JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 2, Issue 2, No. 1 / June 2024
https://www.jopd.com.ng

ARMS CONTROL IN WEST AFRICA: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Daniel F. Atidoga
LLB, LLM, Ph.D., BL, PGDE
Department of Public Law
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Nigeria
&
Umoru Adejo Yakubu
B.Sc., M.Sc., Political Science
Department of Liberal Studies
Federal Polytechnic, Kaura Namoda, Nigeria
Email: umoruadejoyakubu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

West Africa has long been plagued by instability, violence, and underdevelopment, primarily due to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Despite numerous legislative frameworks and initiatives by regional and international actors, illicit trafficking and exploitation of SALW continue to thrive, exacerbated by challenges such as porous borders, the involvement of non-state armed groups, and weak governance structures. This article highlights the crucial role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting effective arms control policies in West Africa. It assesses the regional and international legislative frameworks guiding weapons control efforts, the unique challenges posed by SALW proliferation, and the current level of civil society engagement. The study adopted a systematic literature review, leveraging databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and DOAJ to gather and analyse relevant studies using thematic analysis. Common themes identified include advocacy, monitoring implementation, community engagement, and support. The study employs the collaborative governance framework to analyse interactions among various stakeholders in arms control. Findings indicate that CSOs, despite their vital contributions, face significant obstacles such as limited resources, restrictive legal frameworks, and security risks. The paper offers recommendations to create a supportive environment for CSOs, including increasing financial aid, strengthening legislative frameworks, enhancing collaboration, investing in capacity building, and providing security for civil society members. Recognizing and bolstering the role of CSOs can help West African nations and regional bodies consolidate their efforts to achieve lasting peace, security, and development in the region.

Keywords: Arms control, Capacity building, Civil society organizations (CSOs), non-state armed groups, small arms and light weapons (SALW).

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, one of the primary reasons of instability and violence in West African has been the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW). These weapons are readily accessible, which has hindered regional attempts to promote peace, security, and development by fueling organized crime, civil conflicts, insurgencies, and breaches of human rights (Bourne, 2007). Aware of how important this problem is, regional and global parties have attempted to prevent the illicit trafficking and inappropriate use of SALW by creating a number of weapons control programmes and regulatory frameworks.

However, a number of difficulties have restricted the success of these efforts, including insufficient border security measures, the presence of non-state armed groups, and deficient institutions of government (Batchelor & Kenkel, 2013). According to Kytömäki (2015), civil

society groups (CSOs) are now vital in pressing for better living conditions for civilian populations and backing effective weapons control measures.

In weapons control measures, civil society performs a range of roles, including advocate, facilitator, and watchdog. CSOs engage with governments and international organizations to establish and carry out disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) initiatives. They also aggressively monitor the application of arms control legislation and educate the public about the hazards connected with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) (Lamb & Dye, 2009). In addition, they promote sustainable development goals and the protection of human rights in addition to giving crucial humanitarian relief to places afflicted by armed conflict (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2018).

The goal of this research study is to explore how civil society helps in regional initiatives to regulate armament in West Africa. It will look at the legislative mechanisms that govern these projects, the special issues brought on by the proliferation crisis of SALW, and the level of civil society engagement as it exists right now. Furthermore, the paper will present techniques to develop a favourable culture for expanded civil society engagement, applying insights obtained from many case studies conducted in the region.

This research intends to add to the existing conversation on the establishment of sustainable peace, security, and prosperity in West Africa by showing the priceless contributions of civil society actors and pushing for their expanding participation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study utilizes the collaborative governance framework, which examines the processes and structures of public policy decision-making that involve multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, and international organizations (Cisneros, 2019). The collaborative governance theory, propounded by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash in 2007 in their work "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice," provides a framework for understanding public policy decision-making involving multiple stakeholders (Nabatchi and Emerson, 2021). These stakeholders include government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the public. The theory emphasizes cooperation, shared responsibility, and joint problem-solving to address complex public issues. By fostering collaboration among diverse actors, it aims to enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of policy outcomes, leveraging the unique resources and expertise of different stakeholders to tackle challenges beyond the capability of any single entity.

The collaborative governance framework was selected because it provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the multifaceted interactions between various stakeholders in arms control initiatives (Hersman et al., 2022). Unlike other frameworks that focus solely on either government or non-governmental actors, the collaborative governance framework considers the dynamic interplay between multiple entities, making it well-suited for examining the complex environment of arms control in West Africa. This holistic perspective is crucial for understanding the contributions and challenges of CSOs and supports the development of effective strategies for improving arms control efforts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study involves a systematic literature review to evaluate and synthesize existing research on the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in arms control within West Africa. Utilizing databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and DOAJ, the search included terms related to CSOs, arms control, and West Africa. The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles in English, relevant to arms control and CSOs in

the West African context, while excluding non-peer-reviewed and unrelated studies. Data were collected by reviewing articles, reports, and policy documents, and analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes. The study employs the collaborative governance framework to understand the interactions between various stakeholders in arms control. While this framework offers a comprehensive approach, it also has limitations, including a lack of detailed guidance on stakeholder interactions. The methodology provides a holistic understanding of CSO contributions, challenges, and successes in arms control initiatives in West Africa.

LEGAL UNDERPINNINGS

A comprehensive legal framework at both regional and international levels guides the efforts to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in West Africa. These legal instruments provide the normative basis for cooperation, coordination, and action among states, regional bodies, and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations.

The principal international apparatus tackling the SALW challenge on a worldwide scale is the United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA) (United Nations, 2001). The UNPoA, which was adopted in 2001, sets down a series of political obligations and steps that UN member states must take to combat the illicit trafficking in SALW. These include steps to fortify domestic laws, improve border security, and foster collaboration and information-sharing.

Adopted in 2005, the International Tracking Instrument (ITI) enhances the United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPoA) by providing rules for the marking and tracking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), facilitating the identification of illegal weapon sources, and encouraging collaboration in tracing endeavors (United Nations, 2005). Furthermore, the Arms traffic Treaty (ATT), which came into effect in 2014, attempts to control the global traffic in conventional weapons, such as SALW, and stop them from being diverted to unapproved parties (United Nations, 2013).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has taken the lead in regional initiatives to stop the spread of SALW. Adopted in 2006, the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials is a legally binding agreement aimed at preventing the uncontrolled proliferation, excessive stockpiling, and illicit fabrication of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the area (ECOWAS, 2006). The Convention specifies rules for stockpile management, marking and tracing, and the disposal of excess weapons in addition to controls over SALW imports, exports, and transfers.

Furthermore, the 2008 ratification of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework stresses the importance of a systematic approach to address the root causes of conflict, including SALW proliferation. The Framework highlights the potential role of civil society and other non-state actors in arms control measures by emphasizing their involvement in conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

When combined with national laws and policies, these legal processes provide a solid basis for resolving West Africa's SALW issue. However, proper implementation remains a major challenge, underscoring the importance of coordinated efforts by governments, regional bodies, civil society groups, and the international community.

THE CRISIS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN WEST AFRICA

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has seriously threatened West African regional security for a long time. It has slowed economic expansion, made conflicts worse and lasted longer, and jeopardized stability and peace (Berman & Maze, 2016). Civil wars, insurgencies, and intercommunal violence are only a few of the violent conflicts that have occurred in the area because of the general availability and use of SALW.

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) estimates that there are over 8 million illegal small arms and weapons (SALW) in circulation throughout West Africa, although there are considerable regional differences (UNODA, 2020). This problem is a result of several reasons, such as the growth of non-state armed organizations, the historical repercussions of armed wars, weak borders, weak government, and the involvement of organized criminal networks in the illicit arms trade (Coulibaly, 2008).

SALW's proliferation in West Africa has caused widespread destruction. These weapons have been used to commit human rights abuses such as gender-based violence, enlisting of adolescents as troops, and displacement of civilian populations (Schroeder, 2011). Furthermore, there is a severe danger to regional security and stability since the illicit arms trade has promoted criminal behavior including armed robberies, cattle rustling, and the trafficking of narcotics and people (Batchelor & Kenkel, 2013).

In addition, the proliferation of SALW has had a huge economic impact. Insecurity and armed conflict have limited foreign investment, disrupted economic activity, and reallocated cash from development programs to finance military operations and humanitarian help (Oxfam 2007). According to the Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2015), armed violence in West Africa costs billions of euros each year and worsens poverty and underdevelopment.

Regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and international players have responded to the SALW crisis with a variety of DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) programs and initiatives aimed at improving stockpile management and strengthening border controls (ECOWAS, 2016). Unfortunately, the involvement of non-state armed organizations and organized criminal networks has caused substantial issues, and these efforts have been limited by a lack of political will and resources.

A multimodal approach that targets the root causes of armed violence, improves regional teamwork and coordination, and includes all relevant parties, including civil society groups is needed to address the proliferation of SALW in West Africa (Berman & Maze, 2016). The possibilities for long-lasting peace, stability, and prosperity in the area will remain elusive unless there is a coordinated and sustained effort to limit the unlawful spread and misuse of small guns and munitions.

THE PLACE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in their efforts have largely tackled the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in West Africa by supporting the government, regional organizations, and international entities. These non-governmental organizations advocacy networks, research institutions, community-based groups, and non-profits organisations have been essential in promoting disarmament, awareness-raising, and peace-building initiatives (Kytömäki, 2015).

Among the primary responsibilities of civil society in weapons control has been monitoring and reporting on the implementation of regional and international legal frameworks, like the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the United Nations

Programme of Action on Small Arms (UNPoA) (Berkol, 2007). Keeping governments accountable for their commitments, CSOs have closely watched state activities in enforcing relevant laws, strengthening border security, and managing stockpiles.

Furthermore, civil society players have been very helpful in the necessity of disarming programs and increasing public knowledge of the dangers connected to the growth of SALW (Lamb & Dye, 2009). By engaging a number of stakeholders, including youth groups, decision-makers, and communities devastated by armed conflict, these initiatives have built a culture of peace and nonviolence.

Furthermore, vital in delivering victims of armed violence including internally displaced persons, refugees, and survivors of gender-based violence humanitarian help and support have been CSOs (Oxfam, 2007). By their close contact with affected communities and on the ground presence, they have been able to identify and address specific needs, therefore promoting the more general goals of conflict prevention and peace making.

Civil society groups have aggressively supported disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes in addition to actively facilitating communication with non-state armed groups, helping to seize and destroy illegal weapons, and assisting former combatants in their return to civilian life (Berman & Maze, 2016). Their local experience and insight have been important in customizing these programs to the various situations and obstacles faced in different places.

Despite these significant results, civil society engagement in West African weapons control programmes has encountered numerous challenges, including financing shortages, tight legal frameworks, and security concerns (Batchelor & Kenkel, 2013). Regional organizations such as ECOWAS, however, have emphasized the need of intensifying cooperation and fostering an atmosphere that is favorable to civil society participation, pointing out the critical role that CSOs play in promoting long-term peace and security (ECOWAS, 2008).

CHALLENGES FACING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ARMS CONTROL

In addition to supporting effective arms control measures, civil society organizations (CSOs) are crucial in developing a peaceful, nonviolent culture while often facing a number of challenges in the way of their efforts to participating completely and successfully in initiatives aimed at arms control. These challenges include limited financial resources, constrictive legal and regulatory frameworks, little coordination and cooperation, insufficient knowledge and ability, and security risks.

1. Limited Financial Resources

CSOs involved in weapons control have a great deal of financial resource constraints (Batchelor & Kenkel, 2012). Financial constraints that many CSOs in this field face severely limit their capacity to carry out programming, advocacy, and research activity. For grassroots groups and those operating in isolated or conflict-torn areas, this is particularly true. Short-term financing and outside donors can make CSO initiatives less sustainable and successful over time (Lamb & Dye, 2009).

2. Restrictive Legal and Regulatory Environments

CSOs' ability to function and take part in weapons control programs is hampered in some countries by laws and regulations (Florquin & King, 2018). This can include restrictions on the freedom to associate, communicate, and congregate as well as roadblocks brought about by paperwork and intense government supervision during the Civil Society Organization

(CSO) registration and operation, making it more difficult for CSOs to do their job as they ought to (Kytömäki, 2015).

3. Limited Coordination and Collaboration

Effective weapons control programs require coordinated and cooperative effort from all stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, CSOs, and regional institutions. However, when there is inadequate cooperation and information sharing between civil society groups and other pertinent parties, this might make their efforts less effective (Lamb & Dye, 2009). This may as a result lead to repetitious effort, missed opportunities for teamwork, and a disorganized approach to addressing the issues raised by the proliferation of SALW.

4. Capacity and Knowledge Gaps

Limited access to opportunities for research, training, and knowledge-sharing can contribute to capacity shortages and limited knowledge thereby make it more challenging for CSOs to significantly contribute to weapons control initiatives. Despite having local knowledge and grassroots ties to weapons control efforts, CSOs might not have the ability or experience to engage in detailed policy discussions and operational initiatives (Berman & Maze, 2016).

5. Security Risks and Threats

When engaging in arms control programmes, civil society actors may face security risks, such as threats, harassment, and violence, especially in countries affected by war (Berman & Maze, 2016). This might discourage CSOs from tackling sensitive issues related to the misuse and spread of SALW or from working in certain regions. The lack of adequate defenses and the pervasive impunity that violent individuals who target members of civil society enjoy enhance these dangers even more (Oxfam, 2007).

These challenges have to be addressed for civil society participation in weapons control programmes to fully live up to their potential. Governments, regional organizations, and international organizations must cooperate to provide an enabling atmosphere that promotes improved coordination, capacity-building, and sustainable financing strategies in order to empower and support CSOs.

CREATING ROOM FOR MORE CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are crucial in limiting the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in West Africa. However, they are not fully utilizing their potential because of a variety of challenges. In order to fully maximize the potential of civil society involvement in arm control efforts, coordinated efforts to develop an environment that empowers and makes it simpler for them to actively participate in arms control initiatives is required.

The lack of adequate funds and resources is one of the main obstacles to successful civil society involvement (Batchelor & Kenkel, 2013). Many CSOs operating in the SALW field are unable to conduct operational activities, research, or advocacy due to financial constraints. This problem requires more support from the government, regional organizations, and foreign donors. Furthermore, there is need to look into ways to ensure sustainable financial alternatives such as social entrepreneurship models and public-private partnerships.

Also, it is critical to strengthen the legislative and regulatory frameworks that monitor civil society operations (Florquin & King, 2018). Some West African countries have imposed restrictive laws and procedures that have restricted the capacity of CSOs to operate, therefore limiting their ability to take part in weapons control programs. Governments should look at

these laws with aim to change or modify these laws to foster an atmosphere that upholds the freedom of assembly, association, and speech of civil society actors.

Enhanced coordination and cooperation between CSOs as well as between civil society and other stakeholders is another essential step (Lamb & Dye, 2009). Forming alliances and networks allows CSOs to pool resources, exchange best practices, and strengthen their collective voice and impact. Through providing platforms for debate and information sharing, regional and international organizations may encourage CSO participation in relevant policy-making processes and hence promote collaboration.

Important are also programs meant to strengthen the ability of civil society actors to effectively engage in weapons control (Berman & Maze, 2016). These includes training in relevant legal frameworks, advocacy strategies, monitoring and reporting protocols, and intervention programs such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Cooperation of regional and international organizations with educational and research institutions may be very beneficial to the development and execution of these capacity-building projects.

Finally, it is important that civil society participation in weapons control programmes be guaranteed their protection and safety (Kytömäki, 2015). In many conflict-affected regions, CSOs and those who work for them face grave security concerns including threats, intimidation, and violence. Governments and regional organizations have to take initiative to protect the rights and welfare of civil society actors. These covers setting up protections and promoting an environment that encourages their activities.

By addressing these concerns and creating an environment that promotes civil society involvement, West African nations and regional organizations may fully benefit from CSOs in furthering sustainable peace, security, and development through effective weapons control measures.

SUCCESS STORIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ARMS CONTROL

Civil society organizations (CSOs) encounter various hurdles in their attempts to promote weapons control and disarmament, despite these challenges several famous wins highlight the relevance of these groups. In many parts of the world, CSOs have made a major contribution to combat the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW), from advocating for legislative reforms and raising awareness to supporting disarmament and reintegration initiatives.

1. Promoting Regional Disarmament Initiatives

Activities of civil society organizations in West Africa has had a major impact on the 2006 adoption of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials (Berkol, 2007). CSOs ensured that the Convention addressed critical concerns such as stockpile management, tracing and tagging, and civil society engagement in disarmament initiatives (Berman & Maze, 2016). Since then, the Convention has given regional initiatives meant to stop the unchecked spread of SALW across West Africa a vital legal foundation.

2. Monitoring and Reporting on Arms Control Agreements

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a role in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of weapons control agreements and programmes, therefore holding governments responsible for their commitments. For example, since the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) came into force in 2014, the Control Arms coalition, a worldwide alliance of civil society groups, has been observing and recording the treaty's implementation (Control Arms,

2022). Through its annual ATT Monitor reports, the Coalition has been releasing comprehensive assessments of state compliance with the ATT, highlighting both areas that have improved and those that still need improvement.

3. Facilitating Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes

Programs for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have received strong support from civil society groups, which uses their local contacts and expertise to support these initiatives. In Sierra Leone, for example, the DDR process after the civil war was greatly supported by CSOs such as the Campaign for Good Governance and the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA), which collaborated with communities and former fighters to support disarmament and reintegration initiatives (Lamb & Dye, 2009).

4. Providing Victim Assistance and Raising Awareness

Giving victims of armed conflict humanitarian relief and creating awareness on the disastrous consequences of the expansion of SALWs have been a major contribution made by CSOs. Various initiatives have been created by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Handicap International (formerly known as Humanity & Inclusion) to help victims of armed conflict. These programmes include medical care, therapy, and socio-economic reintegration (ICRC, 2022; Humanity & Inclusion, 2022). In addition, CSOs have carried out a educational and awareness activities to advance peace and a culture of non-violence, mostly targeting youths and vulnerable populations.

5. Advocating for Policy Change and Improved Governance

CSOs have been important in influencing policy changes and good government in arms control through their advocacy efforts. For example, the independent research project Small Arms Survey, located in Geneva, has offered insightful research and analysis to policy discussions and decision-making processes at many levels (Small Arms Survey, 2022). Comparably, groups like Oxfam and Amnesty International have constantly pushed for more accountability, openness, and arms control in the arms trade; as a result, they have helped to change public opinion and increase public scrutiny of the world's arms trade.

CONCLUSION

The spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in West Africa has been a threat to the peace, security, and economic prosperity of the region for a long period of time. Despite efforts of governments, regional organizations, and international parties to address the issues through various legislative frameworks and initiatives, the illicit trafficking and use of SALW continues to generate tensions, violations of human rights, and instability.

In this view, it has become obvious that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a key role as partners in designing proper arms control legislation and establishing a culture free of violence. CSOs have employed variety of strategies to address the issue of SALWs, including public awareness, social assistance, and support for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes in addition to supervising the execution of disarmament policy.

However, the full potential of civil society activities is hampered by a variety of obstacles, including limited financial resources, restrictive legal and regulatory frameworks, and security concerns.

A deliberate effort to increase financial aid and evaluate long-term funding opportunities, alongside investments in capacity-building programs, is essential. Ensuring the security and safety of civil society actors in weapons control efforts and improving the legal and regulatory frameworks governing their activities will create an environment that empowers

and supports CSOs. This, in turn, will enable them to engage meaningfully in weapons control measures and fully achieve their potential in these endeavours.

By understanding and appreciating the crucial role that CSOs play, West African governments and regional entities may leverage the combined resources, knowledge, and grassroots connections of CSOs to establishing long-term peace, security, and development in the region. The proliferation of SALWs may be effectively controlled by executing an inclusive and cooperative approach that recognizes the contributions of all stakeholders, making way for a more prosperous and stable future for the region.

The success or failure of measures in West Africa to handle the proliferation of SALW will ultimately depend on the coordination and continuing efforts of governments, international partners, regional organizations, and strong involvement of civil society organisations. West Africa may be able to fulfil its goal of being free from the plague of illegal SALW by building a culture that emphasizes cooperation, shared accountability, and dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increasing Financial Support and Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:
    - Governments, regional agencies, and international donors should prioritize giving additional financial assistance to civil society groups (CSOs) operating in the weapons control sector.
    - Explore sustainable funding strategies such as public-private partnerships, social impact bonds, and crowd funding platforms to diversify funding sources for CSOs.

Encourage corporate social responsibility initiatives and cooperation between CSOs and the private sector to support weapons control programs and advocacy activities.

2. Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Frameworks:
    - Governments should evaluate and change restrictive laws and regulations that limit the capacity of CSOs to function freely and engage in weapons control activities.
    - Ensure the legal framework fosters freedom of association, speech, and assembly for civil society actors, while establishing clear norms and regulations for their activities.
    - Streamline bureaucratic processes and remove excessive government control over CSO registration and activities, providing an enabling climate for civil society involvement.

3. Enhancing Collaboration and Coordination:
    - Establish regional and national locations for discourse and information-sharing among CSOs, as well as between CSOs and other stakeholders (governments, regional agencies, international organizations).
    - Encourage the engagement of CSOs in important policy-making processes and decision-making forums pertaining to weapons control.
    - Foster alliances and networks among CSOs to pool resources, exchange information and best practices, and amplify their collective voice and effect.

4. Investing in Capacity-Building Initiatives:
    - Develop and execute comprehensive capacity-building programs for CSOs, concentrating on areas such as applicable legal frameworks, monitoring and reporting techniques, advocacy tactics, and programmatic interventions (e.g., disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs).
    - Engage regional and international organizations, universities, and research institutes in planning and executing these capacity-building activities.

- Facilitate knowledge-sharing and exchange of best practices among CSOs through regional and international conferences, seminars, and online platforms.

5. Ensuring Safety and Protection for Civil Society Actors:
   - Governments and regional agencies should implement comprehensive protection procedures to guarantee the rights and well-being of civil society actors participating in weapons control activities.
   - Promote an atmosphere favourable to the work of CSOs by ensuring accountability for perpetrators of violence, harassment, or threats against civil society actors.
   - Provide legal help, security training, and risk reduction measures for CSOs working in high-risk or conflict-affected areas.

6. Promoting Public Awareness and Engagement:
   - Support CSO-led public awareness and education campaigns on the dangers of small arms and light weapons proliferation, addressing different stakeholders, including communities affected by armed conflict, youth groups, and decision-makers.
   - Encourage CSOs to engage in grassroots mobilization and community-based activities to build a culture of peace and non-violence.
   - Leverage digital channels and social media to expand the reach and effect of CSO awareness-raising initiatives.

By adopting these recommendations, West African nations and regional organizations can create an atmosphere that empowers and makes it easier for civil society groups to successfully engage in weapons control initiatives. This will ultimately contribute to the continued peace, security, and progress in this region.

REFERENCES

Batchelor, P., & Kenkel, K. M. (Eds.). (2013). Controlling Small Arms: Consolidation, innovation and relevance in research and policy. Routledge.

Berkol, I. (2007). Civil society and the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. https://unrcpd.org/wps/wcm/connect/0e5806804648e7c5ac92ec2c2f7c7c53/Civil+Society+and+ECOWAS+Convention.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=0e5806804648e7c5ac92ec2c2f7c7c53

Berman, E. G., & Maze, K. (2016). Regional organizations and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA). United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2238/RegionalOrganizationsAndTheUNPoA.pdf

Bourne, M. (2005). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In New threats and new actors in international security (pp. 155-176). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Cisneros, P. (2019). What makes collaborative water governance partnerships resilient to policy change? A comparative study of two cases in Ecuador. *Ecology and Society*, *24*(1)

Control Arms. (2022). The ATT Monitor. https://attmonitor.org/

Coulibaly, M. (2008). From mobile crisis to human insecurity: Tracing the diffusion of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. Security and Defense Studies Review, 8(1), 197-237.

ECOWAS. (2006). ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials. https://www.poa-iss.org/RegionalOrganizations/ECOWAS/ECOWAS%20Convention%202006.pdf

ECOWAS. (2008). ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. https://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1-en-28012013-ECPF-ENG-ENGLISH.pdf

ECOWAS. (2016). ECOWAS Programme on Small Arms and Light Weapons. https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-sectors/free-movement/ecowas-small-arms/

Florquin, N., & King, B. (2018). From legal obligations to policy opportunities: Enhancing civilian control and oversight of armed forces in West Africa. Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper. https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP3-Civilian-Control-Armed-Forces-West-Africa.pdf

Geneva Declaration Secretariat. (2015). Global burden of armed violence 2015: Every body counts. http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2015.html

Hersman, R. K., Williams, H., & Claeys, S. (2022). *Integrated Arms Control in an Era of Strategic Competition*. Rowman & Littlefield

Humanity & Inclusion. (2022). Armed Violence. https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/armed-violence

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2022). Armed Violence and the Victims. https://www.icrc.org/en/armed-violence-and-victims

Kytömäki, E. (2015). The Arms Trade Treaty and Human Security. Cross-cutting Benefits of Accession and Implementation, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London.

Lamb, G., & Dye, D. (2009). Civil society role in strengthening control over SALW in the Western Balkans. Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford.

Nabatchi, T., & Emerson, K. (2021). Implementation in collaboration governance. In *Handbook of collaborative public management* (pp. 402-420). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Oxfam. (2007). Africa's missing billions: International arms flows and the cost of conflict. Oxfam Briefing Paper, 107. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/africas-missing-billions-international-arms-flows-and-the-cost-of-conflict-123908

Schroeder, M. (2011). Small arms, large impacts: Copening with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. BICC Brief, 48. https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/brief48.pdf

Small Arms Survey. (2022). About the Small Arms Survey. https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). (2020). Illicit small arms and light weapons continue to undermine peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. https://www.un.org/disarmament/update/illicit-small-arms-and-light-weapons-continue-to-undermine-peace-and-security-in-west-africa-and-the-sahel/

United Nations. (2001). Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. https://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/192.48%20ATT%20Systems%20%20Programme%20of%20Action.pdf

United Nations. (2005). International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons. https://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/international_instrument.pdf

United Nations. (2013). Arms Trade Treaty. https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/att/