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TRANS-BORDER CRIMES: IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The emergent challenges of trans-border crime have become a contentious issue that has gained credence in modern scholarship. The porous nature of Africa's national boundaries coupled with the post-colonial states bequeathed to Africans at independence with its cross-cutting cleavages has made the continent prone to this menace. The inability of state managers to provide good governance and allocate scarce resources equitably to the wellbeing of all citizens has further alienated the masses thereby eroding their confidence on the capacity of the government to proactively ameliorate and perhaps, eradicate their suffering. Hence, a large army of unemployed youths have engaged themselves in illicit activities which cut across national boundaries to survive. These scenarios are prevalent in West Africa where many unemployed youths have engaged in drug trafficking, cybercrime, human trafficking, hostage taking, kidnapping and abduction. These nefarious activities grossly undermine both human and national security. This paper is centered on trans-border crimes specific to the Seme border with reliance on secondary data to examine the impact and implication of this imperil on both human and national security of Nigeria. The study revealed that several factors are responsible for crimes across the borders concluding that good governance and a more effective border management strategy amongst others are prerequisites for the preservation of human and national security. The study recommends that proactive measures must be undertaken by the government in addressing these problems. Good governance should be entrenched so as to open up political and economic space. The government should provide an enabling environment through the establishment of empowerment programs for youths. Friendly policies should be made so as to enable private businesses to thrive thus leading to massive employment.

Keywords: Border, Border Security, Crimes, National Security, Nigeria, Trans-Border

Introduction

For decades, trans-border crime has posed a serious threat to the national security of several countries across the world, including Nigeria. In the West African sub-region, trans-border crime has been identified as one of the major challenges requiring the joint efforts of individuals, groups, organizations and governments to

address (Ola, 2012). Nigeria shares boundaries with four countries; Benin Republic to the West, Chad and Niger to the North and Cameroon to the East (Nte, 2011). Despite the efforts of border security agents, Nigeria's borders have been regarded as porous because of the several threats that transcend the borders (Alemika, 2013). Threats that transcend the borders include small arms and light weapons smuggling,

corruption, fraud, contraband goods smuggling, human and drug trafficking, among others (Aluede, 2017). These illegal operations have fostered a worrisome situation that has had serious implications for Nigeria's socioeconomic, political, and psychological well-being (Nte, 2011). It has reduced productivity and brought about financial setbacks to Nigeria's economic growth.

In spite of the efforts by successive governments to curb criminal activities across borders with the support of agencies and foreign governments, many of these illegal activities persist. Hence, without doubt these criminal activities have negatively impacted on government activities, depleting scarce national resources that could have been used to provide basic amenities and engender developments such as medical or health care and educational facilities, housing, income, and other infrastructure but are instead used to combat crime (Aluede, 2017). Nonetheless, it can be said that the national security problems Nigeria experiences due to trans-border crimes are made more complex by an increasing level in corruption, lack of good governance, poverty, unemployment and so on. In order to combat organized crime across borders, there is need for a strong institutional mechanism and constitutionalism, an enabling environment that would empower youths by creating job opportunities must also be fostered with friendly policies by the Nigerian government otherwise, a narrowly focused militaristic approach to the control of organized crime will be ineffective (Wali, 2010). It is upon this background that this study seeks to discuss the impact and implication of trans-border crime on the national security of Nigeria as well as the way forward.

Conceptual Clarification

National Security

There is no universally acceptable definition of the concept of national security. However, several scholars have attempted to conceptualize the term. National security as a concept emerged in the United States of America in the aftermath of the World War II. Initially focusing on military might but now encompassing a broad variety of features that determine a nation's non-

military or economic security (Uche, 2015). National security refers to the totality of all individuals', communities', ethnic groups' and political entities' security interests in order to ensure the safety and security as well as the prosperity of persons and institutions within a country (Jegede, 2019).

Trans-Border Crimes

It would be difficult to describe or define trans-border crime because various factors have been identified as comprising it. Trans-border crime refers to a variety of illegal or criminal operations, carried out across national or international boundaries by individuals or groups for economic or financial gain as well as socio-political or religious reasons (Folami & Naylor, 2017). These criminal operations carried out beyond state or international borders by individuals, groups and organizations include small arms and light weapon smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, kidnapping, money laundering etc (Folami & Naylor, 2017).

The Seme Border

The Seme border is situated between Badagry town in Nigeria and Ogligbo in Badagry and Karate village in Benin republic. It is a settlement that shares about 1,000 km between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin linking other ECOWAS countries via Benin to Nigeria. The Seme border is significant and regarded as a vital channel for better regional integration within ECOWAS (Opanike, 2015). Seme border links Nigeria with Benin, functioning as a major trade channel. This is because of the prominence of Nigeria, which has become a major trading hub in West Africa with its enormous and increasingly rising national consumer market (Blum, 2014).

Additionally, within the ECOWAS region the seme border provides the most direct road linkage between ECOWAS countries' and Nigeria (Deen-Swarrray, Adekunle & Odularu, 2012). The Seme border serves as a point of departure for roads, linking some countries like Burkina Faso in the hinterland to the ports. These countries derive the majority of their foreign exchange

from re-export and transit (Golub, 2012) thus causing a bigger market irrespective of their geographical disadvantage. The Seme border on the other hand, gives Nigerian traders access to trade agricultural products and fabrics among other goods developed locally in regional markets (Njikam & Tchouassi, 2011). Given the significance of the Seme border in ensuring trade relations amongst ECOWAS countries, the Nigerian government in 2009 with the backing of the ECOWAS, the World Bank, neighboring countries etc. began reconstructing the road leading to the Seme border crossing. The goal was to minimize the trading costs and also to ensure better regional integration through trans-border trade.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories like the failed states theory, fragile states theory, securitization theory and systems theory etc can be applicable to this study. However, for the purpose of this research, the fragile states theory would be considered as a theoretical basis for explaining the impacts and implications of trans-border crimes on the national security of Nigeria.

Fragile States Theory

The fragile states theory is used as a theoretical basis for this study. The major proponent of the theory is Patrick Shaw and the main assumption of the theory is that national environments that are unable to fulfill critical government roles such as providing conducive and long-lasting economic environment, establishing and developing credible formal organizations, preventing violent conflicts, protection of national boundaries, meeting basic needs and safeguarding citizens' constitutional rights are weak and thus vulnerable to oppression (Patrick, 2007). Despite continuous discussion over whether the label of "fragility" is a viable, relevant, or equitable description for these states, (Anten, Briscoe & Mezerra, 2012) contend that the concept of a group of developing nations where governmental institutions fail to deliver basic public goods has been prevalent. He notes that there are two components of 'fragility' namely capacity

and legitimacy. Capacity here refers to the ability of the state to provide public goods and services as well as the protection of citizen's rights whereas 'legitimacy' refers to the ability of a state to have its authority fully recognized, acknowledged, and exercised throughout its territory. Hence a state is said to be fragile if it lacks the above (Anten, Briscoe & Mezerra, 2012).

However, the relevance of the fragile states theory in analyzing trans-border crimes and national security in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized because the inability of the Nigerian government to effectively contain threats to its national security as a result of trans-border crimes has resulted in a situation in which the state, rather than being the framework for lawful order and the highest sovereign source of governing authority has become the greatest enemy and threat to itself.

Methodology

This research paper adopts qualitative content analysis to analyze secondary sources on the impacts and implications of trans-border crimes on the national security of Nigeria with specific reference to the Seme border. Secondary sources of data collection included journals, conference papers, newspapers, textbooks and dissertations. The study utilized content analysis approach to analyze, study and interpret the data collected in order to arrive at informed judgments and critical conclusions from the sources mentioned above.

Some Factors that Encourage Trans-Border Crime in Nigeria

1. Border Porosity

The porosity of the Seme border is one of the major challenges to the national security of Nigeria. The porous nature of the border continues to contribute and promote trans-border illegal activities as well as regional instability (Aning & Pokoo, 2014). This has encouraged an increased rate in illegal trading activities such as smuggling of adulterated drugs, contra bands goods, and stolen cars including cars that are above the prescribed use limit in Nigeria as well as poultry

products, shoes and many more. The Seme border has encouraged human trafficking of individuals who are used for domestic purposes. Young girls are used for prostitution across Nigeria, Benin and perhaps other neighboring countries for various forms of exploitative labor (UNODC, 2015). Seme border also serves as a major transit route for both migrants and immigrants entering and leaving Nigeria illegally, and for drug traffickers, arms smuggling and other illicit products (Onuoha, 2013). There have also been instances where criminals from neighboring countries have tormented Nigerian citizens and have escaped thereafter because of the porous nature of the Seme border (Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016). Studies show that villagers and residents within Seme border and neighboring communities usually help criminals through illegal routes that are unknown to and unguarded by security officials (Lahav, 2013).

2. Corruption (The nexus between corruption and insecurity)

Corruption has ripped through the very core of Nigerian society, making most institutions vulnerable, attracting and feeding a wide range of international threats. Corruption breeds insecurity and serves as a breeding ground for criminal organizations and activities (Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016). The lack of a working criminal justice system, some of which are very vulnerable to corruption as well as the inability of governmental institutions to effectively regulate borders and many ungoverned spaces are among the reasons why some countries of the world attract criminal activities in which Nigeria is no exception (Oyebanji, 2017). The same array of institutional flaws makes Nigeria vulnerable to terrorist attacks. There is a vast range of transnational illegal behavior. Much has been written and said about the connections between them. The corrupt practices of the Nigerian government officials as well as those of border security operatives pose a serious threat to the national security of Nigeria. Contributing negatively to border security has been the corrupt and unethical dealings of border security officials. A number of government officials are wholly responsible for bringing arms and munitions into the

country. It is argued that state customs personnel put in a lot of effort to get to the border, where state restrictions on clearing goods are easily disregarded (Chikwanha, 2008). This is evident in the drive distance between Badagry and the Seme border which is tripled by illegal check points (Sunday & Okechukwu, 2014). It is important to note that the reason behind the mounting of these checkpoints is to extort people's money and not to check passports. The Immigration officers particularly indulge in daylight robbery (Onyekwelu, 2014). Criminals therefore easily cross borders as smugglers pay-off their way into the country. This explains the extent in which criminals involve themselves in illegal trans-border activities. The import of ammunitions into the country has heightened terrorism due to Corruption. This has led to the death of innocent Nigerians who are being killed because of the inconsistency of selfish and corrupt officials who cannot control influxes at the border (Onuoha, 2013).

3. Inadequate Border security personnel and Logistics

One of the major security challenges at the Seme border is that of inadequate governmental personnel which pose a negative threat on the security of Nigeria's national borders. Seme Border is marked without specific policies (Olanrewaju, 2015). The safe guarding of the region by the security personnel is not efficient. The insufficiency in manpower does not enhance effective surveillance of the illegal routes criminals use as means of entry (Eselebor, 2013). Owing to inadequate manpower and logistics challenges, criminals often outsmart the security operatives at the borders. For instance, there are presumptions that some members of terrorist groups in Nigeria are citizens of neighboring countries following recent security issues Nigeria is faced with (Adeyinka). This would have been impossible if the borders had adequate security operatives and logistics. Security personnel from the Customs, Immigration, FRSC, and Army are assigned on both sides of the borders to the different outpost but their operations are questionable (Olanrewaju, 2015). There is also a challenge in logistics like patrol vehicles, surveillance helicopters,

intelligence service units and limited security force personnel at the Seme border which poses a threat to national security (Iheanacho & Ohazurike, 2019).

4. Institutional Framework

ECOWAS created the Protocol on the free movement of individuals, goods and services to allow member states citizens into each other's territory with little or no difficulties. The main purpose of the Protocol is to allow for the free movement of individuals, goods and services across West Africa without a visa; implying that an ECOWAS citizen who presents a valid travel document and an internationally verified health certificate may gain access to the entire region without a visa (Ike, 2015). Though the protocol is a positive pronouncement, it however has some negative implication. The protocol allows for the mobility of criminals across the border, who under the pretext of this protocol, participate in nefarious activities. The consequence of this falls on the shoulders of Nigerians who go outside the country and are faced with humiliation because the Country's reputation is in doubt (Akinyemi, 2013). The Seme border has notably become a safe route for people without proper identification considering that the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol has been misunderstood to imply entry without valid documentation (Ike, 2015). This discrepancy presents a threat to the human security of Nigerians as the border violations call for border control reforms to be implemented.

5. Globalization

One of the remarkable manifestations of globalization which in contemporary times has had a profound effect on the national security of states is that globalisation is gradually introducing a "borderless world" (Nosiri & Ibekwe, 2017). Norrin & Paul (2010) considers national security as being directly related to the protection of a state's border. He posits that security is related to the defense of a state's boundary, and as an essential feature of every political entity. The rise of globalization with new ideas and connectivity brings national security risks, challenging the traditional

approach to be outdated and insufficient to tackle emerging threats. Globalization has positive effects as it has revolutionized transportation, communication systems etc. (Akinyemi, 2013). Globalization facilitates easy communication as well as new developments in relations between and within countries. Notwithstanding the positive results, there are still some negative consequences that continue to threaten state survival in the international system. Globalization has however made it easier for criminals to participate in covert activities (Nosiri & Ibekwe, 2017). Money, essential products and people can be easily transported across boundaries, thus making it complex to monitor criminals because of technological advances. This is an evident challenge the Seme border is faced with.

Impacts and Implications of Trans-border Crime on the National Security of Nigeria

The impacts and implications of trans-border crime on Nigeria's national security cannot be over-emphasized. These range from violence and unrest, deplorable human security situation, increased criminal activities, influx of inferior goods, proliferation of small arms and light weapons etc.

1. **Violence and Unrest-** One of the causes of unrest in Nigeria is the rise in weapon smuggling. With various criminal gangs, ethnic militias, revolutionary, rebel, and terrorist groups all in possession of large arsenals, the steady supply of illegal weaponry into the country is a serious cause for concern because of its detrimental effect on Nigeria's national security (Ojiakor, Nzewi & Arize, 2021). Because there are enough weapons to go around, people tend to utilize them for their own personal advantage. The increased prevalence of criminality, the growth of secret cults, the rise of private security, electoral and political violence all reflect and fuel a culture of violence that is closely linked to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across borders (Ojiakor, Nzewi & Arize, 2021).
2. **Increased Threat to Human Lives and Property-** Trans-border crimes have been one of

several issues impacting on Nigeria's national security. The lives and property of Nigerians have been put in jeopardy as a result of these various crimes (Zoaka, 2018). When there is a gunfight between security services and criminals, lives are lost on a regular basis, especially in towns near the border. Several times in these areas, community conflicts have resulted in the deaths of security agents and smugglers. Also, drug trafficking into the country through the Seme border puts Nigerian youths who abuse them in a position where they are psychologically affected (Nosiri & Ibekwe, 2017). They have mental disorder that encourages rape and all forms of evil. They become a menace to the society and a threat to national security.

3. **Heightened Criminal Activities-** The high rate of crime is one of the causes of conflict and has harmed Nigeria's national security. Because guns are widely available in the country, people are more inclined to use them for personal benefit, such as armed robbery and fraternity fights (Mobolaji & Alabi, 2017). Border crimes are fueling an upsurge in criminal activity on a daily basis. There have been multiple instances of criminals from neighboring nations intimidating and threatening the lives of Nigerian residents, and these criminals are easily able to flee due to the porous nature of Nigeria's border (Opanike, 2015). The ban on vehicle importation by land had a negative impact on those who work in the automobile industry. Because they had no other source of money, several of them turned to criminal activity (Mobolaji & Alabi, 2017). Influx of small and large weapons (SALW) due to the porous nature of the Seme border has continually encouraged insurgency carried out by armed robbers, terrorist groups (like Boko-Haram) etc. in the country which has denied citizens their fundamental human rights.

4. **Influx of Inferior Goods-** The growth of false and inferior health items is having a negative impact on citizens. Drugs that are unsafe to consume or have expired are smuggled into the country and sold to unwitting buyers (Abia & Ekong, 2013). Human health is jeopardized by such medications (Olanrewaju, 2015). The use of heavy drugs by

teenagers and youths has a particularly negative impact on their mental health. They have a proclivity for behaving abnormally, rendering them useless to society. This raises the number of people in psychiatric hospitals, which is bad for the country's human resources (Opanike, 2015).

5. **Economic Woes-** Trans-border crimes have diverse economic effects that have a negative impact on Nigeria's socio-economic growth particularly as a developing nation. Criminal activities discourage domestic and foreign direct investments in the country (Kazaure, 2019). It also destabilizes the Nigerian economy by altering cash demand making exchange rates volatile thus producing inflation. Contraband goods like poultry products that come into the country through the Seme border discourages the growth of small-scale business enterprises which would in turn affect the GDP of Nigeria (Opanike, 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, border, identity, territory, and human security are generally the cornerstones of national security. When a country's border fails to execute its necessary functions as a deterrent entity, it creates a gateway for various crimes that undermine our national security. From the foregoing it is evident that the impacts and implications of trans-border crimes on the national security of Nigeria are enormous. The research identified different areas of concern that facilitate trans-border crimes at the Seme border as well as the diverse impacts and implications trans-border crimes have on the national security and economic growth of Nigeria. The major concern is on the porous nature of the Seme border. This has fostered a massive influx of illicit trade activities, such as arms trading and smuggling, contraband smuggling, drug and human trafficking etc. All of these activities have led to loss of lives, property, peace and stability of the nation. It is however glaring to say that trans-border crime is a problem that, if not addressed, might cause international turmoil. This study thus recommends the following;

1. **Good governance:** For national peace and development to thrive, Good governance must manifest itself through transparency, rule of law, accountability and public participation amongst others. All of these elements and more are sine qua non to the preservation of Nigeria's national security.
2. **Youth empowerment and poverty alleviation:** Youth empowerment empowers the masses, paving way for a better future. Empowerment guarantees that youths have the skills they need to make a living, preventing them from resorting to crime. Youth empowerment has the potential to significantly increase employability, reduce poverty

rates and boost the Gross domestic product (GDP) of a nation.

3. **Advancement in technology:** As there is an increased level in crime with the advent of technology, better skills need to be put in place to address emerging challenges at the Seme border. In our effort to fight crime across the border zone, the Nigerian government must implement modern technology. Scanners, cameras, well trained sniffing dogs, helicopters; patrol vehicles among other technologies could be employed. To detect approaching threats, a watch house should be instituted with installed cameras as well as central data base equipment's.

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