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# IDENTITY-CRISIS AND SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION, THE BANE OF AFRICA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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By

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## **Abstract**

*All societies including individuals and groups have certain unique features and attributes evolved either from the sub-group cultures or the general culture which not only enhances their social relations but promote their economic and political development. These unique features and attributes anchored on identity could be racial, national, ethnic, religious, class interest and language. It is important to note that identity is not in itself negative but the negative politicization of it generates all kinds of contradictions and violence in pluralistic societies resulting in identity-crisis especially on the issue of state collapse, mediocre leadership, economic exclusion, injustice, exploitation, political marginalization, religious bigotry, absence of constitutional guarantee, ethnic and communal conflicts. Identity-crisis is particularly pronounced because of the plural nature of African states. A major aspect of this dynamism is massive mobilization of identities as a basis for contesting hegemonic power which is often used in igniting or fanning the embers of negative ethnicity or regionalism. Some of these crises prevalent in Africa such as the one in Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan-Darfur, Egypt, Togo, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Libya, Congo-Zaire, Somalia, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Zimbabwe and Eritrea have not only ethnic undertone and identity of class interest but also assumed a genocidal proportion through small arms proliferation, abuse and misuse. These cycles of violence ravaging Africa have not only made the African countries unattractive for foreign investor in spite of the many overtures of the governments but generally hinder economic development. The paper is premised on the identity crises as the primary cause of conflicts and major stimulant of small arms proliferation, abuse and misuse that impacted negatively on Africa's economic development.*

The search for identity has always been a key issue facing mankind in its striving after significance and meaning. However, African understanding of self is in crisis as the loss of identity especially under the colonial template has resulted in state collapse such as mediocre leadership, economic exclusion, injustice, exploitation, political marginalization, religious bigotry among others. In view of the above, Africa has become a continent of conflicts and most countries like Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Congo DR, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Uganda, Egypt, Libya, Mali and others have suffered greatly from widespread and intense internal conflicts. These crises for self definition, self determination and self affirmation ravaging almost all African countries exposed the inadequacies of the African states and worsened the economic condition of the people. In this situation, social and political misunderstandings quickly degenerate into crises of identity involving small arms abuse and misuse. Therefore, the thrust of this paper centre's on identity-crisis that made the prospects of Africa's economic development very uncertain.

### **Definition of Concept**

Identity-crisis is a borrowed word from the field of psychology to explain the natural instinct of the African peoples and the challenges experienced while passing through the transition period of development. It is important to know the meaning of identity in order to bring identity-crisis to clarity. Identity refers to the process of determining the meaning, purpose and direction of one's inner, unique core of self while also maintaining some sense of sameness and continuity with one's past and conforming within the context of one's culture. (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/identity-crisis.aspx>) Identity is a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when there is development in one's way or another. This has been applied quite broadly, at times being used to include not only the healthy growth of individual or groups but other issues of individual or group therapy and reconsiderations of what it means to be part of a constituted nation in the process of rapid historical change. Unsatisfactory aspect of ones or group identity always leads to identity-crisis.

Identity-crisis, according to the dictionary of contemporary English (2009) is a feeling of uncertainty about who you really are and what your purpose is. Chambers English Dictionary (2003) defined identity-crisis as a psychological confusion caused by inability to reconcile different elements in ones personality. In other words, identity-crisis is a time in life when an individual or groups of individuals begin to look seriously for answer about the nature of their beings and the search for identity. This is an emotional disturbance characterized by self-consciousness; uncertainty and anxiety as the groups or individual have realized their human folly and wants a reconsideration of their mistakes. Erik Erikson described identity-crisis as the stage in which persons or

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group of persons end up misplacing any sense of personal semblance or historical permanence. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/identity-crisis-psychology>).

This sort of unresolved crisis leaves individuals or groups struggling to find themselves, and these are common among all races, ethnic groups, regions and classes that want to be recognized and respected not only in human relationship but in the schemes of economic and political development. These groups struggle against discrimination, lordship, injustice and exploitation. They may also go on to seek negative identity which perhaps involve the mobilization of members in the prosecution of conflicts in order to assert their rights of existence and freedom. In a nutshell, African countries are undergoing a transition period of development that enables the people within the various destined boundaries, to seek for their self-worth. Therefore, in the process of making the strive, many races, regions, ethnic groups and classes that were subjugated, exploited and humiliated during the post-independence and post-cold war eras as a result of the dictatorial imposition and economic exclusion, raised small arms against the oppressors. These crises ravaging the continent are evident in the North, West, East and South Africa.

**Small Arms:-** There is no universally acceptable definition of small arms. The closest to a global definition is that provided in the report of the United Nations Panel of Government Experts on small arms and light weapons. Significantly, rather than providing a single definition, experts made a distinction between small arms which are designed for personal use and light weapons which are designed for use by several persons (Amadu and Simbine (eds), (2006:XX). Thus, small arms include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifle, machine guns and light machine guns. While light weapons include portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted; portable anti-aircraft cannons; non-recoil guns; portable antitank missile launchers or rocket launchers; portable anti-aircraft missile launchers, mortars with a caliber of less than 100mm.

The Economic Community of West African states provided no single definition of small arms. Rather it referred to small arms as arms used by one person and which include notably firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system or landmine, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns (ECOWAS, 2008:8). Based on definition, most of the weapons referred to as small arms by ECOWAS are included, even the heavy machine guns. That notwithstanding, almost all the weapons used in most areas of conflict in Africa, were more of small arms since it had no massive destruction of life and property within the moment of detonation. Therefore, Alaku (2011:3) defined small arms as man-portable, inexpensive and easy-to-use weapons of lethal barreled quality from which any shot,

bullet or missile can be discharged. This category of weapons are produced either locally or externally under license or based on indigenous designs. Since these definitions of small arms are based on situational factors, they may be subject to further clarification.

An estimate in 2000 showed that there was one (small arms and light weapons for every 12 people on the planet (Malloh Brown & Dhanapala 2002:2). Against this background, Oxfam and Amnesty International estimate revealed that 638.9million small arms were in circulation around the world and 100million of those arms were in sub-Sahara Africa with 8-10 million small arms concentrated in West Africa sub-region. (*Africa Security Review* 2004:33). In 1994, 300 companies in 53 countries were manufacturing small arms, an increase of 25 countries since the mid-1980's (<http://www.globalpolicyorg/security/smallarms/2000/0126alba.htm>). More significantly, there was an increase in the number of countries with facilities to manufacture small arms as 22 developing countries joined the group of small arms and light weapons manufactures ([http://www.matedu.cinvestay.mx/filloy\\_SDA/four\\_characteristics.htm](http://www.matedu.cinvestay.mx/filloy_SDA/four_characteristics.htm)).

The table above shows and explains the crisis –situation of most African countries and there is no denying the fact of the preponderance of small arms as most communal and ethnic conflicts, civil wars, religious crisis, civil unrest and terrorism were prosecuted with the sophisticated weapons. Both the state and non-state actors allocated more resources to arms purchase than on economic development. In recent time, Africa, preferably do not need small arms of any size for security but more security from the rulers so that we can have fewer arms for peace and development.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

Theory is the thrust through which the soul of the research or paper is explored and predictive solution proffers. It also offers a useful insight into the understanding of crisis and small arms abuse in Africa. In examining the identity-crisis and small arms proliferation, the bane of economic development in Africa, the work adopts two theories- the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes and the capture theory of Jonah Onuoha. The social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes shows that the state is supposed to maintain a monopoly on the instruments of violence on behalf of the citizens and guarantee security to the citizens in return. The theory posits that people accept to give up their rights to protect themselves, including the rights to bear arms, to the state on the understanding that the state will provide adequate physical and social security. In doing so, people transfer possession of arms to the state and its coercive agencies, while they retain ownership of the weapons, enabling them to reclaim their rights to self-help when the state failed to fulfill its part of the social contract(Ibeanu 2005:53).

The capture theory of Jonah Onuoha argues that two contending social forces, namely the nationalists and the reformers are currently struggling for the capture of the soul of country's economy. It is this struggle and the consequent capture of the state by a captor that has sustained the economic crisis and made revamping and sustaining the economy impossible (Onuoha 2008:7). The identity-crisis and proliferation of small arms in Africa is a reflection of the general failure of the social contract and the consequent capture of the economy.

### **Types of Identity-Crisis**

Baumeister et al [1985; 407-408] identified two types of identity-crisis such as the motivation and legitimation crisis. Motivation crisis refers to the individuals or groups that experienced a lack of guiding commitments but struggle to establish personal goals and values. This is a problem caused by an inadequately defined self. Whereas legitimation crisis is the inability of a social entity to fulfill demands and expectations it has placed on itself. It refers to an inability to justify actions that are called for. These types of identity crisis though portrayed the inadequacies of African governments but glosses over the issues of resource control which is the propelling factor of the crisis in Africa. These inadequacies refer to the structures and institutions that have remained relatively underdeveloped through the 60's. The focus being on building those institutions that allowed for the deprivation, exploitation and management of resources (Alli 2011:331). There has been too much effort put on the management and exploitation of resources than on nation-building. And this has encouraged individuals, ethnic or regional groupings seeking for self-definition and assertion, to resort to other alternative means of achieving their goals.

Against this backdrop; the researcher identifies three types of identity-crisis in Africa which include identity crisis based on resource control; culture and ethnic-based identity crisis, identity-crisis based on democracy and participation.

### **Identity-Crisis Based on Resource Control**

Resource based rivalries are of two types namely traditional or communal and elite group conflicts. The traditional communal conflicts occur between herdsman and farmers over grazing land or water. Examples are the Darfur (Sudan), Jos crisis (Nigeria), Ogaden (Ethiopia) crisis. The elite group crisis occurs when entrepreneurs or elite group want access to resources or wealth. This is evident in the blood diamond and gold ore of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Congo DR; and Guinea, and the oil of the Niger Delta, Nigeria and Angola. In the Niger Delta, the governments used force to suppress demand for equitable and fair resource distribution and control by the Ogoni, Ijaw and Urhobo minority ethnic groups. The multinational oil companies received concessions for oil extraction without commensurate compensation to the local communities who bear the burden of degradation (Ifeagwazi & Nwofia 2011:232).

The situation in both Sierra Leone and Liberia which led to protracted civil wars and state collapse is similar in the sense that a combination of several years of monopolization of power and economy especially trade in extractive minerals like diamonds and gold ore fueled opposition from the excluded groups and sections of the country. This led to the emergence of resistance groups who were recruited by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, and Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The duo warlords not only launched criminal attack on the state of these countries but established useful link with foreign companies to sell diamonds, gold and ivory, to finance the crises through purchase of small arms. Again, the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) rich endowment in various minerals has been major factor in the civil war that ravaged the country. It has been the scene of brutal act since 1998 when rebel groups backed by Uganda and Rwanda went up against the central government to overthrow President Laurent Kabila. This was not only extended over a long period of time since then, but has also drawn in several other countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

### **Culture and Ethnic-based Identity-Crisis**

These are crises that originated from contradictions of religious, ethnic, class and regional interests. Colonialism created cleavages, destroyed traditional institutions, fragmented identity groups and coerced divergent groups into nations that lack single national identity (Ifeagwazi & Nwofia 2011:233). In some countries, dominant groups foisted their cultures and religious as the national identity but are fiercely resented and resisted by the minorities. The rise of ethnic militia in Africa is a strong indication of the features of ethnic identity. This is evident in the formation of ethno-regional and religious organizations and movement. Such organizations include Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA), and National Democratic Alliance in Eastern Sudan; Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) in Congo; Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD), National Liberation Forces(FNL) in Burundi; the Patriotic Movements of Ivory Coast (MPCI), Movement for Peace and Justice (MDJ) and Popular Ivorian Movement for the Great West (MPIGO) in Ivory Coast; the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone and Lords Resistance Army of Uganda; O'dua Peoples Congress, for Yoruba, Arewa consultative forum for the North and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra for the Igbo people in Nigeria, and the Omoro People Liberation Front of Ethiopia, are strong indication of the salience of ethnic identity.

The spiral increase of the these groups led to the proliferation of small arms as their ethnic militias or separatists requested small arms and light weapons to prosecute the crises. These associations make claims that have far-reaching implications for the states. These claims and demands includes those for equitable distribution and sharing

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of political power and economic resources, and sometimes, a demand for the re-configuration of the state like is being demanded by MASSOB in Nigeria, MDJ in Cote D'Ivoire, the Separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Cassamance in Senegal and Sudan (Alli 2011:333). In most cases, these demands are pursued and promoted by well-armed militias in manner that inevitably lead to small arms abuses and misuse which imparted negatively to Africa's economic development. In Sudan, the crux of the matter is Islamic religion while it is language in Cameroon. In Rwanda and Burundi, Congo DR, Uganda, Kenya and Senegal (Movement for the Liberation of Cassamance) ethnic sentiments served to mobilize cohorts during the genocide after creating self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing enemy images of opposing groups. Enemy images were the products of deep-rooted social and psychological needs frequently created by the elites to serve their interest.

**Identity-Crisis Based on Democracy and Participation:** Most African countries lack functional or effective democratic systems and institutions to regulate the behavior of politicians. Some countries in Africa adopted a one party system or multiple parties with weak finance, to vitiate competition and without offering credible alternatives. Many African leaders are sit-tight leaders. Some groups are excluded or marginalized and there are no legal or constitutional mechanisms for members to assert their rights. Attempt to address the imbalance is usually revisited by the few in power. This increases the potential for violent conflict as those who are excluded, target at the privileged groups, who in turn, defended their position leading to oscillation of conflicts between the groups. Liberia, Burundi and Rwanda are some examples. In Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, Algeria, Chad, Niger, Sudan-Darfur, Somalia, religious crises served as façade to cultural, economic and political crises. The protracted wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe are attributable to years of monopolization of political power by one group at the expense of the other. The political instability and inter-group disharmony in the Great Lake region involving the Congo DR, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi is experienced by the crisis of identity. The exclusion of the Tutsi, whose population spread across these countries, from political and social life generated lot contradictions, antagonisms and violence that encourage small arms abuse and misuse.

**Causes of Identity-Crisis in Africa**

The spate of identity-crisis in African has gone out of proportion and was caused by economic dislocation, political marginalization and relics of colonialism, among other.

**Economic Dislocation**

The end of the cold war in 1989 has led to the escalation of crisis not only in Nigeria but Africa in general. The situation in Africa accompanied by the

intensification of the structural adjustment programme and other economic reforms dictated by the IMF and World Bank generated lot of economic down turn. These dramatic changes in the economies have downsized the role of the state in economic management thus undermining the capacity of the state for social provisioning. The cancellation of this policies and withdrawal of state welfare programme from the people couple with the uncontrolled adoption and promotion of market-oriented reforms significantly weaken socio-economic equilibrium. The state withdrawal from its constitutional responsibility or capacity generated or stimulated a dynamic set of forces that in certain cases provoked turbulence, serious instability and possible disintegration (Aina 1997:42).

As the capacity of the state to provide welfare diminished because of the implementation of the economic recovery programme, groups especially communal or ethnic or intra-class have developed new framework of succor not only in ethnic organization and movements, but in ethnic militias which have become institutionalized and essentially played instrumental roles in the intra-class and inter-ethnic struggle between deferent factions of the ruling class. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, Liberia and Sierra Leone, Angola, Guinea Bissau, communal clashes and group crisis evolved as a result of struggle for power and influence among the different political factions of the ruling class for the control of the oil wealth and solid minerals of the areas. In the DRC, Sudan, Ivory Coast and Somali etc, the conflicts and the ensuing virtual state of war are so intractable that the governments have to a large extent become paralyzed.

**Political Marginalization:** Identity-crisis arises as a result of the struggle for political participation or over political space. The political history of African countries is riddled with assassination, military coup d'état, lack of faith in the transparency of electoral system, leadership failure, poverty and unemployment. The return to civil rule has opened up the space for interrogating political and social phenomena in Africa. The perceived imbalances and unanswered questions within the Africa's political system contributed fundamentally to the atmosphere of hostility and conflict.

However, in the absence of a systematic attempt to resolve most of the fundamental contradictions or differences and problems facing the continent's political structure, the newly enlarged political space is fast becoming filled with ethnic or other primordial identities. The net effect of these strong feelings arising from these ethnic groups entrenched an atmosphere of hostility and antagonism, with each group alleging political and economic exclusion at the hands of others. The crisis, currently experienced in Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, Libya, Congo DR, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia are examples of conflicts which resulted in the struggle for political participation and inclusion.

**Relics of Colonialism:** Of all the legacies established by the colonialist are the forceful unification of formerly independent nations and kingdoms in Africa with different histories, political system, custom and traditions, religions and other practices. According to Ajayi, (2013), this becomes a heavy albatross as it is structured against the political geometry. This was how the seed of national discord was inadvertently sowed in the land, for the diversity which could have been the sources of strength and unity becomes our sore throat and constant sources of political uprisings, crisis and devastations. African political elites, instead of fostering unity, continued to stoke the fire of ethno-religious nationalism and imposition of harsh religious penal codes on so many unwilling and pretentiously willing people.

**Its Impact on Economic Development of Africa:** Africa has suffered greatly from widespread and intense crisis of identity. These conflicts with severe consequences explode the myth of national solidarity, enthrone insecurity, undermine the social fabric of the nation and at the sometime, destroy the fragile African economy.

The nation-states in Africa often assume the role of guarantors for individual and collective security but the blatant misuse and abuse of small arms affect the perception of every average person with respect to the role the state is expected to play in the maintenance of law, order, and domestic security as a whole. The way African people come to perceive the state and its security institutions are altered by the frequent conflict and uncontrolled threats prevalent in the continent. These conflicts involving the use of small arms erode the perception of the state as the guarantor of security and also query our national relations (Oche 2008:100). This has had the effect of destroying the basic mutual trust and confidence among the peoples of the continent and encouraged suspicion among different ethnic groups which in turn encouraged small arms proliferation.

The increasing incidence of intrastate crises has stimulated a rapid increase in the demand for weapons which can be used for internal purpose rather than for defense against external threats (eg. Counter - insurgency). In countries of Africa, state and non-state actors (including insurgent groups, separatist forces, local warlords and criminal syndicates) have emerged as the major consumers of arms. These small arms exported to irresponsible governments contribute regularly to gross human rights violations and abuses. The worst of the matter is that members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, Britain and USA) supply arms to rebel groups in an effort to overthrow dictatorial regimes. These various developments have combined to produce a dramatic increase in the demand for small arms either for individual or collective defence.

Identity crises in Africa divert scarce government resources, discourage investment and economic growth and deprive developing countries of the skills and

talents of the victims of war. African countries have committed a disproportionate percentage of their human and material resources to prosecute armed conflicts at the detriment of the national economy. International Action Network on Small Arms, Safer World and Oxfam International Report that arms conflict cost Africa US\$18billion each year and about US\$300billion between 1990-2005. During this period, 23 African nations experienced war, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Republic of Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan-Darfur, and Uganda (<http://www.isafrica.org/pubs>).

The presence of small arms in any crisis escalate and intensify violence, impact crime all of which hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance. Not only that, people that got displaced from the warring zones and found solace within the neighbouring communities faced severe and devastating economic and social problems such as hunger, crime, whoredom and high mortality rate.

### **Conclusion**

This work attempted to explain the meaning and causes of identity-crisis, its relation to small arms proliferation that have adverse effect on Africa's economic development. Identity-crisis is the struggle for self-definition, self determination and self-assertion against the historical errors of forceful unification and political or economic exclusion. The continent of Africa has become a cockpit of crisis as most ethnic, religious and regional groups, in various countries have resorted to negative identity not only to challenge the oppressor but hold themselves out of the stormy water of exploitation, humiliation, subjugation and dehumanization. In as much as the governments of African countries are perceived not to meet its obligations to the people by guaranteeing security, ensuring self-definition and determination, and promoting economic development, their legitimacy is widely contested by the majorities, and the governments will also continue to contest the right of the state and its coercive agencies to monopolies societies instrument of violence hence small arms proliferation, abuse & misuse.

### **Recommendations**

African governments should exercise political, economic and administrative power or authority to manage the countries' resources and affairs in a manner that is rational, open, transparent, accountable, equitable, and responsive to the people's needs.

There should be good governance which comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and settle their differences in non-violent ways.

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It must be people-oriented, all inclusive, participative, reliable and accountable government that can articulate the interests and opinions of all fringeless of the society into a coherent whole that can be addressed within the limits of available resources.

Good governance requires the reformation of the existing political, social, cultural and economic structures to secure improvement (skills, attitudes and organizational culture) in resource management (Downer, 2002).

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