revitalizing economic activities, and ensuring access to essential public services while addressing structural vulnerabilities. According to the World Bank (2020), socioeconomic recovery encompasses measures aimed at enhancing economic resilience, promoting inclusive growth, and ensuring sustainable development. In the Nigerian context, scholars like Odeyemi and Gambo (2019) conceptualize it as a process of rebuilding economic and social systems to pre-crisis levels or better, with a focus on resilience and inclusive development. Similarly, Erunko and Jatau (2022) highlight the importance of local participation and the revitalization of productive sectors, while Akpan and Udo (2020) stress rebuilding livelihoods and infrastructure as key to post-conflict recovery.

Within the context of this study, socioeconomic recovery refers to efforts aimed at stabilizing communities affected by the dual challenges of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation and the socioeconomic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 lockdown. This process involves revitalizing livelihoods, restoring public services, fostering economic stability, and addressing vulnerabilities exacerbated by insecurity and the pandemic. It also integrates targeted interventions such as enhancing security measures, strengthening governance frameworks, and promoting inclusive development strategies to empower local communities. Emphasizing resilience, socioeconomic recovery ensures that affected communities not only rebuild but also develop the capacity to withstand and adapt to future challenges, positioning Taraba State on a pathway toward sustainable development and peace.

Community Resilience

Community resilience refers to the ability of a community to anticipate, adapt to, withstand, and recover from adverse events or disruptions while ensuring long-term sustainability and development. In the context of this study, it is conceptualized as the collective capacity of communities in Taraba State to address the socioeconomic and security challenges posed by the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Resilience involves strengthening governance frameworks, fostering economic recovery, and building social cohesion to mitigate the impacts of insecurity and instability. According to Olawale and Igbokwe (2020), resilience in Nigeria is deeply rooted in traditional governance structures and social networks, which provide local mechanisms for conflict resolution and recovery.

Similarly, Norris *et al* (2008) frame community resilience as the interplay of economic development, social capital, information, and communication, all of which are critical to maintaining functionality during crises. For conflict-prone areas like Taraba State, Adebayo and Yusuf (2019) emphasize the importance of inclusive development strategies and grassroots empowerment in fostering resilience. These perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of community resilience, which integrates traditional practices, adaptive capacities, and strategic interventions to enhance recovery and long-term stability. Given the persistent threats posed by SALW proliferation, building community resilience in Taraba State requires targeted policies that strengthen local institutions, promote conflict resolution, and support sustainable economic initiatives that empower vulnerable populations.

Literature Review

Link Between Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Socioeconomic Recovery in Post-Lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has significantly hindered socioeconomic recovery in post-lockdown Taraba State. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing economic vulnerabilities, with many individuals losing their sources of livelihood, leading to an increase in crime and insecurity. According to Adebayo (2023) the availability of SALW has fueled criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping, and armed robbery, disrupting economic activities and discouraging investment in affected communities. The post-lockdown period has seen a surge in violent conflicts, making it difficult for displaced persons to return to their economic ventures. This aligns with the findings of Eze and Yusuf (2021) who argue that widespread access to SALW in conflict-prone regions impedes recovery by destabilizing local economies and discouraging business expansion.

Furthermore, the insecurity caused by SALW proliferation has weakened institutional efforts aimed at rebuilding critical sectors such as agriculture, trade, and infrastructure. Taraba State, being predominantly agrarian, has suffered from attacks on farmers, leading to food insecurity and economic stagnation (Olawale & Igbokwe, 2020). The inability of the government to effectively curb the spread of illegal arms has further compounded the situation, as armed groups continue to terrorize communities, limiting mobility and access to markets (Bako & Aliyu, 2022). As a result, socioeconomic recovery remains sluggish, with residents unable to fully engage in productive activities. To address these challenges, scholars advocate for a combination of disarmament policies, enhanced security measures, and economic empowerment programs that can help rebuild trust and restore economic stability (Erunke & Jatau, 2022).

Link Between Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Community Resilience in Post-Lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has undermined community resilience in post-lockdown Taraba State, weakening the ability of communities to adapt to and recover from crises. Resilience is built on social cohesion, economic stability, and effective governance, all of which are disrupted by the widespread availability of SALW. According to Adebayo and Yusuf (2019), communities struggling with high levels of armed violence face greater difficulty in rebuilding social structures and fostering cooperation for collective recovery. In Taraba State, the prevalence of SALW has heightened intercommunal conflicts and criminal activities, leading to forced displacements and deepening mistrust among different ethnic groups (Nwankwo & Musa, 2021). These disruptions have made it challenging for communities to engage

in post-pandemic recovery efforts, as fear and insecurity deter collaborative development initiatives.

Moreover, the presence of SALW in the hands of non-state actors has weakened traditional governance structures and local conflict resolution mechanisms. Olawale and Igbokwe (2020) argue that resilience in Nigerian communities is largely dependent on indigenous conflict management systems, which have been eroded by the increasing use of sophisticated weapons in local disputes. In post-lockdown Taraba State, security challenges have stretched communal resources, making it difficult for local leaders to implement sustainable recovery strategies. The continued circulation of illegal arms has also made humanitarian efforts and government interventions less effective, as violence disrupts aid distribution and infrastructure rebuilding projects (Erunke & Jatau, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including community-driven disarmament programs, conflict resolution mechanisms, and economic support initiatives to enhance resilience and long-term stability in the state

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Failed State Theory as its theoretical foundation. The concept of "state failure" emerged prominently in the 1990s, largely influenced by Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner's (1993) seminal article, *Saving Failed States*. In their work, the authors describe a failing nation-state as one that has lost both its national and international functions. They argue that contemporary failed states lack effective authority, struggle to enforce governance over their societies, or are unable to fulfill fundamental state responsibilities. Helman and Ratner (1993) compare these states to the fragmented geopolitical remnants of Germany after World War II, emphasizing their incapacity to maintain stability.

According to Helman and Ratner (1993), failed states have become a global phenomenon, with examples ranging from Haiti and Yugoslavia to Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia in Africa, as well as Cambodia in Asia. These states are characterized by persistent violence, lawlessness, and inability to protect their citizens. Their instability often extends beyond their borders, triggering refugee crises, political turmoil, and prolonged conflicts. Given the severity of human rights violations in such states especially the fundamental right to life. Helman and Ratner argue that international intervention is necessary to prevent further suffering and restore order.

According to Helman and Ratner (1993) "Third World countries are not the only ones that could fail. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia over the last two and a half years has created almost 20 new states, most of which have no tradition of statehood or practice in self-government". Referring to the civil war in Bosnia and lack of experience in governments of many other countries, they think it is impossible to be certain that the political boundaries created under colonialism will, in the end, could prove sustainable. On Helman and Ratner's account, the proliferation of the failed state phenomenon can be ascribed to the end of the Cold War and the end of European colonialism, two significant historical events. They both resulted in a large number of newly independent states. These states, created in the spirit of the UN mandated self-determination of peoples, were intended to have a liberating effect, but that they would simply not function geopolitically was, the authors argue, never properly considered - such an idea ran contrary to the liberatory spirit of decolonization (MacKay, 2006).

Application of the Theory

The Failed State Theory aptly explains the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and its impact on socioeconomic recovery and community resilience in post-lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria. This theory highlights the breakdown of state authority and institutions, resulting in insecurity, lawlessness, and the inability to deliver essential services. In the case of Taraba State, the post-COVID-19 lockdown period exposed systemic governance challenges, exacerbating security risks tied to the proliferation of SALW.

Weak Governance and Security Lapses: The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in post-lockdown Taraba State underscores the implications of state failure, as weak governance structures and ineffective law enforcement mechanisms have created an environment conducive to illicit arms circulation. The state's inability to effectively regulate border control and curb illegal arms trade has allowed non-state actors to exploit security gaps, further exacerbating insecurity. This has significantly hindered socioeconomic recovery by discouraging investments, destabilizing local markets, and disrupting essential public services, thereby prolonging economic stagnation and deepening structural vulnerabilities.

Economic Hardship and Socioeconomic Disruptions: The post-COVID-19 lockdown period intensified economic hardships, increasing unemployment and social tensions. In response to economic instability, marginalized groups and unemployed youths turned to armed violence and criminal activities, facilitated by the widespread availability of SALW. This has obstructed socioeconomic recovery by eroding business confidence, displacing productive populations, and diverting resources from development initiatives to crisis management. The weakened economic landscape has further reinforced cycles of poverty, making long-term recovery efforts unsustainable.

Erosion of Community Resilience: The proliferation of SALW has directly weakened community resilience by fostering violence, distrust, and social fragmentation. Traditional governance structures and conflict resolution mechanisms have been severely undermined, making it difficult for communities to collectively respond to crises. With local institutions losing their capacity to mediate conflicts and maintain order, communal relations have deteriorated, further aggravating intergroup tensions. This breakdown in social cohesion has delayed efforts to rebuild local economies, restore public services, and strengthen adaptive capacities necessary for long-term stability.

Empowerment of Non-State Actors and Perpetuation of Violence: The failure of the state to enforce security measures has enabled the rise of non-state actors, including militias, insurgent groups, and criminal networks, who have filled the power vacuum left by weakened state institutions. These groups not only facilitate the flow of illicit weapons but also disrupt socioeconomic recovery by imposing parallel governance structures, extorting local businesses, and exacerbating violence. This persistent insecurity has limited the effectiveness of community-led resilience strategies and further deepened the fragility of post-lockdown Taraba State.

Humanitarian and Developmental Consequences: The unchecked proliferation of SALW has resulted in devastating humanitarian crises, including mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, and destruction of critical infrastructure. The inability of the state to mitigate these consequences has perpetuated a cycle of instability, where communities remain vulnerable to recurring violence and economic disruptions. This continuous state of insecurity has hindered both immediate recovery

efforts and long-term developmental planning, trapping affected communities in a cycle of underdevelopment and fragility.

Thus, the failed state theory is highly relevant in explaining the deteriorating governance structures in Taraba State, where the proliferation of SALW has significantly impeded socioeconomic recovery and eroded community resilience. Without urgent interventions to strengthen state institutions, enhance security measures, and promote inclusive development strategies, the prospects for lasting recovery and stability remain bleak.

Methodology

Taraba State is the subject of this investigation. The state is situated in the northeastern part of Nigeria and is one of the 36 federating units. There are 3,066,834 people living there, spread among the state's 16 LGAs (National Bureau of Statistics 2018a). Taraba State shares boundaries with Bauchi and Gombe, Adamawa to the North-East, Plateau to the North-West, Nasarawa and Benue to the West and Cameroon to the East and South (Lenshie *et al*, 2020).

The data used for this study were generated between August and December 2024. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Purposive sampling method was adopted to select the study areas namely: Gassol, Bali, Kurmi, Ussa, Takum, Wukari, Lau, Karim-Lamido and Sardauna. The participants for the study were selected based on convenience sampling technique. In this context, participants were sampled simply because they were convenient sources of data collection. The sampling took into consideration the availability, accessibility, dependability and acceptability of respondents to participate in the research. The instruments used in generating data for the study consisted of the Key Informant Interview (through face to face and telephone), and expunge of the underlined review of the extant literatures on the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Socioeconomic Recovery and Community Resilience in Nigeria. The data generated from the field were analysed using discourse analysis.

Data Analysis

Question 1: Do you believe that the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has impacted farming activities and socioeconomic recovery in post-lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria?

A respondent posits thus;

Before the lockdown, we could go to our farms without fear. But now, armed bandits attack us almost daily. Many of us have stopped farming altogether because it's too dangerous. The bandits come with guns, demand money, and sometimes kidnap people. This year, I couldn't plant anything on my land, and my family is struggling to eat. This has never happened before in Gassol (Personal communication, December 2024).

According to Enganya and Jessey (2024) banditry-induced displacement disrupts social cohesion and traditional agricultural practices that are crucial for maintaining food security. In areas such as Kurmi and Ussa LGAs, the forced migration of communities due to bandit attacks leads to the breakdown of cooperative farming systems and local food markets. This fragmentation undermines the resilience of agricultural communities, making it harder to recover from shocks and sustain food production. The loss of social cohesion also weakens the community's ability to organize collective responses to banditry and other threats. The relationship between small arms and insecurity has been the object of contentious debates among scholars. While some scholars argue that small arms are the direct cause of insecurity, others maintain that small arms are merely trigger of insecurity or precipitating factor. Despite this seeming apparent disagreement, both

scholars commonly agree that the proliferation of small arms poses serious challenges to the sustenance of peace and stability of any society (Osimen & Akintunde, 2015). The proliferation of small arms sustains and exacerbates armed conflicts. It endangers peace keepers and workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian laws. It threatens legitimate but weak, governments and it benefits terrorists as well as the perpetrators of organized crime (Kofi, 2010). Some of the old threats that assumed new dimensions include small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation, armed robbery, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy, assassinations, cultism, human trafficking, terrorism and kidnapping (Osimen, & Akintunde, 2015). While proliferation of small arms and light weapons have nevertheless, the increase of insecurity have not been given adequate academic attention after COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayo-lope for instance, the Mayo-Lope Cattle Market in Lau Local Government Area, Taraba State, has faced significant challenges due to insecurity. Reports indicate that incidents of communal clashes, and herder-farmer conflicts have disrupted economic activities in the market. These security threats have created an atmosphere of fear among traders and buyers, leading to reduced market attendance and economic stagnation. Furthermore, the market's operation has been hampered by the inability of herders and farmers to safely transport cattle and other goods, resulting in decreased trade volumes.

How has the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) specifically impacted the economic activities of the Mayo-Lope Cattle Market and similar markets in Lau, Taraba State?

A resident recounts the villages that were affected as thus:

My family and I fled Bawagarki after bandits raided our village and other villages such as Todung, Kusamo, Kashedi, Sapkane, Abbare, kpantilate etc. They came with guns and destroyed lives and properties. They killed some of our neighbors and burnt down homes. Since then, we've been trying to bounce back from the destruction (personal Communication, November 2024).

Nte (2011, p.5) in Danwanzam, Saleh and Stephen (2019) explain that “there is a direct link between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and escalation of violent conflict” in North-East Nigeria. Nigeria severely experienced direct and indirect consequences and security challenges of proliferation and circulation of SALW, which have contributed to the slow pace of development in the North-East.

Research Question 2: How has the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) affected community resilience in post-lockdown Taraba State, Nigeria?

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has critically undermined community resilience in post-lockdown Taraba State. The availability of these weapons has eroded traditional conflict resolution systems, fragmented social cohesion, and fostered an environment of insecurity.

To what extent has the Karim-Wurkun conflict affected agricultural productivity and local livelihoods in the area? What are the community-led or government-led recovery efforts in place?

A resident of Karim posits thus:

The violence between Karimjo-speaking and Wurkun-speaking tribe members have recently occurred. The clashes are said to be linked to the recent crowning of a Wurkun

tribesman as chief over a Karimjo tribesman. Acts of arson, looting, civil unrest, and the destruction of crops which have been reported. To me this violence between the Karimjo-speaking and Wukun-speaking tribes in Karim has significantly eroded community resilience (Interview with a resident, December, 2024).

This illustrates the destabilizing effects of such conflicts. These events have disrupted agricultural activities, a cornerstone of local livelihoods, plunging many families into economic uncertainty and food insecurity. The reported use of explosive devices and the subsequent militarization of the conflict highlight the dangerous proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region, further exacerbating the violence. This environment of insecurity has forced many residents to flee their homes, fragmenting the social cohesion necessary for collective recovery. Similarly, Gimba (2021) explained how SALW availability has intensified inter-communal tensions, particularly between herders and farmers, eroding traditional systems of conflict resolution and undermining efforts to rebuild trust within communities.

Ibrahim (2023) posits that the failure of governance in curbing the influx of illegal arms is as a result of weak border control and enforcement mechanisms which are significant contributors to the problem. This governance deficit has allowed armed groups to proliferate, further destabilizing the state. Meanwhile, Yusuf (2022) advocates for a multi-pronged approach to addressing these challenges, emphasizing the importance of robust disarmament programs alongside poverty alleviation initiatives to address the root causes of SALW proliferation. Dodo (2022) adds that empowering local conflict resolution structures and promoting social cohesion are essential for fostering community resilience.

The rise of armed vigilantism is Across Taraba State, communities have formed self-defense groups, often armed with SALW, to protect themselves from external threats. While this provides a semblance of security, it also creates an environment where weapons are normalized, complicating disarmament efforts (Dodo, 2022). These perspectives collectively highlight that the socioeconomic recovery and community resilience of Taraba State remain contingent on addressing SALW proliferation through integrated and context-specific strategies.

On what specific measures has the government implemented to address the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Taraba State, particularly in the post-lockdown period? How have these measures contributed to socioeconomic recovery and community resilience? A government official posits thus:

The government has adopted a multi-pronged approach to address the proliferation of SALW in Taraba State. First, we strengthened security measures by setting up military outposts and deploying more personnel in conflict-prone areas like Takum, Wukari, and Donga. Operations such as Ayem Akpatuma (Cat Race) were launched in collaboration with the Nigerian Army to disarm individuals in possession of illegal arms. (Personal interview with government official in Jalingo, December 2024)

Whether or not the government has responded in area of socioeconomic aspect, a government official still posits thus:

On the socioeconomic front, government has initiated projects like the Taraba Greenhouse Project and youth empowerment programs to create employment and reduce the economic desperation that often fuels violence and arms trafficking. Additionally, government have collaborated with traditional rulers to mediate conflicts and promote communal harmony.

Displaced persons in areas like Gassol and Ussa have also received support for resettlement, including housing and vocational training. While these measures have had a positive impact, the widespread availability of SALW continues to challenge our efforts toward long-term stability (Personal communication, December 2024)

Similar efforts in fostering economic resilience and reducing the triggers of violence. According to Oruonye and Abbas (2020), the Taraba Greenhouse Project, aimed at boosting agricultural production and providing employment for youths, has significantly contributed to economic recovery in the state. Furthermore, youth-targeted programs, including skills acquisition and entrepreneurship training, align with findings by Adewale (2019), who asserts that vocational programs in northern Nigeria have reduced unemployment and economic desperation—a known driver of SALW proliferation.

Conclusion

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Taraba State, particularly during the post Covid-19 lockdown period, has significantly disrupted socioeconomic recovery and community resilience. Armed banditry in areas like Gassol, Bali, and Wukari LGAs has forced many farmers to abandon their fields, leading to reduced agricultural productivity, increased food insecurity, and economic instability. Ethnic and communal clashes fueled by SALW, such as those between herders and farmers or ethnic groups like the Tiv and Jukun, Karimjo and Wurkum have further eroded traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and social cohesion. These challenges are exacerbated by weak border controls, poor governance, and the normalization of armed vigilantism, which perpetuate a cycle of violence and insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Implement targeted disarmament programs and poverty alleviation initiatives to reduce the economic desperation fueling violence and arms trafficking.
- ii. Strengthen border control mechanisms and improve arms regulation to curb the inflow of illegal SALW into Taraba State.
- iii. Empower traditional conflict resolution structures and collaborate with local leaders to restore trust and social cohesion.
- iv. Promote community-driven peacebuilding programs to enhance resilience and support long-term stability in post-lockdown Taraba State.

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