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The Impact of Arms Proliferation on Social Development in Anambra State Nigeria (2017–2022)

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, arms proliferation has become a serious threat to peace and development in Nigeria, particularly in areas affected by farmer-herder conflicts. Anambra State, known for its agrarian communities, has experienced growing insecurity that erodes social cohesion and undermines communal welfare. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design using structured questionnaires to collect data from selected local government areas with a high incidence of conflict. Respondents were purposively sampled from zones identified as high-risk, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test to examine the impact of herdsmen activities on social relationships. Findings revealed widespread disruption of community life due to ongoing clashes, including a decline in hospitality, reduced attendance at cultural festivals, and heightened fear of violence and abductions. The statistical analysis indicated that herders' activities do not contribute positively to social relationships, as the hypothesis suggesting a positive impact was rejected. The study concludes that arms proliferation has intensified the negative effects of the farmer-herder crisis, threatening sustainable social development across affected communities in Anambra State. In response to these challenges, the research recommends the adoption of community-driven peacebuilding initiatives and the implementation of more rigorous arms control policies. Strengthening local security mechanisms and fostering dialogue between conflicting groups are seen as critical steps toward restoring trust, rebuilding social bonds, and ensuring long-term stability in the region.

Keywords: Arms proliferation, social development, communal disintegration, grassroots peacebuilding, Anambra State

INTRODUCTION

The uncontrolled spread of arms across Nigeria has become a critical threat to peace, stability, and development particularly in regions like Anambra State. Social development, which is fundamentally about improving the quality of life, promoting human welfare, and strengthening community structures, cannot take place in an environment plagued by violence and insecurity. Unfortunately, the growing proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) has directly undermined social relationships, disrupted livelihoods, and weakened the very institutions designed to foster development in Anambra State (Okechukwu, T. (2024).

The problem has become increasingly alarming in agrarian communities across the state, where the activities of armed herders and non-state actors have intensified. These groups often operate in farmlands, along major roads, and near settlements, leaving trails of destruction and fear in their wake. Farmers, business owners, and ordinary citizens live in constant anxiety, fearing attacks, kidnappings, or property destruction. Over time, this sense of insecurity has forced many to abandon their farmlands and relocate, leaving behind a disjointed social structure

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and a collapsing local economy. As Nyiayaana (2024) noted, the consequences of these armed activities go far beyond immediate violence—they fundamentally alter how communities function.

One of the clearest impacts of arms proliferation is on communal life. Traditionally, Anambra communities are known for their strong social ties, active town unions, vibrant festivals, and religious activities that bring people together. But today, many of these social events are either abandoned or poorly attended (Zhang et al, 2015). People now avoid weddings, funerals, and even church services for fear of being caught in violent outbreaks. This disconnection from communal activities weakens social trust and erodes the culture of mutual support that is essential for social development. The agricultural sector has also taken a heavy blow. Anambra is largely agrarian, and many families depend on farming as their primary source of income. With farmlands under constant threat from armed herders, productivity has declined significantly. Muoemenam and Okafor (2022) observed that food scarcity and inflation are direct consequences of farmers fleeing their land. This not only affects the farmers themselves but also deepens poverty and hunger in communities that rely on local produce. Reduced agricultural activity means fewer jobs, lower incomes, and limited resources for education, healthcare, and infrastructure—core elements of social development.

Beyond the physical and economic effects, the emotional and psychological toll of armed violence cannot be ignored. Many victims of these attacks suffer from trauma, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, often without access to mental health support. Merkey (2015) highlighted that prolonged exposure to violence breaks down trust within communities and isolates individuals, making it harder to rebuild relationships and work collaboratively for the common good. In a society where unity and cooperation are critical for progress, such psychological scars hinder any meaningful developmental effort. Furthermore, arms proliferation undermines governance. The inability of the state to effectively control the spread of weapons or prosecute offenders erodes public confidence in government institutions. In some cases, communities turn to self-help or vigilante groups, which can either help or worsen the situation. Welch and Kim (2022) argue that this power vacuum often creates room for non-state actors to impose control through force and intimidation. As a result, participation in governance declines, public services are disrupted, and community projects are either stalled or abandoned entirely.

The financial implications of arms proliferation are also significant. Resources that should be channeled toward education, healthcare, and social welfare are instead diverted to emergency response, security operations, and compensation for victims. According to Neher et al, (2025), this redirection of funds slows down development and deepens inequality. When insecurity drives away investors, reduces business activities, and halts tourism, the overall economy suffers—along with the people who depend on it. The motivation for this study stems from the alarming rise in insecurity and social disintegration in Anambra State, largely attributed to arms proliferation. Despite increasing reports of violent herder-farmer clashes, kidnappings, and community unrest, there is limited empirical evidence directly linking arms proliferation to social development in the region.

Existing studies often focus on national security or political instability (Ukaeje, O. (2022), while neglecting the specific socio-economic and cultural disruptions experienced at the local level. For instance, Oranekwu and Eze (2023) examined the impact of insecurity on Nigerian change initiative but did not address how arms proliferation affects social trust, communal relationships, or access to public services. Furthermore, Akwaeze (2024) also explored the psychological effects of violence on victims but did not establish how these personal experiences translate into broader social development outcomes. There is also a lack of localized data assessing how arms accessibility and violent conflict influence participation in social, religious,

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and political life in Anambra communities. This gap underscores the need for a study that holistically examines the correlation between arms proliferation and social development.

In the light of the above, the following research question has been constructed to guide the study: Does arms proliferation affect social development in Anambra State?. To effectively address these research question and to meet the related objective, the following hypotheses were tested.

Ho: Arms proliferation does not affect social development in Anambra state.

Hi: arms proliferation affects social development in Anambra state.

METHOD

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which allowed for data collection from different individuals across selected locations within a specific time frame using structured questionnaires. The study focused on six agrarian local government areas in Anambra State: Anambra East, Anambra West, Orumba South, Ihiala, Anaocha, and Awka North, with a total population of 1,686,900 as provided by the National Population Commission of Nigeria. Given this population size, the researcher employed Yaro Yamane's formula to determine the sample size at a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error. This resulted in a sample size of approximately 323 respondents. While purposive sampling ensured relevance of participants, it also limits generalizability due to potential researcher bias in selection. The questionnaire was subjected to expert validation and reliability testing to ensure consistency and accuracy of responses. The number of questionnaires was evenly distributed across the six selected communities, allocating 54 questionnaires to each.

Purposive sampling was used for this study, enabling the researcher to deliberately select local government areas and farming locations based on the prevalence of herder-farmer conflicts. The focus was on farmers whose farmlands were located near roadsides or within areas considered vulnerable to herder attacks. These groups also included residents, business owners, and service providers operating in these high-risk zones. Data analysis involved the use of statistical tools such as percentages, frequencies, and tables to describe and summarize the responses. To test the hypotheses formulated for the study, the chi-square (X^2) statistical method was applied. The chi-square test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between observed and expected frequencies, aiding in validating or refuting assumptions made in the research. The formula used for this test was $X^2 = \Sigma(f_o - f_e)^2/f_e$, where f_o represents the observed frequency and f_e the expected frequency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Observed Frequency

QUESTIONS	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL
1	149	94	22	39	10	314
2	94	119	52	27	22	314
3	104	99	27	47	37	314
TOTAL	347	312	101	118	69	942

Expected frequency is given by: $\frac{\text{Row total x Column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$

Thus; SA =314×347/942 =115.66

A = 314×312/942=104

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U =314×101/942=33.66
D= 314×118/942=39.33
SD = 314×69/942 =23
The calculated value of Chi-square (X^2) = 25.54
The critical value of Chi-square(X^2) at 0.05 significant level and confident level of 0.95% is given by:
Df = (c - 1) (r - 1)
=(3 – 1) (5 – 1)
= (2) (4) = 8
Therefore, the critical value of Chi-square at 8 degree of freedom and 0.05% significant level = 15.507

Decision rule: Reject the null hypothesis if the calculated value of Chi-square is greater than critical value of Chi-square Since the calculated value of Chi-square (25.54) is greater than the critical value is Chi-square (15.507), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is no positive impact of the herdsmen activities on social life of the people living in Anambra state

The hypothesis of this study sought to determine whether herdsmen activities had a positive impact on the social relationships of people living in Anambra State. The analysis showed that the calculated Chi-square value (25.54) was greater than the critical value (15.507), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that herdsmen activities have no positive impact on the social life of people in the state. The findings revealed that residents now live in fear, avoid public gatherings, and show declining trust toward individuals from perceived hostile regions. This finding agrees with Akanwa et al (2023), who reported that herder-induced violence in Southeast Nigeria has led to the collapse of communal cohesion and reduced civic participation. In a related study, Iheanacho et al (2022) found that increased attacks by armed herders in rural Enugu communities triggered displacement and strained social relations, as people withdrew from religious, cultural, and economic activities. In contrast, some national-level studies overlook the direct social consequences of such violence, focusing instead on economic losses alone. The present study contributes by highlighting the deep-rooted damage to interpersonal relationships and community identity caused by herdsmen activities in Anambra State.

The result of the study showed that there is no positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the social relationships of the people living in Anambra State. The results gathered, also indicated that the herders' farmers clashes have to a very high extent, altered the social life of the people living in Anambra State as they are no longer hospitable to their guests most especially those from the northern part of the Country. The case of kidnapping has also deterred people from coming home for festival celebrations so also, attending to other social And religious activities such as going to the church, weddings etc. due to the fear of reprisal attack of any form.

CONCLUSION

The rearing of cattle and the cultivation of crops are two separate economic activities in which none of them is expected to thrive at the expense of the other, and so, the security apparatus needs to be strengthened to ensure a peaceful co-existence between the herders and farmers, by encouraging them to make use of ranches. The widespread availability and use of arms—especially among non-state actors such as armed herders and criminal groups—has led to heightened insecurity, displacement, fear, and the breakdown of communal relationships. This situation is associated with disruptions across key aspects of social development, including education, agriculture, social trust, cultural participation, and access to basic services. Traditional

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social structures have weakened, and the culture of peace and hospitality once known in the state is gradually eroding.

The study confirms that arms proliferation not only disrupts physical safety but also undermines the emotional, psychological, and socio-economic stability of affected communities. Insecure environments discourage civic participation, limit economic activities, and increase trauma among residents, thereby impeding progress towards inclusive and sustainable development. Addressing the impact of arms proliferation on social development in Anambra State requires urgent multi-stakeholder collaboration. This includes strengthening arms control policies, promoting peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level, enhancing community policing, and rebuilding trust through inclusive dialogue. Without a strategic and people-centered approach to disarmament and security, efforts to achieve long-term social development will remain compromised.

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