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Silencing the guns, killing governance: Rhetoric and reality in Africa's quest for safe neighbourhood for Agenda 2063

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Abstract

Drawing on documentary evidence sourced from online materials and reports, this article examines the African Union's silencing the guns by 2020 (STGIA2020) initiative. Specifically, it assesses the initiative in the context of the continent's quest for safe neighbourhood for Agenda 2063. It notes that the implementation of the initiative and other roadmaps aimed at silencing the guns in Africa have been fraught with monumental challenges, chief among being pervasive governance deficits, which have continued to create condition for structural violence in many countries. It argues that as long as the state structures that have, over the years, nurtured structural violence and mal-governance persist in Africa, the projection of safe neighbourhood envisaged in agenda 2063 is likely to remain a pipe dream. It concludes that silencing the guns in Africa initiative may just be rhetoric by African leaders to mask the reality of state failure, pervasive structural violence and governance deficits in Africa.

Keywords: *peace, security, conflicts, governance, Agenda 2063*

Introduction

In the last two and half decades, African leaders, through the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (later the African Union), had launched many initiatives towards managing and preventing violent conflicts, promoting democratic governance and enhancing human security (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2020:50). Despite these multilateral efforts, however, many countries remain trapped in violent conflicts of various shapes and sizes resulting from struggles over power, identities, resources and citizenship (Okumu et al, 2020:1). It may have been against this background that African leaders framed the new agenda for the continent's long-term development-Agenda 2063 (AU, 2015). At its launch in 2013, African leaders, beyond affirming their supports for greater African unity agenda, expressed their commitments to address conflicts and wars on the continent by 2020 in order 'not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans (AU, 2013).

Perhaps, realizing that the goals of Agenda 2030 and 2063 may be unattainable in the atmosphere of pervasive insecurity and violent conflicts, the leaders declared their desires to banish violent conflicts from the continent by 2020 (Okumu et al, 2020:1). Nomenclatured as "Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020-STGIA2020-initiative", the new project does not only aim to address the root causes of violent conflicts in Africa but also seek to silence the guns from Africa by 2020. Interestingly, since its adoption, various

programmes and implementation frameworks, chief among which being the 2016 Lusaka Master Roadmap, have been operationalized by actors purportedly geared towards realizing STGIA2020 agenda.

However, based on observable reality, as at 2020, the year initially earmarked for the achievement of the goals, there are no convincing indicators that the much publicized vision is close to being realized. Why? This is the core problematic of this article. Drawing from documents, online materials and reports, this article critically examines AU's silencing the guns initiative in the context of the continent's quest for violent-free neighbourhood for Agenda 2060. Specifically, this article engages issues and contentions in the AU's STGIA2020 agenda. It situates the research problematic within the context of research on the character of governance as undercurrent of pervasive violent conflicts in Africa and build on existing arguments which hold that governance is the bulwark against behaviours that could trigger violent conflicts.

In order to achieve the foregoing objectives, the article has been organized into six thematic sections. Following this introduction, which presents the article's significance and focus, is section two which surveys extant literatures' contribution to research on SALW proliferation

and pervasive violent conflicts in Africa. The emphasis is to show how SALW proliferation and its antinomies have become major stumbling blocks to sustainable peace and development in Africa. The third section examines and discusses the background to and content of AU's Agenda 2063 via STGIA2020. The next section highlights the seeming achievements of STGIA2020 in the context of prevailing realities. In the section that follows, an attempt is made to engage contextual issues and realities in the AU's silencing the guns initiative and the prospect for a safe neighbourhood for Agenda 2063. The sixth section draws on informed conclusion from the arguments in the article.

SALW Proliferation and Violent Conflicts in Africa: A Literature Review

In addendum to governance deficit, which as it would soon be shown to be the central driver of pervasive violent conflicts in Africa, guns (SALW) proliferation has also been implicated as a key incubator of violent conflicts (AU, 2003; Bah, 2004; Keili, 2008; Otuya, 2009). Here, a clarification of the concept "SALW" is germane. SALW, according to the ECOWAS Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition and Related Materials, is defined as weapons designed for personal use, such as firearms, destructive devices such as exploding bombs and explosive, hand grenades, rock launchers, revolvers and pistols with

automatic loading, gas bombs, rifles and carbines, assault rifles and light machine gun, pump action shotgun, AK47 and other varieties of sub-machine guns (ECOWAS, 2006).

Really, extant literatures on the "guns" dimension of violent conflicts in Africa are replete with various analyses of trends, manifestations and impact of SALW proliferation on violent conflicts. Many scholars have studied epochal global trends that have spurred excessive availability of SALW driving violent conflicts. For instance, Stemmet (2001) implicates the rampaging force of globalization as the trigger of increasing availability of SALW to conflict zones. Specifically, the author contends that the changes wrought on the inter-state system by globalization provided avenue for easy networking of arms dealers, easy procurement and transportation of arms, illicitly, across national borders. Reinforcing Stemmet's contention, Alimba (2019:208) avers, "globalization expanded the arms market and created room for the emergence of sophisticated arms brokers. With the sheer number of companies producing arms rising, production of arms also increased". Lending credence to the view of Stemmet and Alimba, Kytomaki (2015) argues that the liberal atmosphere created by the forces of neo-liberal globalization, following the end of the Cold War, contributed to proliferations of small arms with implications for intra-state violent conflicts.

From a different perspective, some scholars link increasing proliferation of SALW in Africa and

other regions of the world to burgeoning number of ungoverned spaces. Tar (2013), Ishola (2018) and Eselebor (2013) for instance attribute increasing arms proliferation in West Africa and the Sahel region to the collapse of the Ghadaffi regime in Libya. The trios contend that by the collapse, SALW found their ways into the hands of rebels that deploy them to stoke instabilities in the region. As Ishola (2018:270) opines, “the weapons from Northern Africa infiltrated into Northern Nigeria and strengthened the capacity of the Boko Haram group, who was offered training and combat resources to prosecute a medium scale war against the Nigerian state forces”. In a similar vein, Okeke and Orji (2014) link proliferations of SALW and rising incidences of violent conflicts and crimes in the Northern part of Nigeria to ungoverned spaces in the area. Equally, Fall (2005) argues that ungoverned spaces and poorly marked border have escalated the flow of illicit arms across West Africa with attendant consequences for the security of the region.

From another perspective, growing local/artisanal production of small arms have also been studied by scholars to have contributed to proliferation of arms and burgeoning of violent conflicts in Africa. Okolie-Osemene and Aghalino (2013), for instance, contend that local arms fabrication in the last three decades has been a huge business in the Eastern part of Nigeria and has in small measures contributed to increasing criminal activities in the region. Assanvo (2017), in a

recent work, argues that local blacksmiths in many parts of Africa have turned into “gunsmiths” and thereby making violence cheap.

Suffice to stress however that irrespective of the perspective, generally in literature, SALW (guns) proliferations are implicated as incubators of violent conflicts in Africa. Indeed, recently, there has been a flurry of empirical literatures on the link between small arms proliferations and violent conflicts in Africa (Bankale, 2016). For instance, Bahati (2009) posits that arms proliferation undermines peace, reconciliation, safety and sustainable economic development. Joining issue with Bahati, Alimba (2019:212) avers that, “it will be difficult for peace to flourish and be sustained in a place filled to the brim with arms”. The foregoing perhaps informs the submissions of Stohl and Myescough (2007) and Bourne et al (2006) where they appear to have advanced the arguments that inextricably linked rising incidences of violent conflicts and crimes in Africa to proliferations of small arms.

AU’s Agenda 2063 via STGIA2020: Navigating the Background and Content

Suffice to stress that the process leading to the adoption Agenda 2063 and STGIA2020 by the highest decision-making organ of the AU could in its remove origin be traced to the early 1990s. This was when African leaders began to link the reality of peace and development (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2020:54). Prior to this era, the

security environment of the continent was characterized by extreme militarism and statism in which various national regimes defended national sovereignties within the context of Cold War politics and diplomacy. To be sure, the OAU, formed in 1963 to promote economic integration in line with the pan-Africanist agenda, paid lip service to liberal peace agenda (Leininger, 2014: 5). In fact, while this era lasted, issues of intra-state violent conflicts were regarded as falling within purview of internal affairs of states. Even when armed conflicts did occur within and between states, OAU rather deployed the instrumentalities of mediation, conciliation and arbitration to deal with such (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2020:54).

Indeed, prior to the 1990s, when regional peace-keeping initiatives were institutionalized by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the idea of rapid intervention force in the internal affairs of member States was frowned at by the OAU and its members (see Franke, 2006). There was however a paradigm shift in the early 1990s as the OAU and African leaders began to see the issue of African insecurity beyond safeguarding state sovereignty (see Muyangwa. and Vogt, 2000). Perhaps, it was realized that sustainable development is better assured in an atmosphere of peace and stability. To this end, starting with the 1991 All African Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation (ACSSDC) held in Kampala, Uganda, various initiatives aimed at re-crafting the continent's

security architecture was imitated (Franke, 2006:10).

As a follow up, in a Report submitted to the OAU Summit meeting in 1992 and titled, "Proposal for Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", OAU's Secretary General, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, made some radical recommendations bordering on conflict resolution in Africa. Interestingly, chief among the recommendations was the replacement of the OAU's ad-hoc, ineffective conflict management approach within an institutionalized framework. The recommendations of this Report, which was accepted by the OAU leaders, formed the basis for the establishment, in 1992, of the OAU's first ever Comprehensive Security Framework since its existence. This was the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (see Echezons and Duru, 2005).

This new framework may have unlocked a series of activities that heralded the transformation of OAU, into a new Organization (African Union), that prioritizes human security above State Sovereignty in 2000 (Derso, 2012:2). As Okumu et al (2020:) aver, "the evolution of the OAU into the AU in 2002 was also partly informed by the weaknesses of the AU in the face of conflicts and other forms of insecurity on the continent". To be sure, at the centre of the new agenda was a development and regional integrative frameworks that are anchored on peace and security. In the preamble to the AU Constitutive Act, African leaders affirmed that, "conscious of

the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda” (AU, 2000).

Although, the Constitutive Act was primarily concerned with establishing new organizational structure for the continental body but, nevertheless, it stipulated numerous provisions which aimed at promoting liberal peace and good governance. For instance, Article 3 (g) states that AU seeks, “to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance” (AU, 2000). To implement this objective and other liberal peace norms, the highest organ of AU launched a general policy framework-African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). According to Derso (2012:28), APSA has two components: the normative and institutional dimensions. The former, the normative frameworks, encapsulates principles that re-define sovereignty and intervention. It also teases out a new security regime which is anchored on human rights and democracy promotion in AU member States. According to its base document, security is viewed as entailing “both the traditional, state-centric notion of the survival of the state and its protection by military means from external aggression, as well as the non-military notion which is informed by the new international environment and the high incidence of intra-state conflict” (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2020:54). The point being made here is that

threats to democracy and human rights are now framed as constituting threats to security of African states.

The institutional dimension of APSA is anchored on the Peace and Security Council (PSC), established by the 2002 PSC Protocol. Like the UNSC, PSC is the permanent authority for dealing with conflicts on the continent. It was created as a “collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa” (AU, 2002). With supporting institutions like the AU Commission, Panel of the Wise, Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), African Standby Force (ASF) and Special Fund, PSC manages conflicts in Africa.

Perhaps realizing the monumental threats posed by increasing proliferations of small arms to sustainable peace and development in the continent as envisaged in the 2000 Constitutive Act, African leaders would appear to have begun to weave the conflict management agenda around dealing with the scourge. The new thinking seemed to have found policy expression in Aspiration 4 of the Agenda 2063 and to be realized through STGIA2020 (Okumu et al, 2020:1). To be sure, this was against the background of the AU’s leaders’ convictions that peace and stability were fundamental towards realizing the 2063 aspirations. It would be recalled that AU leaders, at the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the

OAU, agreed on Agenda 2063. In the Declaration, the leaders while acknowledging past successes and challenges, rededicated themselves to the continent's accelerated development and technological progress (AUC, 2015a). Its central vision was, "to build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven and managed by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena" (AUC, 2015a). As a people-driven initiative, Agenda 2063 was to translate the central vision into concrete objectives, milestones, goals, targets and actions/measures. It seeks seven (7) aspirations to be achieved by 2063 vis:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
2. An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance;
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
4. A peaceful and secure Africa;
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics;
6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth; and
7. Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner (AUC, 2015).

Beyond all of these, the Vision Document also imposes some obligations on stakeholders at

national, regional and continental levels using results framework provided in the Ten-Year Plan as its basis¹. As regards the member-states, they are to:

- adopt/integrate Agenda 2063 and the associated Ten Year Implementation Plans into their national visions and plans;
- use the national planning systems-structures for implementation monitoring and evaluation, methodologies, systems and processes, rules and regulations, forms and formats in the execution of Agenda 2063;
- develop policy guidelines on the design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation by various stakeholders;
- ensure that the Legislature adopts Agenda 2063 as the blue print for Africa's social, economic and political development in the next 50 years;
- encourage all political parties/private candidates use Agenda 2063 as a basis for preparing their political manifestos (AUC, 2015b).

The RECs are to:

- adopt Agenda 2063 and its associated Ten Year Implementation Plans as the basis for developing their regional visions and plans;
- serve as focal points for the facilitation of the adoption, implementation, monitoring

¹ Each stakeholder will have specific responsibility, and the Plan will be reviewed at each five-year interval.

and evaluation of all continental frameworks related to Agenda 2063 by Member States of the Union;

- organize annual fora for Member States to review regional implementation performance (monitoring and evaluation) on Agenda 2063;
- report annually to the AU Assembly on regional implementation, monitoring and evaluation of The First Ten Year Plan;
- facilitate/coordinate/support the resource mobilization and capacity development initiatives of Members States for the Ten Year Plan implementation (AU, 2015b).

For the AU organs:

- The African Union Commission will be the body to follow up the formulation and adoption of decisions on Agenda 2063. These decisions / policies will cover – the 50 year Agenda; the 10 year plans; guidelines on implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- The AUC will organize annual consultation(s) between the AU Organs and the RECs on implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2063.
- The AUC/NEPAD will ensure the formulation of policies and frameworks for the assessment of RECs and national capacities for the execution of Agenda 2063 at the inception and mid-term review of every 10 Year Plan.
- The AUC will provide a continental framework/strategy/platform for the

mobilisation of resources for the implementation of the Ten Year Plan by Member States of the Union.

- The Pan African Parliament (PAP) will hold annual consultations with the African Legislatures on the progress towards the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2063.
- The Economic, Social and Cultural Commission (ECOSOCC) will hold bi-annual consultations with the Member States Focal Groups for Agenda 2063.
- The AUC/NEPAD Coordinating Agency will follow up on the implementation of continental programmes/projects (AUC, 2015b).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the 2060 Agenda as stipulated in the Vision document contain many provisions that, if implemented by the concerned stakeholders, could provide dividends associated with sustainable peace and development in Africa. All these cannot be comprehensively examined as that is outside the scope of this article but those related to STIGIA2020 are highlighted. Specifically, Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 restates the desire for a peaceful continent and building functioning mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts at all levels. In addendum, it affirms promoting a culture of peace and tolerance among children and youth, and of harmony at grass-roots level so that the management of diversity is a source of wealth and social and economic transformation

(Okumu et al, 2020:3). It was envisaged that by 2063, Africa shall have:

- an entrenched and flourishing culture of human rights, democracy, gender equality, inclusion and peace;
- Prosperity, security and safety for all citizens; and
- Mechanisms to promote and defend the continent's collective security and interests (AUC, 2015a).

Still further, it aspired that:

- Africa shall be free from armed conflict, terrorism, extremism, intolerance and gender-based violence, which are major threats to human security, peace and development.
- The continent will be drugs-free, with no human trafficking, where organized crime and other forms of criminal networks, such as the arms trade and piracy, are ended. Africa shall have ended the illicit trade in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
- Africa shall promote human and moral values based on inclusion and the rejection of all forms of terrorism, religious extremism and other forms of intolerance, irrespective of their motivations.
- Africa will have the capacity to secure peace and protect its citizens and their interests, through common defence, foreign and security policies (AUC, 2015a).

In furtherance of the foregoing goals, a flagship initiative-STGIA2020-was initiated by the AU

leaders in 2013. It envisaged that by 2020, all guns would have been silenced and all conflicts emanating from ethnic, religious, cultural diversity and all forms of social exclusion would have been eliminated. It was also expected that by 2020, national and other mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts would be in place (Okumu et al, 2020:1).

Journeying towards STGIA2020

Unarguably, African statesmen, diplomats and other stakeholders, like their counterparts in other regions of the Global South, have a good record in expressing strong and open commitments to implementing long-term developmental visions (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2017:159). As such, Agenda 2063, through the instrumentality of STGIA2020, was therefore no exception. Indeed, since its adoption as a flagship programme of the Agenda 2063 by the AU Assembly of Heads of States in 2013, there has been a flurry of activities on the parts of stakeholders purportedly geared towards silencing the guns by 2020. To be sure, stakeholders arguably, even though marginal, have made efforts and put in place a robust framework towards STGIA2020. In the first place, the Lusaka Master Roadmap, through the auspices of the AUC and adopted in 2016, has translated the STGIA2020 policy initiative into a number of component challenges (AU, 2016). This appeared to have been a major step towards achieving the enumerated goals. As Okumu et al (2020:23) note,

due to the lack of clarity of the concept of silencing the guns, the nature of the tasks in their expanded form help African policymakers understand what achieving the goals to silence the guns entails. This should guide existing oversight mechanisms and institutions to identify key actions and entities to partner and engage with in their efforts. It is also important in guiding the actions of national and regional contributions as well as securing the buy-in of civil society organizations (CSOs) and external development partners.

Beyond charting an implementable roadmap, great efforts would also appear to have been expended in dealing with SALW proliferation challenges. To be sure, in 2017, AU launched a campaign for the collection of illicit weapons circulating across national frontiers in September each year till 2020 (Okumu et al, 2020:26). It was nomenclatured as the African Amnesty Month (AAM). Indeed, in furtherance of this, AUC developed a preliminary guiding document on the implementation of the AAM. Again, the same body undertook a mapping of the proliferation of illicit weapons across Africa which was subsequently endorsed by the PSC on 18th July 2017 (PSC, 2019).

At the highest level of the AU, the Assembly of Head of State initiated an agenda that called for naming and shaming of individuals involved in the supply, storage and finance of illicit weapons (PSC, 2019). Suffice to stress that

beyond efforts at curtailing the proliferation of “guns”, the key component units would also appear to have made appreciable progress. For instance, the Panel of the Wise and the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) have improved on the AU’s mediation process and thus contributed in playing important roles in preventing conflicts (PSC, 2019). Furthermore, numerous appointments have been effected by the AU authorities to create structures needed for the implementation of STGIA2020. For instance on 4th July 2017, the Assembly of Heads of States established in a novel structure: Femwise-Africa (Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation). It was charged to, “to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of APSA” (AU, 2017).

Other offices identified to have been created by Okumu et al (2020:24) in their recent study include:

- STGIA2020 Coordinating Unit in the office of the Chairperson of the AU.
- High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa.
- Special Adviser to the Commissioner for Peace and Security on Silencing the Guns.
- Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) with the mandate of promoting women’s voices in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

STGIA2020 Initiative: Issues and Contentions

As teased out in the previous sections of this article, African leaders have not been bereft of ideas and initiatives in finding solutions to African security problems. More specifically with the STGIA2020 discussed earlier. Nonetheless, the rising proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the increasing open displays of such weapons by the youths in the various conflicts zones suggest that the goal of silencing the guns is still a tall order. As the AU's PSC itself reports in a communiqué issued at end of its 824th meeting held on 5 February 2019, "the illicit flow of arms, particularly small arms and light weapons (SALW), to non-state actors contributes significantly towards exacerbating insecurity and violence in various parts of Africa, thereby undermining social cohesion, public security, socio-economic development and the effective functioning of state institutions" (PSC, 2019). Reinforcing this submission, Okumu et al (2020:20) aver, "Africa is neither closer to silencing the guns nor eliminating the conditions that contribute to the possession and use of guns". This raises an apt question: any prospect for safe neighbourhood in Africa towards realizing Agenda 2063?

However, it has to be stressed that foretelling any developmental programme in Africa is often a daunting task. This is more so for inter-governmental organization like the AU whose members are yet to make any significant impact

on governance. This notwithstanding, our thesis is here is that given the governance deficits and the political realities on ground in virtually all regions in Africa, which may have informed the failure to meet the STGIA2020 target, coupled with African leaders' perchance for rhetoric, the prospect for safe neighbourhood for 2063 Agenda is rather slim. Specifically, this may be unconnected to the reality that certain contextual factors that have individually and collectively worked against previous visions and programmes are still at play and may likely not disappear.

One, most initiatives, including the STGIA2020 which seek to banish guns from Africa by 2020, are hardly properly conceptualized. This often heralds divergent interpretations and understandings which tend to create confusion in implementation. For instance, the idea of silencing the guns which informed STGIA2020 initiative is nebulous because it could not clearly distinguish between eliminating the conditions triggering guns and those reducing guns alone. Related to this is the fact that the project itself does not capture the reality of human nature as it would appear to have assumed that violence is only perpetuated by "guns"; whereas other weapons could still be available to conflict non-state actors even when all the guns are eliminated (BBC, 2018). In the words of Okumu et al (2020:28), "it is not enough to only address people's motives for acquiring and using guns, since they will pick up other types of weapons to fight each other

when they disagree, if guns are removed from society”.

Linked to the conceptual ambiguities in the definitions of most initiatives/projects is the issue of institutional capacities. Oftentimes, AU lacks the capacity to enforce some of its programmes and projects. For instance, the units within the AUC charged with the responsibility of operationalizing STGIA2020 has been reported to have challenges of working with others (Okumu et al, 2020:29). Even in larger context, the ASF floated since 2003 is yet to be deployed for operational purposes (Franke, 2006). Another critical issue that is germane for analysis is the low appetite of member states to contribute most of the OAU/AU projects and programmes. This is often connected to the fact certain decisions reached on behalf of member states are often seen as constituting threats to national sovereignty and such treated with kid gloves.

At this juncture, it must be stressed that while the foregoing contextual issues and factors are no doubt real and might offer explanatory framework for unearthing the challenges of silencing the guns in Africa, our contention is that they cannot be divorced from the issue of governance deficits in Africa, which have continued to reinforce structural violence and other antimonies that have contributed to arms proliferations (Khadiagala, 2015). Although, it may be undeniable that attempts, as hinted earlier, have not been made by the OAU/AU

leaders in the last three decades, to put in place governance architecture; yet, the state of governance generally in Africa has been appalling (Crocker, 2019). As John Mbaku (2020:1) notes, “Africa has a long way to go. Too many countries have yet to achieve the type of reforms that can prevent dictatorships, corruption and economic decline”. To be sure, governance deficits have manifested in human development crisis that have afflicted many countries in the region (UNDP, 2018). On the specific issue of poverty, there has been a substantial decline in the share of people living in extreme poverty in the last two decades. As one source reports, the number of Africans living in poverty has actually increased from 278 million in 1990 to 415 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2019).

What the foregoing suggests is that beyond rhetoric, in reality, the African states which should be the purveyors of governance have failed to meet the needs of the citizens. Indeed, as the African states descend into incapacitations, the state of governance degenerates further into the abyss, leading to citizens’ alienation (see Ninalowo, 2010). Consequently, citizens are forced to develop and invent all forms of coping strategies to deal with the situation. Interestingly, while some may resort to exiting the state as Osaghae (1999) notes, other may adopt non-civil approach to dealing with the situation by outright confrontation with the state via armed conflicts

(Adejoh, 2018:122). The point being made here is that African states themselves create conditions for “guns” proliferations and violent conflicts. It may therefore be posited that at the centre crisis of arms proliferations in Africa are the states themselves, which have not only failed in terms of discharging governance but have also created conditions for pervasive violent conflicts.

Sadly, in spite of their weaknesses, predatory and agent provocateur character, their custodians, incidentally the drafters of the various visionary initiatives, inclusive of STGIA2020, are interested in their preservation. This may be unconnected to the almost limitless opportunities they offer their custodians to deploy states’ awesome powers for the purpose of primitive accumulation within their territories (see Ake, 2000). It may therefore be posited that beyond the rhetoric of occasional declarations and pronouncements by African leaders through the OAU/AU, such as silencing the guns, lies the hidden force of leaders’ self preservation.

Concluding Remarks

This article set out to examine AU’s silencing the guns initiative in the context of the continent’s quest for violent-free neighbourhood for Agenda 2060. In furtherance of this objective, it reviewed literature on context, dimension and impact of SALW on the terrain of violent conflict in Africa. Most importantly, it analyzed the key provisions in the Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 and that of STGIA2020. Based

on these reviews and analysis, it noted that in spite of the STGIA initiatives, arms proliferation sector continues to blossom in Africa. This is attributable to a legion of factors, chief among which is the governance deficits in many countries which have continued to create condition for structural violence. It is concluded that as long as the state structures that have, over the years, nurtured structural violence and mal-governance persist, the projection of safe neighbourhood envisaged in agenda 2063 is likely to remain a pipe dream. To this end, the idea of silencing the guns in Africa may just be rhetoric by African leaders and policy makers to mask the reality of state failure, pervasive structural violence and governance deficits in Africa.

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