



Research Paper

Security Implications of Border Crimes along the Cameroon-Nigeria Western Border 1990-2020

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ABSTRACT

In many ways than one, peripheral activities at a country's border often have implications on the entire country. This is because it is at these points of entry that raw materials for the production of goods are received or sent. At these border areas many activities that are criminal in nature often take place and usually stretch across international borders. This paper made an analysis of the implications of cross border crime along the Cameroon-Nigerian South western border on the security and economy of Cameroon. In doing this, the paper argued that though these crimes were committed at the borders of Cameroon, they had far reaching security and economic implications on Cameroon. The paper made use of the qualitative and quantitative approach to study and made use of primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources included oral interviews while secondary sources of material included textbooks, articles in journals, unpublished thesis and dissertations and material gotten the internet. The paper revealed that, security concerns ravaged border communities and mainland territory as well, there were also rising cases of insecurity and violence in schools. Economic wise, the country lost much to informal illegal trade of all kinds.

Key words: *border crimes, security, economic, implications.*

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I. Introduction

Boundaries have existed as long as mankind has existed. Thus the concept of borders is as old as the existence of mankind. Borders are human creation grounded in various ethical traditions.(Brunet, 2009,1). To Africans, the concept of physical borders was not usual and only became popular after the balkanization of Africa by European imperialist. Prior to this, political as well as cultural aspects such as language defined most boundaries. African boundaries acted more as points that united the people and not points of separation.(Funteh 2015, 5). At these points social and economic activities such as trade brought the people together where they met and did trade exchanges and had other social interactions(Takor 2009). This went ahead to strengthen the bond that united the different states.

Physical international boundaries were visible in Cameroon after 1884 when Cameroon became a German protectorate. (Nghoh 2019,82). One of the boundaries of Cameroon which underwent several changes was the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary where part of the south western borders under study is included. The making of the boundary began as early as 1886 between the Germans and the British and witnessed other changes notably as a result of the German defeat in Cameroon during the First world war, the Anglo-French Partition of Cameroon and the later the Cameroon Nigeria conflicts over the oil rich Bakassi peninsular (Nghoh, 2019, 83, 90, 336). The various border changes and other political and economic factors led to certain activities that gradually and increasingly either led to cross-border crime or aggravated it. Cameroon shared boundary with 6 countries which included Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon Equatorial Guinea and Congo. The international boundaries of Cameroon were estimated at 5018km with a coastline of 402km² (Dizian, 1976, 86). Cameroon shared the longest of her international borders with Nigeria which measured at 1975km and spanned from a trijunction up north in the Lake Chad area right down to the Bight Benin into the Atlantic ocean. As such 5 out of 10 administrative regions in Cameroon: Adamawa, Far North, North, North West and South west) shared boundaries with Nigeria while 6 of Nigeria's 36 states shared international boundaries with Cameroon. These states include: Adamawa, Akwalbom, Benue, Borno, Cross River and Taraba.

The South Western border of Cameroon which is considered for this study covers parts of the North West and South West administrative regions which share both terrestrial and maritime borders with Nigeria. Herein, mention will be made of valves of entry such as Ekok, Abongshe and Idenau. On the Nigerian side of the border are found states such as Taraba, Cross-River and Benue. The long borders with Nigeria were very porous and as such the prevalence of certain of certain crimes such as human trafficking, human smuggling, drug smuggling, arms smuggling, smuggling of both licit and illicit goods across this border line. The strategic location of Cameroon at midpoint between the West African sub region and the Central African sub-region permitted it shared its territory to be very instrumental in cross border crime because it acted both as both transit and destination for criminals and crime as well to be committed.

Conceptual clarification Borders

In defining borders Brunet (2019 1), holds that, borders are human creations grounded in various ethical traditions. He further explains that borders organised the Roman Empire according to hierarchy of spaces and this made territories to vary according to function. To Brunet, the way borders were looked upon differed from place to place. On his side, Gbeneyesimplyviews borders as adjacent areas connecting boundaries (Gbeneye 2016,117).

Significantly, the concept of border which existed with the creation of states was sustained and has evolved over time. Giuliano and Tusciatrace this concept to the initial period of no man's land where ancient hunters and gatherers protected their land without physically marking limits but each tribe understood the dangers of encroaching in to no man's land. As time went on the broader line became thinner and acted as a zone of friendly exchanges and contacts. This made borders a point that United States instead of separating them (Giuliano and Tuscia 2013,1).

Adesina (2019,2) joins the others in saying that borders are traditionally defined as international boundaries between nation states which can be artificial or natural but is in any case always artificial or a result of a consensus and agreement, conquest and peace treaty. Further to, O'Dowd in Adesina also sees borders as points that bring together states and not separate them; to him borders are places of economic and political opportunities for nations and states as well as for a host of other interested groups and agencies, legal and illegal (Ibid 2).

Interestingly, Okumu (2023,2) views borders as a region or area straddling a boundary or the area adjacent to a boundary. Boundary to him refers to a line that marks the confines or divides two contiguous territories. Borders define a country's sovereignty by determining its territory and where its administration and jurisdiction begins and ends. Asiwaju (1992,46-47) holds that border refers to the line of demarcation between any two sovereign states. He goes ahead to clarify that they are sub national areas whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary. On his part, Funteh (2015,5) regards boundaries in the African context as points of unity between states and not separation. Thus in other words he says African boundaries were usually rooted in social contract.

While not differing much with the perspectives of the different authors cited herein as regards the definition of borders, this study on its part holds that, a border is that area directly connected to the symbol of demarcation or boundary between two sovereign states and in such an area the command of the state ends and or begins.

Crime/Cross Border crime

Another concept worthy of a definition is crime. Referring to the Blackstone dictionary of law, Akwo (2009,1) quotes that crime is the violation of public rights and duties of the whole community. Akwo further cites Etouge who defined crime as 'an action or omission stated and punishable by law and imputable to its author'. It should be noted that what is considered as crime varies from society to society.

Tappan (2001, 27-36) on his part defined crime as an intentional act in violation of the criminal law (statutory and case law) committed without defence or excuse and penalized by the state as a felony or misdemeanour. Hitchler(1934,2) on his part viewed Crime as an act committed in violation of a public law forbidding or commanding. Crime is the willful and pleasurable disregard for standard norms for inordinate gains.

A third term to be defined is cross border crimes. To Onyekwelu et al,(2014, 47) cross border crimes are crimes that have actual or potential effects across national borders and crimes which are intra state but which offend fundamental values of the international community. They go ahead to say that such crimes are caused in one country but their consequences significantly affect another country and transit countries may also be involved. To Ukwayi et al (2003,13), cross border crimes include a number of illegal and notorious activities carried out by individuals and groups across national and international borders either for financial or economic benefits and also socio-political or religious considerations.

Passas(2003,13) holds that cross border crime is conduct which jeopardizes the legally protected interest in more than one national jurisdiction and which is criminalized in at least one of the states/jurisdiction concerned. In summary he says cross border crimes are acts which violate the laws of more than one country.

Following the various definitions herein, we define cross border crimes, as any willful and pleasurable acts committed in defiance of established international, regional and country laws along a country's periphery with often repercussions on neighboring countries and internal country communities as a whole.

Common crimes visible along the border Arms smuggling

The Global Initiative against crime noted that arms trafficking was one of the fastest growing markets in Cameroon (GIA,2023 4). They laid emphasis particularly on areas that were affected by violence. These were the two English speaking regions and the northern regions affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. It was also rampant in areas that shared borders with Nigeria and which were generally porous (Ibid 4).Arm smuggling is defined in accordance with the definition used in United Nations Firearms Protocol, supplementing the United Nations organised crime convention which is legally binding for states parties as "the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms in parts and components from or across the territory of one State party to that of another State party if any one of the State parties concerned does not authorize it."(Pinson 2022, 6).

Generally Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) were the arms generally smuggled into Cameroon from Nigeria through the South Western borders. These SALW were smuggled into Cameroon principally for use or for transition to other neighbouring countries. Bello and Mohammad (173) hold that arms were trafficked into Nigeria through countries like Cameroon, Benin and Chad. They equally held that, arms were smuggled into Nigeria through smugglers operating from countries like Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. In such case, Cameroon was used as a transit country principally due to its strategic location which acted both as a "blessing" to her as well as a "curse" to her. Bello (2022, 80) equally noted that the area along Cameroon's South East border with Nigeria was equally a busy transit zone for traffickers of arms from Nigeria to Equatorial Guinea via Cameroon. In this area that included border towns in Cross River, Rivers and Akwalbom states wherein women and children traffickers active in the area also trafficked SALW. Some of these traffickers it should be noted went above Nigeria into other West African States like Togo and Benin with the aid of porous borders (Biodum, 2019,36).

Human smuggling

Human smuggling was defined as the procurement in other to obtain, directly or indirectly a financial or other material benefit of the illegal entry of a person into a state party of which the person is not a national or permanent (Philip 2008,210). The practice was illegal in Cameroon and as a member of the UN signed the UN convention against transnational organised crime in 13 December 2000 and ratified it on 6 February 2006 (Baird 2013, 4). According to this convention Cameroon engaged itself to fight against human trafficking and people smuggling. In many creeks along the coastal areas in Cameroon human smuggling was a common practice. According to INTERPOL(2018, 15) the entire sub region was affected by the syndrome of human trafficking where by all countries were, sources, transit and/or destination countries. Humans were smuggled notoriously from or through Cameroon to Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Nigeria. The main reason was the search of greener pastures and better economic opportunities. Many of such smugglers had well-established networks of intermediaries in Cameroon who recruited and smuggled vulnerable young women through neighbouring countries to destinations in the Middle East.

Human trafficking

Human trafficking has been one of the long time border crimes beginning from even the trade in slaves. According to Article 3 of the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations convention against Transnational crime, human trafficking was

defined as: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception of the abuse of power or of position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (Philip 2008, 210).

The outbreak of an armed conflict in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon only came to accelerate the rate of human trafficking at the south Eastern border of Cameroon with Nigeria. Over the years, this borders had been identified to be very active for human trafficking especially child trafficking. In the 1990s many young girls were trafficked from Mamfe and other parts of Cameroon through the Mamfe-Ekok borders into Nigeria. While on Nigerian soil some moved to the northern part settled and practiced prostitution in Kaduna while some carried out the practice in the city of Lagos (Magaret, 2001: 64). In the 2000s though, many commercial sex workers were still trafficked along the said border, the border was still noted to be favourable to child traffickers. Many towns in the cross river state which shared boundary with Cameroon were frequently used as staging points by child trafficking rings that moved children mostly by sea to destinations in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Some of the trafficked children were brought in from West African countries such as Togo and Benin and moved into CEMAC countries through Nigeria with Cameroon as transit point (Ukwai, 2019, 205).

Based on Ndeh's account, the frequency of child trafficking between the Cameroon-Nigeria border of Ekok-Ikom and the South western border in general was high. Though there was a scarcity of data on the amount of children trafficked, this was because there were difficulties faced in the attempt to distinguish between children that were trafficked and those that were adopted. Many women trafficked children across this border and sold to barren women in Nigeria while other children were used as beggars and some few teenage girls were used as prostitutes or for other forms of labour (Sango 2017: 37). The EkondoTiti sea route and the Ekok roads were very fluid for child traffickers. This was accelerated by the porous borders and numerous and difficult to control points of entry into Cameroon.

Drug smuggling

For the same purpose, drug smuggling was a crime and loudly practiced across Cameroon's borders. The geographical as well as historical links between Cameroon and Nigeria opened up the countries porous borders with Nigeria to drug smuggling. According to detail information, Nigeria was noted to be the highest country in the sub-region with the highest frequency of drug smuggling for domestic use and for transit purposes and Nigeria's Lagos seaport was noted to be a point of entry of these drugs (AU 2014, 12). As such it led to the smuggling of some of these drugs along Cameroon's international borders.

The strategic location of Cameroon in the Gulf of Guinea made many organised crime syndicates to operate in the area. These syndicates were involved in different criminal activities with drug trafficking being one of them. According to Arinze, there was much corporation between pirates in the Gulf of Guinea and other criminals. The pirates fuel drug trafficking and other crimes in the region. Pirates in the region operated a wellfounded criminal industry which included the establishment of supply networks (Arinze 2023, 177). This criminal industry used Cameroonian waters and territory to equally carry out their activities. A contributing factor to the strategic location of Cameroon was that all her borders were generally porous and this made drug smugglers to gain advantage and smuggle drugs along the Country's international border.

Illicit trade in fuel

Illicit trade in fuel from Nigeria which was one of the biggest oil producing countries in Africa was rampant across Cameroonian borders. This fuel was smuggled into Cameroon and illicitly sold in about 6 out of Cameroon's 10 regions like, North West, South West, Littoral, Adamawa, North and far North. All these regions had some direct or indirect contiguity to Nigeria which offered opportunity for the importation of the product. The proximity of the above regions to Nigeria made the smuggling of fuel into Cameroon to witness a phenomenal growth (Njingti 2019, 2230). The illicit fuel smuggled was commonly called *zuazua* in areas like Abongshie and *finge* in Ekok and other areas. The fuel was smuggled on motorcycles, cars and canoes depending on which point of the border the dealers found themselves. The people in the above mentioned areas preferred to use *zuazua* or *finge* on the bases that it was more economical and durable in their locomotives. Apart from this economic point of view, it was equally argued that the scarcity of filling stations in many localities in the above regions contributed to the illicit importation of this fuel. Underdevelopment and government neglect made many of these areas to be inaccessible all season to trucks that could supply fuel if filling stations were to be opened in such areas. Economic hardship equally contributed to the use of this illicit fuel. The users preferred it because it was cheap and available. The dealers had a complex but well organised network on both sides of the border. In Idenau and the West Coast sub-division for instance some of the members of the network included naval officials and custom officials who had invested in the businesses making security checks complicated. These officials continually permitted the illegal trade because they had huge returns from it. As such, the boats that conveyed their

merchandise were allowed to pass through security checks untouched while some of those who did not belong to the officials simply gave a bribe to the maritime officers they met (Basiru 2024).

Implication of cross-border crime on Cameroon

There is an undeniable connection in arms smuggling and public security for countries the world over and Cameroon is not an exception. For this its government remained worried because of its sovereign assignment to protect her citizens. Socially, much impact was felt in Cameroon as a result of the economic crisis which hit Cameroon in the 1990s. The crisis caused a high rate of unemployment across the national territory thereby fostering misery and desperation. Many unemployed youths became desperate and decided to get into robbery using arms that were smuggled or done clandestinely. This aligns with the submission of Ngoh (2019, 317) who opined that a general increase in social malaise, rising unemployment, underemployment and corruption led to a rise in insecurity. This resulted to banditry and assassinations. From the periods after the economic crisis, there were many cases of high way robbery and kidnapping for ransom recorded on major highways in Cameroon especially in the three Northern regions (Danga 2022,17).

Insecurity orchestrating from cross-border crimes was visible in the inner portions of the nation especially intercity roads on which high way robbers operated and along the borders of the nation. At the Cameroon borders, there was insecurity due to conflicts in neighbouring countries like Nigeria, CAR and Chad. The presence of armed groups in the above countries led to a new wave of crime which was manifested in the form of terrorism and piracy. Again heightened security concerns was impacted by the clandestine purchase and usage of drugs especially by none state actors in other to aid them carry out terrorist activities. Actually, the smuggling of drugs like tramadol increased criminal activities perpetrated by these group with increased general insecurity to have been their main objection.

In 2018, the national anti-drug commission noted that more than 12000 young people under the age of 15 consumed narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. They further revealed that 21% of the population tried a hard drug. Meanwhile, 10 % were frequent consumers including 60% young people aged 20-25 (Afanwi 2022, 10). This affected national security in two ways that is human security and health security. Firstly drug smuggling enforced arms smuggling and arms related crimes. The availability of tramadol made many youths to feel “high” and this gave them false courage which enabled them to commit crimes. In the two English speaking regions of the country, the secessionist fighters smuggled drugs and consumed much of it. The drugs as usual enabled them to carry on criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom, rape, and indiscriminate killing amongst others. An ex-secessionist fighter at the disarmament demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) centre in Buea on anonymous bases submitted this about their use of cannabis and tramadol in these words:

There were two principal drugs which we consumed regularly that enabled us carry on our activities smoothly. They were cannabis and tramadol, we had agents who bought tramadol from the road side vendors and supplied to us. At times we get the drug directly from Nigeria when we go to get (groundnuts) bullets or arms. At times our agents in Nigeria supplied us both with arms and tramadol. For cannabis we could easily lay hands on them since many of the cultivators and sellers were in most of the areas where we operated. Cannabis and tramadols were our life support we could not sincerely do without (Anonymous 1)

As noted by Atia (2024,5), the non-state fighters initially consumed locally processed drugs such as cannabis at the early stage of their insurgency against the state in 2017. As time went on, they turned to smuggle and consumed harder drugs such as cocaine, heroin and *Cayiou*. Many of the non-state fighters became addicted to drugs consequently after consuming these hard drugs the non-state actors became uncontrollable proceeding to make life miserable for civilians he notes further that:

The reason why we used to consume huge quantities of drugs is because it was not easy for you in your right state of mind to harass or kidnap someone or to fire a gun. Thus for us to do this we needed to be “high”. When we take a combination of different drugs we could easily carry out risky missions like attacking the military or to go and kidnap someone you were familiar with or to attack in a familiar area. It was not normal for us to function without drugs.(Ibid)

From his narration and like indicated earlier, it is obvious that drugs smuggling had a negative implication on Cameroon’s national security.

Aside from drug consumption in schools, some of its users were parents and upon their deaths as a consequence to the consumption of these drugs their children were left at the mercy of relatives who took care of them. These children out of frustration were by themselves susceptible to taking drugs. Other indirect deaths to persons who did not consume drugs were visible in the upsurge of accidents in our major and deadly high ways in Cameroon. Drug consumption before driving gave them blind courage, made them less sensitive and blurred their views. The consequence has always been decapitation, trauma and untold deaths. According to UNODC, most accidents resulted from the consumption or abuse of tramadol and other drugs by drivers. It was revealed that 80 % of the road accidents in this area resulted from the consumption of tramadol by youths of the transportation sector. (UNODC, 2021,10). The drivers on their part argued that when they consumed tramadol, it

gave them much power and resistance to be able to cover long distances and equally it enabled them to stay awake as expressed by:

when I want to embark on a journey as a truck driver I need to charge up my spirit not just with beer but with this drug because it helps me so much to stay awake and drive efficiently. To make it more effective I get the tabs and dilute in a bottle of bubble up drink and this accompanies me throughout the journey especially those long journeys that take about 3 day (Ndzemaya, 2023).

Like the driver's experience, many road accidents unknown to them have been likened to drug issues. Furthermore, the consumption of drugs also promoted cyber related crimes. Many cyber criminals like scammers consumed narcotics which they believed facilitated their task. According to them the consumption of drugs like tramadol, Cayiou and cocaine made them to be able to reflect well when communicating with their clients. Also the consumption of cocaine by some of them was a show of a high standard of living. One of them explains that: *For many of us it is impossible to do without drugs because it has a great role to play in our business. For you to be able to convince a client you need extra anointing to convince and confuse someone. It is only when we charge the brain with these substances that we can easily do this job. Also amongst us what differentiates the big boys from the small ones is the type of drug you consume. The smaller boys consume low grade drugs like tramadol while the big boys consume high level drugs like cocaine.* (Boris 2024).

By and large, it is very apparent from the discuss herein that drug consumption had a direct implication of the general security of the town although most of their origins was at the level of borders or from border areas.

II. Conclusion

The outbreak of the economic crisis in Cameroon in the 1990s made many citizens especially those in the South Western Border to take on different activities which some were criminal in nature. Prominent crimes along the borderline with Nigeria included human smuggling, human trafficking, illicit trade in fuel, arms smuggling and drug smuggling. The causes of these crimes varied from natural to man made. At the borderline there was much similarity culturally between the peoples that straddled the borders. They were united by a common history and geography. The south Eastern border of Cameroon with Nigeria was generally porous and had many difficult to control entry points be it maritime or territory. All these greatly contributed to cross border crime. This paper argued that, the crimes even though committed at the borders or periphery of the nation had far reaching repercussions on the mainland territory as it greatly affected the security of the state. The effects of some crimes such as drug smuggling greatly radicalized youths, and made them become violent. The arms smuggled were used to carry out criminal activities such as robbery, kidnap for ransom, hostage taking and terrorism. As such though the criminal acts like smuggling took place at the borders, the implication on mainland security were far reaching. Thus the study recommends that government should tighten border security, equip defence and security forces with modern gadgets and also build the morals of the forces.

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