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**YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS
PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE
STUDY OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI**

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Abstract:

Poverty and violence have eaten deep the polity of Nigeria. This is evident from the fact that economic situation of the country is faced with numerous challenges. The paper is an attempt to investigate whether small arms proliferations in northern Nigeria have economic and political causes. It becomes a fashion among politicians to mobilize unemployed youth for political and socio-religious disturbances in order to actualize their personal gains. Part of the outcomes of the problem is the spread of arms and ammunitions among political thugs which also left majority of the populace in a state of terror. The paper has explained the influence of poverty on youth restiveness in the Northern part of Nigeria, particularly its implications on proliferation of small arms. It is obvious that such phenomenon can be a threat to national security of the Nigerian state. The situation also is becoming worrisome to policy makers. As such, it has been argued by this paper that, systemic improvement in governance is necessary to strategize policy framework to address the menace and reduce possibility of complicating the situation. The essay concludes that Nigeria may have been tends to become more vulnerable to separatist violence and risks of instability like the one we are witnessing in the 21st century north eastern states.

Key words: Youth poverty, proliferation, small arms, thuggery, violence, unemployment, Boko Haram,

1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the oil producing countries in the world, endowed with both human and material resources for national development. The country like most developing nations of the world is faced with a myriad of developmental challenges, which include poverty, unemployment, conflict and disease. These situations pose great challenges to the very existence of individuals in most of the communities (Sanusi, 2012). Therefore, it is assumed that with democracy, people would be better off in terms of their well being. However, the reality on ground has demonstrated that majority of the people in Nigeria has suffered from abject poverty and severe hardship. In the northern region, the situation of youth poverty and unemployment has become a source of worry to policy makers and stakeholders. Hence, nothing concrete has been done to improve the economic hardship. Odey and Agba (2010), states that, the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria is now a decade, however, Nigerians still do not seem to be enjoying democratic peace as poverty and underdevelopment abound (pp. 147).

The increasing economic marginalization of youth and failure to fulfill the socio-economic needs of the people has led to frustration as well as increasing the high level of social insecurity among the inhabitants of the region, particularly the communities of Bauchi Metropolis. Shehu (2011), states that, the implications are that this army of unemployed could easily be lured into any negative tendencies and are in fact ready to be recruited for any social activity. This paper linked the problem of insecurity in Bauchi

YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI

State with increasing level of youth poverty which led to the formation of armed groups in the name of *Sara Suka* in order to actualize the interest of the ruling class. It is against this background that use of small arms proliferated in conflicts and violent acts perpetrated by the so called political thugs, which really undermine human peace and security in the country. The state of insecurity and lack of social justice had also become source of worry among the inhabitant of the state, considering the fact that government lack political will to bring those perpetrators to justice. Numerous human rights violation and killing of innocent people have been a daily routine in the state metropolis; this has led some groups to engage in and try to influence the political process themselves (Hazem and Horner 2007 pp. 3)

2. Poverty and Unemployment Situation in Northern Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, “with about 70% of its population lived on less than \$1 dollar per day” (Duggan, 2009 pp. 1). Moreover, it is an established fact that, the northern region is having the largest number of poor people. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) the Nigeria’s relative poverty has increased to 69% (or 112, 518,507 Nigerians). The North-West and North-East geo-political zones recorded the highest poverty rates in the country with 77.7% and 76.3% respectively in 2010.

Table1. Incidence of Poverty by Zones using different poverty measures (%)

Zone	Food Poor	Absolute Poor	Relative Poor	Dollar Per Day
North Central	38.6	59.5	67.5	59.7
North East	51.5	69.0	76.3	69.1
North West	51.8	70.0	77.7	70.4
South East	41.0	58.7	67.0	59.2
South-South	35.5	55.9	63.8	56.1
South west	25.4	49.8	59.1	50.1

(Sources National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Nigeria Poverty Report Profile 2010)

Based on these indicators, one can insinuated that the poverty level has increases and might have come out with possible repercussion. It is also fundamental to note that, youth poverty in the region is largely as result of high level of unemployment among the youth and lack of good governance. In most cases governments and public institutions operates without consideration to youth unemployment and the existing economic hardship. Economic decline and absence of employment opportunities, especially as inequality grows, likewise drives conflict. As elsewhere in Nigeria, the north suffers from a potent mix of economic malaise and contentious, community-based distribution of public

***YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS
PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF
POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI***

resources (International Crisis Group, 2010). But there is also a specifically northern element. Therefore, the situation of growing number of youth unemployment persists with disastrous effects on polity. According to the 2011 unemployment rates released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Zamfara, Bauchi and Niger states are worst hit by unemployment in the country. And the youth are the most affected considering the fact that about 80% of the active population are jobless, meaning that an estimated 32,504,000 active youths are totally unemployed (Leadership, 2012). This is not only a tragedy to the political system, but a violation of human right and human security. Garba (2010), states, youth unemployment, especially male youth unemployment, makes it profitable to recruit youth combatants and to initiate them into violence (pp, 40).

2.1 Economic Marginalization, Youth Poverty and Violence: A nexus

Studying gangs and violent acts against humanity can no longer be limited to local conditions but must also be related to economic relations internationally. The unprecedented neoliberal economic policies have put states under pressure of free market economy and monetarism. Thus, the process led to the marginalization of others mostly people of youthful ages. That is why disadvantaged groups within societies, and some societies as a whole, especially in developing countries, are excluded from the fruits of globalization (United Nations, 2000). There exists high level of international inequality in world trade and financial markets hereby diminishing potential benefits to the poor nations as well as limiting benefits to the poor.

According to APSA Task Force Report on Difference, Inequality, and Developing Societies international economic inequality enables powerful countries to shape the growth of global markets in ways that limit the benefits globalization might deliver to poor countries. However, hierarchies of status in the unequal globalised economy produce discrimination, marginalization, and outbreaks of violent conflict within developing nations (APSA, 2008).

Scholars argued that neoliberal economic policies and its attendant principles has affected greatly the weaker nation's economy which also resulted to massive socioeconomic upheavals and have created tremendous suffering for people of Africa and other third world countries (Jega 2007, Sanusi 2002, Kwanashie 2002). The Nigerian experiences have shown high level of interface between bad economy and human poverty. Part of the problem is lack of public investment and poor electricity supply, thereby leaving the work force out of jobs. Problems of governance also have contributed to raising poverty level among youth. Through in depth interview, I realized that marginalization of youth from economic activities, directly or indirectly has systematic association with prevalence of poverty among youth that I interviewed. As Garba (2008) show the willingness of young men to participate in crises or conflict situation in some contexts depends on their income earning opportunities. Where this become a mirage while wallowing in unemployment and poverty, they are likely to join rebellion as an alternative way of generating income. Evidence of ethno-religious conflicts, post election violence and Boko Haram insurgency in places like Jos, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Poteskum Damaturu and Mubi demonstrates the challenges youth poverty pose on human security in the northern part of Nigeria. Onuoha states that, the prevalence of poverty, unequal access to resources, large youth populations with limited access to education or jobs, and other socio-political

YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI

factors contribute to conflict and instability in the Niger Delta region, as well as other parts of Nigeria (pp, 113).

Since the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999, the political system became overheated with competitive partisan political activities through which groups are exploited against opponents. The most common practice is bringing together violent youth gangs and militias to form a group fully armed for violent act and conflict (Jega 2007). It is thus that, the ruling elites were blamed for the present condition the northern region is in, especially in the incremental lost of legitimacy with the ever-increasing hopeless population of youth. In explaining why northern leaders failed, late President of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yaradu'a attributed the backwardness of the north to the failure of its leaders to uphold the legacies and values of qualitative leaders like the first Premier of the then northern region (Shiklam, October 2008). Poor governance, economic inequality, entrenched poverty and social injustice were perceived by many scholars to be the major sources of social tension, violence and crises in northern Nigeria (Lewis 2011, Okafor 2011, Sanusi 2012, Odey and Agba, 2010)

Many anti-social activities such as political thuggery, militancy, restiveness and other social vices evident among the unemployed and joblessness youths are real dangers to the stability of democracy in Nigeria (Okafor 2011). Virtually every state of the federation are affected with this social vices, for instance this groups are identified as *Sara-Suka* in Bauchi, *Yan- Kalare* in Gombe, *Ecomog* in Borno and Yobe, *Banu-Isreil* in Taraba, and *Yan- Shinko* in Adamawa.

2.2 Use of Small Arms in Youth Restiveness, Violence and Crises

Small arms according to a UN panel of experts refer primarily to rifles, machine guns, hand grenades and other weapons used by an individual combatant. They are the instruments of modern violence, put to use by criminals and group gangs to maim and kill people in both armed conflicts and violent crimes. The prevalence use of small arms and machete in conflict situation and crises has become the source of social tension and instability in Nigeria. It is a well known fact that, political competition among politicians during election campaigns and reckless attitudes of ruling elites over wealth accumulation are the factors that trigger the employment of youth for social disturbances. Though the phenomenon is not only peculiar to one part of Nigeria, but is overwhelmingly concentrated and sustained in the northern part of the country. Krause (2011) illustrated that, trading in illegal arms is endemic all over Nigeria. But ethno-religious conflict in Jos has contributed severely to illegal weapons proliferation within the city of Jos and all over Plateau State as well as the manufacture of significant number of weapons locally. The author further lamented that, arms are not only financed and supplied by ethnic and religious militias, politicians, wealthy individuals, or traditional rulers, but also by local communities via religious groups or cultural and development organizations (pp, 2).

The use of small arms during elections in Nigeria has greater impetus on militaristic tendencies exhibited by the nature of politics in relation to prevalence of armed groups. It has become a fashion for politicians to sponsor these thugs financially and morally in order to achieve their personal political interest. Most a times they mobilize these thugs from beginning to the end of electioneering campaign/election period (Haruna and Jumba, 2011, pp, 111). Once the electioneering process is over, the armed groups popularly known as political thugs will be left with small arms in circulation thereby promoting arms

***YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS
PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF
POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI***

proliferation and chances of committing crimes against humanity. It is against this background that former president of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo reported to have said that, the availability and wide circulation of small arms and light weapons pose the greatest danger to peace and security, especially in our West African region (Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) 2006, pp 18.). The figure of casualties resulting from the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in most of the northern states and the age- long ethno religious crises remains evidence for the proliferation of arms and ammunitions in the country.

**3. Political Thuggery, Violence and Small Arms Proliferations in
Bauchi**

Politics in Nigeria could be called the ‘politics of allocation’, through which electoral victory is intimately tied to access to the state as an avenue for wealth accumulation and conferment of status (Hazem and Horner 2007, pp 7). To assume political leadership and control over resources, politicians in the country perceived winning election a do or die affair. In their quest to control public office by all means politicians from different parties uses the disadvantaged groups mostly people of youthful age for political victory. In an interview with Sunday Trust newspaper, the Governor of Bauchi State Mallam Isa Yuguda lamented on the attitudes of politicians by saying that ‘some politicians believe the only way to manage people is to impoverished them (Sunday Trust, 2012 pp 4-5). Perhaps this may be the reason why tackling poverty and unemployment lacks stakeholder’s attention or rather political will in the state. Today as the state reels in social tension and insecurity, the general feeling is that political thuggery and armed groups violence perpetrated by youth have resulted in use of small arms and its proliferation, thereby leading to increase in the rate of crimes against humanity. Sara-Suka syndrome is fundamentally one of the challenges posing security threat both to the government and the governed, ‘losing billions of naira and thousands of personal properties’ (Kukah 2011, pp 16). Part of the criminal act of these thugs is the killing of police men, kidnapping, car snatching, theft and human right violation. Recently, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs expressed his fear over the growing access to light arms, saying that the country is suffering from the negative impact of proliferation of small arms. Pointing out that easy access to small arms and light weapons was the cause of militant activities in the country (Daily Trust September 26, 2012 pp 12).

According to Bauchi State Police Commissioner; the police command arrested over 100 ‘sara suka’ in the state with dangerous weapons (Daily Trust, August 30, 2012). These armed groups were accused of kidnapping top politicians in the state as well as killing innocence people working with them. In the month of September 2012 one former Comptroller General of Prison of was announced death in violent gun shots by unknown gunmen, also killing one of his security men and injuring others (Weekly Trust, September 22, 2012). Another violent act where same group where suspected to have kidnapped Muhammadu Usama a top politician in the state, demanding ransom. The gunmen were reported to kill his security guard and ran away with him.

Another problem that created tension in the national politics was the post election violence in the state where thugs launched attack on the Youth Corps members in some local government areas of which ten Youth Corpsers’ were killed (Shehu 2011 pp 10). Although

YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI

violence and political crises is not new to the north, the killing of these 10 National Youth Corps Members has led to rejection of some states from the North. For fear of insecurity, about 6696 NYSC members reject the North (Daily Trust, October 2, 2012).

4. The Implications of Small Arms Proliferations on Human Security and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

The desire to have good government, peace and stability has been the major motivating factors people in the developing countries strived to have democracy as a system of governance. But, the Nigerian experience since 1999 when the country returned to democracy, have demonstrated a different political climate hostile to the environment and the populace. Wide spread of conflicts, politically motivated ethno-religious crises and social insecurity remains the main feature of the Nigerian political landscape. These are clear manifestations of instability and social tension that might have affects sustainable development and democratic peace. Iduh (2011) states, democracy that seems to be a dream come true in Nigeria is fast turning to a nightmare (pp. 121). The security of life and property of people in the country is at stake, going by the security threat bedeviling the survival of Nigeria as a country. Parts of the challenges are the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the Northern region of Nigeria, the ethno-religious crisis and the growing number of armed groups using arms and ammunitions to perpetrate crimes and terror against human security. Hazem and Horner (2007) states that:

Armed violence is not a random event. Acts of armed violence in Nigeria are purposeful in intent and directed at key targets, whether economic or political. Armed violence is about more than oil, religion, ethnicity, or politics. In essence, such violence is about access to resources, whether through committing crimes, playing on communal tensions, stealing oil, or winning elections

Since 1999 to date, Nigeria is facing challenges of increasing use of small arms and its proliferation all over the country, violence emanated from a breakdown in governance and was instrumentalized by the diffusion of small arms into the society since the return to constitutional rule three years ago (Musah 2002, 239). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is an immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states around the world and an enormous hurdle to sustainable security and development. Small arms fuel civil wars, organized criminal violence, and terrorist activities (Hogendoorn and Stohl 2010). It is thus that different regions in the country agitated for secession, while in other ends disrupting the socioeconomic life of the society and keeping them out of their productive ventures. With the growing number of violent crises and insecurity, democratic government in Nigeria has shown gross insensitivity in managing this negative development of arms proliferation. While in reality democracy cannot thrive in the atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty (Gusau 2007 pp).

5. Conclusion

Nigeria in the 21st century have bedeviled with numerous challenges which is largely the result of poor leadership quality and social injustice. To effectively deal with the menace our leaders have to go beyond rhetoric and establishment of committees, but ensure rapid improvement of social infrastructure for job creation. Simply because,

***YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS
PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF
POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI***

societies that emphasize meeting the yearning and aspiration of its teeming youth, especially in productive sector of the economy are likely to live in peace and harmony. The proliferation of small arms has triggered the escalation of violent conflicts and spread of armed groups throughout the country. Conflict over resources also brought in bad governance that adversely affects youth and put them out of jobs. Human security is deeply related to income generation, therefore youth issues pertaining to poverty and unemployment is calling for political attention globally in order to reduce global insecurity and terrorism.

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**YOUTH POVERTY, VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS
PROLIFERATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF
POLITICAL THUGGERY IN BAUCHI**

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