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THE INFLUENCE OF SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVITIES IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines how the proliferation of small arms and light weapons shapes the operational realities of international organizations working in Northwestern Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through key informant interviews across five states, complemented by field observations and review of official documents and scholarly sources. Structural realism provides the analytical lens, explaining why external actors such as the United Nations, ECOWAS, and donor agencies struggle to influence security outcomes in an environment marked by weak governance, porous borders, corruption, and the growing strength of non-state armed groups. Findings reveal that, although regional treaties, donor funding, and technical assistance offer valuable support, their impact is often limited by implementation gaps, fluctuating political will, and local mistrust of external motives. The article proposes short-term measures emphasizing financial transparency, medium-term reforms to strengthen local capacities, and long-term strategies promoting updated regional agreements and cross-border cooperation. The article concludes, it highlights structural constraints that restrict international engagement in conflict zones and underscores the need for robust local-global partnerships.

Keywords: Insecurity; International Organization; ECOWAS; Northwestern Nigeria; Small Arms and Light Weapons

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Introduction

The international bodies tend to be the first to react whenever conflicts strike or when social order goes haywire. Their efforts usually involve feeding aid, peace keeping, training the local police to keep the state of affairs in the affected regions. However, when violence perpetrated day in, day out is being fed by an invisible deluge of small arms and light weapons (SALW), these missions are likely to hit extreme hurdles. Lightweight weapons such as pistol, AK-47, which are easy to carry, keep them in perpetual state of crisis as they keep the areas run by community militias, insurgents and criminal networks. The continued violence or failure to administer the situation internationally may turn neighbourhoods into no-go areas where humanitarian aid workers, election observers, or civil-service workers to start schools or recover socio-economic life will find them uninhabitable.

International organizations often take the lead when crises erupt, yet the intensifying insecurity in countries like Nigeria severely tests their operational capacity. Small arms and light weapons circulate freely, turning convoys that once represented mobility into vulnerable targets. While the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and various national governments maintain treaties and policy frameworks, weapons continue to slip through gaps in the system. Insurgents, highway bandits, and organized criminal networks amplify these effects, rendering entire communities no-go zones (Amali & Buthelezi, 2025).

Critics have also accused international organizations of being complicit, intentionally or otherwise, in perpetuating insecurity, leaving affected populations in fear. During acute crises, aid agencies often focus security resources on major urban centers, while relying on satellite links to coordinate operations. Rural communities, however, are frequently neglected, fostering mistrust and skepticism about promises of support and elections. This sense of abandonment undermines the very peace and development these organizations are meant to promote. Even after crises fade from headlines, the effects persist schools remain closed, health clinics unused, and trust deficits endure (Abiodun, Ayanlowo & Davis, 2024).

Nigeria is one of the leaders of beneficiaries of international aid since it struggles with high rates of insecurity. Analysts reckon that about 10 million SALW are in circulation in the country which provides the country with a dark title of being the most severely impacted state in sub-Saharan Africa. Crime is not the only thing that these arms perpetrate; they redefine the security environment, complicating humanitarian access, straining field offices, and subjecting supply chains to constant danger (Small Arms Survey, 2022; Adebayo and Okonkwo, 2023).

There are guidelines that have been issued by regional organizations like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations (UN) to reduce the transfer of deadly weapons. The enforcement is carried out by the National Centre of the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in Nigeria, although it is usually just done as a symbolic act. These measures are compromised by weak border control, inconsistent enforcement, and local demand (Ogunde, 2023; Sule & Deribe, 2020). The operational problem that is being experienced by the international organizations is something that they had seldom expected. However, initiatives such as the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs have a goal of restoring peace and liveability in those regions that are at risk, but collaboration with local NGOs fails because staffs are not able to work in such volatile societies

safely. Even the expatriates with experience are often locked up in the hotels rather than working in the field.

The structural realism theory, as discussed by Kenneth Waltz (1979), provides an effective prism through which it becomes possible to understand why international organizations have continually been constrained when operating in the conflict zones. The theory starts with the fact that the international system is anarchic i.e. there is no authority above sovereign states. States are hence the key actors and their actions are influenced by the survival in a world that has uneven power distribution. Waltz asserts that the balance of power alone is the only way to achieve stability and he asserts that the order is not created by institutions but through the calculated behaviours of the powerful states that are grounded on self help and strategic alliances. Mingst (2004) builds on this argument by demonstrating that there are two strands of realist thinking. Offensive realism urges states to reach the maximum power and be assertive whereas defensive realism emphasises on the protection of sovereignty and the deterrent of aggression. The two methods also focus on deterrence, as the risk of any plausible punishment would be sufficient to stop attacks and maintain stability. In this sense, peace is maintained by the use of force or the probable use of force.

This reasoning can be used to understand why international organizations, which do not have sovereign powers and coercive instruments, are constrained. According to Ahmad T. M. (2021), the global system is state centred, which means that the organization like the United Nations, ECOWAS or the African Union faces structural barriers before it is allowed access. Their labour is based on the host state concurrence, bargaining and collaboration. Such tools prove ineffective in such settings such as the northwestern part of Nigeria where the powers of the state are challenged by non state organizations with a large number of armed forces. Structural realism thus explains the reason why these types of organizations find it difficult to operate effectively in war ravaged regions. They are still reliant on the member states in terms of funding, logistics and political support and their influence is diminished when the member states are apathetic or divided on their interests. Diffusion of armed forces, the subversion of state power and the confounding of local with transnational interests peep the boundaries of global intervention policies founded on normative principles and not on hard power. The international organizations live in environments where they are unable to implement contracts or prevent violence and structural realism predicts this and is unable to fix it. This theory is applied in this research not to support its normative assertions but rather to understand the structural limitations that surround international organization and undermine the capacity to act in conflict-stricken societies. It gives a reason why international interaction, however its intentions, can tend to fail when faced with the deep-rooted problems of power, sovereignty and aggression. Nonetheless, structural realism does not lack limitations.

Similar to the argument presented by Orogbemi E. O. (2021), its emphasis on states might obscure the power of non state actors, such as insurgents, militias and local civil society organizations. These actors are determinants of arms proliferation and humanitarian activities in a manner that is not well captured by the theory. The focus on power equilibrium does not take into consideration the influence of local government, culture, and history on the situation involving security and assistance provision. Appreciating these limitations implies the usefulness of supplementing structural realism with views that pre-empt the local agency, humanitarian ideals or larger conflict action. Although structural realism provides a powerful analytical basis to explaining structural constraints, more holistic framework might be required in the future studies

that seek to express the complexity of insecurity and international interaction in areas like the northwest of Nigeria.

This paper will discuss armed violence in fragile settings relating to SALW, and Nigeria will be the main example. The one-off coordination in collaboration with the UN agencies in other areas has failed as militants continue to attack convoys. It is necessary to understand, reduce, and sometimes invert these shocks to security to make sure that the global support efforts do not contribute to the instability. It also examines how ongoing arms proliferation and daily insecurity shape the capacity of donor agencies and multinational organizations to deliver meaningful support. Challenges range from inadequate armoured transport to poorly executed security plans, reflecting deeper structural issues in the classification, support, and funding of fragile states. When discourse focuses solely on casualty counts or security updates, external interventions risk appearing performative rather than substantive, leaving communities further disconnected from international assistance. This paper fills this literature gap by discussing operational issues. Although the current literature has looked at international aid and SALW management independently, there are limited studies that look at the two together in high-risk regions such as Northwestern Nigeria. Recording field-level perceptions and experiences gives context-sensitive information on the disconnect between global strategies and local realities on the application of security and assistance interventions.

Methodology

The study utilised qualitative research design due to its ability to be open, eliminates premature assumptions, and enables the researcher to engage the topic further. The sample was chosen through purposive sampling, which is recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967) precise number of individuals recruited would be depending on the point at which saturation is attained in a meaningful qualitative study.

The key informants selected for the who were selected for the interview were 20 and across five states within the Northwestern Nigeria. The states are Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina and Jigawa. Each of the chosen locations had four interviewees each. The choice of these states was premeditated since they are the key regions where SALW spread, permeable boundaries in the Northwestern region. They are equally strategic in exploring the challenges that international organizations encounter in their operations since they are close to transnational smuggling routes, the state is weak, and some local violence is high.

The thematic areas used in the interview questions include the operational effects of the SALW proliferation on the international bodies, local security relationship, success of the regional and international interventions. The balanced spread of interviews among states allowed the researcher to compare and draw the patterns that cut across the region. This study used the field observation, key informant interviews as well as government documents as sources of data. Secondary data was elicited through academic publications, text books, newspapers, and so on. A thematic analysis was done after the data collection, to discover, systematize, and define common patterns within the data.

Combating Terrorism and Arm Proliferation

The sub-Saharan Africa is still facing instability due to the acts of terrorism and arms trafficking, which have left the international community in reaction. To curb supply of weapons, the UN Security Council has prohibited arms embargo in conflict-stricken nations. Together with these policies, the training of police and border officials through the UN and African Union aim at training on cargo checks, border control, and confiscated arms. Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives also provide cash incentive, counselling and skills training as exits out of armed groups (Varisco and Wezeman, 2022). The African regional organizations have increased their endeavours as well. ECOWAS and IGAD have formed firearms intelligence centres and advocated harmonisation of national arms legislation. They are involved in storage audits, campaigns to sensitize the public and weapon-marking programs to enhance accountability. Terrorist networks tend to use the same black markets as arms dealers and thus such interventions would require a multi-layered and coordinated method. The African Union helps in this way with its Peace and Security Architecture and the African Standby Force, and the European Union helps in a range of security training missions throughout the continent (Balogun, 2024).

The United Nations is still a centre of the world arena. The resolutions by the Security Council associate counterterrorism with sanctions imposed on weapons traffickers. The CTC and UNODC agencies are offering legal templates, training sessions and forensic assistance to member states. It is certain that bureaucracy may be criticized because of the time-loss, but there must be follow-through to any successful effect. The arms race should not be an isolated endeavour. They have to take place at the national, regional, and international levels (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, 2020). It requires strong police forces, customs agencies and border patrols; however, lasting peace also relies on the reforms in the governance and on the inclusive economic policy. Weak institutions are another warning that UNODC (2019) provides as it allows arms trafficking and terrorism. Resilience is reinforced with the help of transparency, involvement, and trust in the institutions of the state (Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2020). According to Ojewale (2024), the existence of poverty, inequality, and a sense of injustice still poses recruitment pools in armed groups and according to the author, the security gains would be temporary unless the factors are managed. The international assistance is critical towards stabilizing the high-risk states.

The technical support, funding, and coordination are offered by agencies, such as the UN, as well as regional clusters (UNODC, 2019). Bilateral cooperations are also providing real-time intelligence exchange and operational know-how (Obi, 2017). Such concerted efforts alone can initiate a process of dealing with the two compounded problems of terrorism and illegal shipments of weapons. Despite increased investigation on the issue of arms proliferation, international intervention, there is a scarcity of studies which explore the interaction between the two in extremely volatile situations like Northwestern Nigeria. The majority of the research separates the arms control and the issues of international operations. The gap identified in this paper is tackled by discussing the role played by arms proliferation on aid operations in one of the conflict-ridden regions. It puts emphasis on the local level experiences and the dissonance between the international policy structures and the reality on the ground and provides insights into the limitations and the potential opportunities that can be used to enhance the international activity in troubled areas.

International Organization Support

The international bodies remain at the forefront to deal with SALW proliferation in Northwestern Nigeria. In interviews, it was found that international partners tend to operate through the existing regional and national initiatives. Indicatively, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1467 (2003) shows that it is concerned with the spread of SALW in West Africa and mercenary operations and offers a normative basis on the continuation of these interventions (Inf1).



Source: Researchers Compilation, 2025

The respondents further added that ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP) has helped Nigeria by enhancing armoury control, border security and disarmament (Inf8). Peacekeeping missions and missions associated with the ECOMOG structure and the UN involve sensitisation campaigns, though the respondents emphasized that peacekeeping missions should be more committed and more operation-intensive (Inf13, Inf20).

The additional information revealed that the Nigerian government partners with UNODA to enforce disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration operations with EU and UNDP support especially in the North Western part (Inf11). The financial and manpower assistance of international partners also supplements the national security plans (Inf19).

But one thing informants emphasized was that these interventions are usually sabotaged, hapless in enforcement and even politically interfered with (Inf9). Others mentioned that the international institutions have pressured the Nigerian government to come up with measures of increased control of arms (Inf6), whereas others have pointed to the joint patrol between Nigeria and the neighbouring states to ensure cross border banditry is contained (Inf22).

Quite a number of the respondents felt that the international organizations are assisting in absorbing the impacts of insecurity however the aid is yet to be adequate (Inf13). The humanitarian aid to displaced populations is delivered through NGOs including NSAID, and they work together with security agencies (Inf9). International controls, such as the UN Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, are still fortifying the arms tracking and control systems (Inf7). Regardless of these efforts, a number of informants said that the international entities have not

been responsive to the magnitude of SALW spread and that more provision of assistance to the Nigerian security agencies is yet to be done (Inf14).

The spread of small arms and light weapons has played a major role in influencing the performance of international organizations in Northwestern Nigeria. According to interviews, such external forces as the United Nations and ECOWAS have assisted Nigeria with the help of arms control systems, security financing and capacity building programs, but insufficient enforcement, corruption, and weak borders still do not allow these measures to be performed properly (Inf20). Another respondent elaborated by saying that funding and direct technological assistance has enhanced national capability especially with the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms. Other humanitarian groups such as Amnesty International and the ICRC also play their part in creating awareness about the humanitarian implications of proliferation of arms (Inf16).

Regional Arms Control Mechanisms

According to the respondents, West African SALW control systems continue to rely on regional arms control measures. ECOWAS Small Arms Convention offers an operational system of regional controls, and UNODC assists Nigeria in the tracking of arms through the efforts of the program. SALW Control Project is also funded by the EU but it continues to aid in disarmament programming, but there are still difficulties in enforcing it in Nigeria (Inf15).

According to a number of respondents, even with these efforts, the level of insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria has only been increasing over the years, accompanied by the increased incidences of banditry, kidnappings and communal violence (Inf4). This has promoted political violence, smuggling of illegal arms, and an increasing culture of self defence by the community because of a decaying faith in state security (Inf8).

The proposed actions were more sanctions on smugglers, better security provisions to border officers, reliance on digitalization of border controls to minimize corruption, and proactive surveillance that will see the perpetrators noticed and charged (Inf17). Partnership with the neighbouring nations and other international partners were also highlighted as a requirement towards the reduction of the cross-border aspects of arms trafficking (Inf2). Other informants also mentioned that the border controls such as limiting some imports have been a way of mitigation. One of the most evident forms of international organization contribution is technical assistance. The respondents reported that UNODA offers direct assistance to the government of Nigeria in preparing and enforcing SALW control mechanisms (Inf14). The UNDP contributes the national programmes which combat the problem of arms proliferation engaging the community-based programmes and providing the support of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (Inf19). Nigeria also has treaty-based support to SALW control architecture. According to informants, the aid of the European Union to the Arms Trade Treaty has reinforced the capacity of the nations to fulfill the promise of the treaty provisions and curbed the circulation of illegal weapons (Inf1). Nonetheless, some of the respondents raised the issue of international dynamics which can contribute to insecurity indirectly. Other informants claimed that the runaway states can be the source of international weapons trafficking, such as purported supply of non state actors. One of the respondents cited a quote by an American congressman claiming that his government helped Boko Haram (Inf17), and another one mentioned that high income nations are the ones who ship weapons that find their way to black markets (Inf12). Another respondent asserted that some

foreign players provide weaponry to militants protecting mining fields in Zamfara further spreading SALW in the area (Inf18). Such perceptions bring out the fact that there is a feeling by local stakeholders that external political and economic interests can occasionally go against proclaimed international agendas.

The results demonstrate that the Small Arms Convention of ECOWAS is one of the core tools of arm control within the region whereas the UNODC assists Nigeria with the help of arms tracing programmes. Another project that is funded by the EU that helps in disarmament work and community resiliency is the SALW Control Project, but there is still an issue with enforcement across the country. According to Bankole et al. (2021), ECOWAS is deemed to be among the most powerful Regional Economic Communities in Africa, and the member states are linked by common borders and frequent internal wars. These conflicts have been aggravated by illegal trafficking of small arms and light weapons, use of weak borders, corruption, domestic production of weapons, as well as poor management of the stockpiles, which has continued to compromise the stability of the region.

The United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs has provided technical support to the government of Nigeria to develop and establish SALW control measures. As Bassey et al. (2025) put it, the loose governance, open borders, and ongoing conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa provide the favourable environment where the illicit weapons are spread. Adebowale et al. (2024) further note that international tools like the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the UNODC, UNODA, the ECOWAS Convention on SALW and the IAEA still offer technical assistance that enhances the capacity of the nations to respond to transnational crime and proliferation of arms in Africa.

International Actor perceptions

The international organizations continue to play the central role in the proliferation of SALW in the Northwestern Nigeria. In response, the respondents observed that these organizations strategize with regional and national actors in order to alleviate the effects of the arms circulation. One of the major points of reference is United Nations Security Council Resolution 1467, passed on 18 March 2003 and expressed worries about the spread of SALWs and mercenary operations in West Africa.

Another finding is views of some of the respondents on what they referred to as international conspiracy in arms control. One such source was the allegation by a congressman of the United States that his country was involved in an indirect sponsorship of Boko Haram. On 25 January 2025, the Chief of Defence Staff of Nigeria, General Christopher Musa, said on the Al Jazeera that there were possible foreign interests attempting to destabilise Nigeria. Congressman Scott Perry proposed in a House committee hearing a few weeks later on 18 February 2025 that USAID aid to Africa goes through insurgent groups indirectly. These views are an indication of more generalized issues that foreign politics are at times making local security efforts complicated. The UNDP has also introduced a number of programmes that curtail the proliferation of SALW such as community-based programmes as well as the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes. As described by Olagoke et al. (2023), UN Security Council arms embargoes are sanctions aimed at ensuring the unauthorised groups do not obtain weapons. These have enhanced the national security machineries and the border services and have been assisted by

the UN and the African Union. Programmes have also been financed by international partners to persuade former combatants to lay down their arms and to take part in their community once again.

Governance Gaps

Despite the fact that the international bodies like the United Nations and ECOWAS remain to assist Nigeria by way of treaties, funding and capacity building programmes, poor implementation, corruption and porous borders still exist. According to Akinyemi and Adeoye (2022), there is a tendency to have political reluctance, lack of budgets, and cooperation between the regions to find ways of funding. They further provide that prevalent SALW distribution impairs governance, and interferes in economic operations, like farming and commerce, and deters foreign and domestic investment.

The lack of resources and an insufficient level of technical capacity in the law enforcement agencies also limits the enforcement of the existing frameworks, such as the ECOWAS Convention and the obligations of Nigeria under the Arms Trade Treaty (Aluko and Ajala, 2021). These loopholes contribute to the fact that SALW proliferation is still hard to contain in Northwestern Nigeria where finance and corruption as well as little technical expertise still undermine response efforts.

The Arms Trade Treaty Implementation Support programme by the European Union has empowered African, Asian and Latin American countries to ensure that they have the capacity to fulfill the treaty requirements and minimize chances of illegal transmission of weapons. According to Bassey et al. (2025), the ATT, which was implemented in 2014, has provided the obligatory international norms of the transfer of conventional weapons, including SALWs. The treaty also provides that states should ensure that transfer of weapons will not fuel war or exploitation of human rights before they are approved.

The results support and expand the applicability of the structural realism in defining the constraints of international organizations in conflict zones, i.e. Northwestern Nigeria, in this case. As Kenneth Waltz explains, structural realism attracts attention to the limitations that an anarchic international system imposes upon states whereby state sovereignty is supreme and there is no superior authority to compel adherence. This logic is congruent with the evidence collected in this study, as such organizations as the UN and ECOWAS have to deal with harsh barriers in environments, influenced by low governance, lack of enforcement, and absence of central authority.

The structural constraints that are expected by realist scholars are reflected in the operational barriers that were identified in the study porous borders, corruption and poor law enforcement. Such circumstances make it difficult to impact the arms flows even by the international organizations with the help of regional structures such as the ECOWAS Small Arms Convention. The views of international actors also demonstrate the concerns regarding the non state groups, elite corruption, and the so-called international interference. These factors make the assumption of realists that states will be the dominant agents of results a complicated one because local rebels and weakened institutions will influence the success of foreign intervention.

The governance loopholes that are presented in the research are an extension of the theoretical discourse, since the loopholes demonstrate that the weak state structures compromise

the arms control efforts. Structural realism assumes that states play a key role in the cooperation relationships at the international level, but the results reveal that inadequate political commitment, insufficient funds, and disjointed security organs undermine international programs and regional treaties. In reality, the constraints are generated by not only the international system but also local and transnational processes that are beyond the direct influence of states.

The greater evidence provided in Northwestern Nigeria shows how the distribution of small arms intersects with the daily dilemmas of the international bodies. The high-profile external interventions such as UN grants, ECOWAS funding programs, EU technical assistance, and UNDP reintegration projects may appear good on paper but fail miserably in practice due to local administrative deficiencies, porous borders, bribery and poor coordination. Treaties such as the ECOWAS Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty will find themselves useless in the event of a weak implementation and the armed groups reveal insignificant resistance to accessing weapons. UNODA and UNDP programs also do not work every time when it cannot find capable local partners. Belief in the motives of foreign powers decreases in the community level due to the constant suspicions of foreign intentions. Whether these issues are justified or not, they define local sentiments and restrict the validity of international affairs.

Consequently, the international bodies still generate policy documents and technical guidelines but their effectiveness is limited when the domestic institutions do not have the funds, personnel and leaders to carry out these models. The paper thus shows that although structural realism offers a valuable perspective, a complete view of the problem of arms control in Northwestern Nigeria needs to be considered on the local governance failures, non state actors and the transnational networks that are embedded in supporting the proliferation of small arms.

Conclusion

The fast proliferation of small arms and light weapons in north-western Nigeria demonstrates how minuscule the influence of external actors is when weapons, customers and mediators gain control of the network. The international missions have invested their skills, logistics, and much funds in the region but the difference has not been equal. These external efforts will only continue to dissipate unless Abuja provides stronger political leadership, improved funding practices and policing systems that are able to bridge the gap between the written and actual application of the law. It is not merely that the attention of the outside world has not been drawn, but making half a job at the domestic level is an old story. International agreements, treaties and the routine of international meetings are valuable, and would not yield any meaningful outcome unless followed through. The way forward will be realistic based on the minimization of petty corruption, the ability of the institution, and the promotion of responsibility in the daily enforcement practices (Hoffman et. al. 2022).

Further studies may help compare the experience of Nigeria with other poor locations that address the issue of arms proliferation and poor governance. The case studies in the Sahel or Central America, e.g., would facilitate a clearer understanding of how the international organizations, local institutions, and national governments engage in the arms control work. The use of the comparison methods both prior to and after certain interventions can assist in understanding why similar problems appeal to different outcomes in different regions and indicate the variables that enable international efforts to be effective in one place and falter in another.

The study of the role of local political will and institutional strength in determining the success of treaties and disarmament programs is also a good prospect. Knowledge of the ways of external intervention adaptation to local circumstances and conditions without harming sovereignty can inform more successful international relations between international actors and vulnerable states. Lastly, more attention should be given to non state actors and informal networks in the future work. They are central to conflict dynamics because they determine the supply and the demand of weapons. These groups are influential on escalation or restraint in most instances than formal institutions, and as such, are vital in any realistic analysis of arms control in conflict situations.

Transparency in the release and use of grants on arms control and disarmament should be fully ensured by the international organizations and donor agencies. One of the problems that have been identified in the course of this study is the poor governance environment that usually results in ineffective allocation and misappropriation of funds. To make the budgeting processes more transparent, publicly disclose line-by-line, have them audited by local watchdog groups or academic institutions on a quarterly basis would assist in better tracking of the flows of finances. Such transparency will curb embezzlement and make sure that the funds are delivered to the communities that are the most affected by the proliferation of SALW. The increased openness will also help to overcome political inertia and support the credibility of foreign interventions.

The medium-term activities are required to be aimed at enhancing the capacity of the local institutions particularly the border and customs agencies. Arms smuggling is hard to contain due to weak law enforcement, porous borders and lack of technical skills. There is a need to have a long-term training program providing both classroom and field exercise trainings. These activities should be backed by advanced machinery, computerized systems of tracing of confiscated weapons and frequent review performance. Measurable indicators, e.g., higher interception rates, will be used in progress reports to make local practice compatible with the rest of the region and the international standards.

Regional systems like ECOWAS Convention should be revised in the long-run to incorporate existing trends on the trafficking of arms as well as the illicit trade. The implementation has been spotty and co-operation between member states is low. The treaties need to be updated to take into consideration domestic challenges like the smuggling networks and transnational markets facilitating the illegal transfer of arms. The fear of foreign conspiracy and suspicion between local government and foreign forces also undermine the collective action. To mitigate this, regional organizations need to embrace real-time intelligence exchange, joint border patrols as well as imposing penalties on noncompliant states. Enhanced cooperation will assist in assuring that regional accords transcend rhetoric and start interfering with networks that support illegal arms trafficking.

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