

**CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION AND SMUGGLING IN NIGERIA:
A CASE OF IDIROKO BORDER, OGUN STATE BETWEEN 1999 AND 2021**

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Abstract

Migration is a highly diverse and complex phenomenon that transcends societies, cultures, races and borders as it involves the movement of people beyond their country of origin. It is a phenomenon that has continued and contribute to the transformation of the entire facets of various countries changing the racial, ethnic, linguistic and socio-cultural compositions of their population. It is a dynamic process which affects every dimension of social existence. Studies have indicated that smuggling is the illegal transportation of objects, substances, information, people, such as out of a house or buildings, into a prison, or across an international border, in violation of extant laws or other regulations. This paper looks at the factors responsible for cross-border migration and smuggling in Idiroko border. Data for this study was extracted from primary sources in the area of study and later analyzed and interpreted. Likewise, personal visitations to the border were embarked upon to observe the nature of transactions and movements of people at the border. Also, secondary sources were used to realize the objectives set for the study.

Keywords: *Cross-Border, Migration, Smuggling, Panacea, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Migration is a dynamic phenomenon common to most societies and shapes population distribution. It is a process which has been from the creation of the universe. In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been a permanent characteristic of the region even long before colonization. In West Africa, it is a normal process of interaction without barrier even after the forceful partition of the continent between the western capitalist powers which paved the way for colonization.

Cross-Border migration according to Popoola¹ is the movement of people beyond their country of origin. People migrate beyond international borders based on the prevailing conditions. These conditions include political instability, drought, landlessness, soil infertility, unfavourable climate among others. It is obvious that cross-border migration is on the increase.

Idiroko is in the present day Ipokia Local Government Area in the western part of Ogun State, Nigeria, bordering the Republic of Benin. There are other towns like Ihunmbo, Agosasa, Aseko, Maun, Koko, Iropo, Alaari, Tube, Ilashe, Ifonyintedo, Madoga, Ijofin, Akere, Vawhe, and Tongeji. The area covers a total of 629 square kilometers. The type of vegetation and

climatic condition found here has supported the planting of palm trees on a large scale and this explains why the Local Government Area has palm oil and Kernel in large quantities. The people are predominantly farmers with major concentration on cassava and maize. They also produce mats and foodstuffs such as *lagba, fufu, koko, etc.* Also, fishing is practiced on Yewa River by some inhabitants of the area to supplement their food crops. The land here is not suitable for cultivation of cash crops like cocoa, rubber, citrus and many economic crops. The insufficiency of stipends earned from farming activities has led the youths to look elsewhere for survival. And to some extent, cross-border migrants have taken their place, filling the gap to increase the level of agricultural yield in the border communities. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the people of Nigeria from those of Republic of Benin due to similarity in religion, languages, mode of dressing and social interaction. The Yoruba people of the sampled area are related by birth historically. It was the arbitrary partitioning of Africa in general that led to the separation of kiths and kins from one another. This is why we have the Keotu, Sabe and Popo who are the children of Oduduwa the progenitor of the Yoruba race in Nigeria and The Republic of Benin. Any social function in Idiroko always spread over to the Republic of Benin because of their social affinity and interactions between relatives across the border.²

Adepoju³ has identified various factors which can attract migrants from other countries in West Africa to rural border communities of Nigeria. These are environmental (soil productivity, good harvest, available soils, rain fall, food security), economic reasons (accumulation of money, means for transportation, employment, available agricultural tools, commerce), Social reasons (personal development, information, networks, adventures, bettering of life situation). Consequently, smuggling is the illegal transportation of objects, substances, information or people. There are various motivations to smuggling. These include the participation in illegal trade, such as in the drug trade, illegal weapons trade, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, exotic wildlife trade, art theft, heists, chop-shops, illegal immigration or illegal emigration, tax evasion, providing contraband to a prison inmate, or the theft of the items being smuggled.⁴

Bredow⁵ asserted that smuggling is a world-wide activity which cuts across all the nations of the world. It usually occurs between rich countries and the poor countries. Smuggling in Idiroko, has a long history. ResearchGate⁶ pointed out that fuel smuggling across the Benin-Nigeria border has a long history but has seen a huge increase since the oil boom in Nigeria from the 1970s. Nigeria is an oil producer, Benin is not and therefore, fuel smuggling is embedded in the history of trade between the two countries. In Benin, there are not enough petrol stations, people earn an average of US \$2 per day and an estimated 60% of fuel consumed comes from smuggling. The advent of democracy after dictatorship in Benin in the 1990s marked a turning point in the social and economic life of the people. This brought increased freedom to do business without state control but also led to the rise of the informal economy. The smuggling of petrol/fuel from Nigeria to Benin Republic through the Idiroko and Ijofin borders in Ipokia has led to several crises between Nigerian Customs and the smugglers that claimed many lives and properties in the area.

Findings revealed that the smuggling of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) (popularly known as Petrol/Fuel) from Nigeria to Republic of Benin through the Idiroko border is not the only illegal economic activity in the area. Other items that are being smuggled in Idiroko includes rice, chicken, turkey, used clothes, vegetable oil, used shoes, tyres, cars and coconuts to mention but a few.

Supporting the above, Omoniyi⁷ noted that among the goods smuggled in Idiroko border are petrol, poultry, tyres, motor parts, drugs, cars and electronics. The frontier post is also used by human traffickers to carry young girls and boys from the Republic of Benin into Nigeria. Sometimes, the underage children are leased by their parents to work in Lagos for a stipulated time frame. Most of the children are taken from Benin to serve as maid or house helps in Nigerian households.

Factors Responsible for Smuggling in Idiroko Border, Ogun State

It is pertinent to stress that there are many factors responsible for smuggling among the youths in Idiroko, Ogun State. However, the most important factor as mentioned by Jimoh Alabi⁸ is the youths unemployment, according to him, joblessness among the youths of Idiroko prompt them to engage themselves in smuggling of rice, turkey and other contraband goods from Republic of Benin to Nigeria, as these activities fetch them more money to cater for themselves and families.

Economic factor is another reason responsible for smuggling and illegal movement around the border. Berger and Nitsh⁹ opined that smuggling is related to a country's level of economic development. The porosity of Nigeria's border with neighbouring Benin Republic aids smuggling. Semedeton Viwanu¹⁰ narrated that the ready assistance from the villagers and towns dwellers living around the border routes, which smugglers normally enjoy, is another factor, as the villagers give maximum supports to smugglers since they will be paid some amount of money for providing accommodation and sheltering them from security personnel.

Findings also revealed that there factors in smuggling in the area. Ackello-Ogotu as cited in J. F. David¹¹ observes that territorial boundaries of almost all the African Countries have artificially partitioned the national economic, social, cultural; and ethnic links that existed between communities, kingdoms, or regions of pre-colonial Africa. These borders were arbitrarily drawn regardless of cultural cohesion of the countries and separated people of same ethnicity held together for centuries by their common heritage and language. This is a crucial factor which sometimes encourages smuggling across the border. Setonji Mivojo¹² was of the view that the people of Idiroko borders that speak Ogu (Egun) language but partitioned between Nigeria and Benin Republic are of the same roots.

Setonji stressed further that the congestion at the ports is another reason why smuggling is carried out. The smugglers prefer smuggling their goods into the country rather, than facing the rigour/bottlenecks of clearing their goods at ports officially. Many goods have been stolen, damaged or expired as a result of unending waits for goods to be cleared at the ports. In order to beat the men of Nigeria Customs Service and evade arrest, these smugglers have resorted to the use of voodoo (*charm*). The common voodoo (*charm*) among them is the ones that serve as bullet proof to them since it is a common belief that shooting is common to the men of Nigeria Custom Service. In most cases, it is innocent school children that fall victim of their shootings, as this had happened severally along the popular Ajilete axis of the area.

More importantly, Kenneth¹³ asserted that Motorcyclists also play a great role in smuggling rice in smaller quantities as they speed past Customs officials, taking heavy wood strikes as they refuse to stop for examination. Some traders were also seen buying over 50 litres of premium motor spirit (PMS) from filling stations in the Nigeria border area for the Benin market at two times the price in Nigeria. The fuel was measured in large polytene bags and wrapped with clothing by the traders. While at other border areas such as seaports and airports there is a fierce battle for supremacy and jurisdiction over seizures, arrests and investigation,

the Idiroko border area displays a charming symphony of security agents as several checkpoints would have Police, Customs, VIO, and NIS doing their jobs seamlessly.

Omoniyi¹⁴ pointed at geographical factor as, due to the location of the town along the Nigeria-Benin border, an illegal smuggling trade exists within the settlement. Illegal cross-border trade is carried out by settlers and transient populations using knowledge of the local population to create alternative routes within the border. Oral information gathered from Maumen Salako in the sampled area,¹⁵ supported the above claim. Moreover, some of the people trek from Republic of Benin to Idiroko border to transact their businesses. Some selling their goods in the midnight and trekking back to their home some days after. Some even spend a month before going back to Benin. Innocent activities of some of these smugglers as observed by the researcher, such as head-portage, hawking and selling of goods, displaying goods on floor by roadside such as clothes, shoes, belts, dry fishes among others hinder Nigerian Customs Services, Immigration and other security operatives from detecting who is who at the border.

Ifeanyi Onuba¹⁶ wrote that Maiwada of the Nigerian custom said the command's Anti-Bunkering Team 'A' while on information patrol discovered a smuggling hideout at Iko-gate along Idiroko road, leading to the seizure of 160 jerrycans (25 litres each) of petrol. "The smugglers devised a crooked method by hiding the tanker and then used other vehicles to form a shield. "They further constructed a pipe with an outlet sited on a cassava farm. The fuel was then siphoned into a tank and then into the jerrycans with the intention to export fuel in batches.

The Guardians Newspaper revealed that during one of their visits to Idiroko border in Ogun State, they found that while security officers had completely shut the official border post, illicit activities were going on unhindered at unapproved routes popularly called bush paths. Usually, unapproved routes are busier than official ones, with hundreds of motorbikes moving across the borders of the Republic of Benin and Nigeria engaging in illegal trade. A security officer at the border, who confided in The Guardian, said that security personnel were aware of happenings at the bush paths, which are more than 100 in Ogun State alone. He said officers only routinely patrol the routes because they were too many to cover. Besides, the officer disclosed that the bush paths became more dangerous for officers because smugglers, who are more familiar with the terrain, could lay ambush for the team.

However, the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) said it is strictly manning the nation's gateways, in line with its mandate to protect the country against importation of illicit items. With the massive smuggling, price of foreign parboiled rice has dropped sharply from about N35,000.00 to N20,000.00, depending on the location. Interaction with some traders around the border revealed that the notorious smugglers use the night as cover and move in convoys. The Guardian also observed some petty smugglers at the border communities bargaining and re-bagging foreign rice. Many of those involved were local people, who resell the commodities wholesale. Others deal in palm oil, groundnut oil, frozen chicken, tomato paste, sugar and others.¹⁷

Findings further revealed that smuggling in the area is endemic and systemic; as the smugglers have groups and godfathers who front for them. They are armed and full of charm. They are notorious and difficult to confront. Some of their godfathers have link with security agencies, so they know when to move and they move massively in groups or convoy. They make the price of rice cheaper. A source at Owode told The Guardian that they bought the rice at N16,000.00 from them and resold at N18,000.00¹⁸

Panacea to Cross-Border Migration and Smuggling in Idiroko, Ogun State

Cross-border migration is a complex phenomenon enhanced by contacts with outside world; its dynamism within the sampled area is spurred by new aspirations for economic and material betterment. The primary motive of migration is to seek for economic viable pasture. Its transformation to crime related activities is viewed within the prism of economically or politically-induced. Migration between Nigeria and her francophone neighbours is a very pertinent and sentimental issue as the people are historically, culturally and ethnically linked. Nigeria has always adopted cooperation rather than confrontation even in the face of provocation. It was this attitude that has always eased off tension and even wars between her and her neighbours.

The issue of Bakassi is enough to have caused war at many instances but Nigerian authorities have exercised restraints. At the borders with Chad, the Nigerian authorities had to militarize the routes, the same goes for Niger Republic. At the western flank, the borders with Benin have been the most problematic as a result increased activities of smugglers and traffickers which have caused border closures from time to time. There seems better understanding and cooperation among the states on security. This gesture of good neighbourliness made the Beninois President Mathieu Kerekou hand over the leader of a notorious international robbery gang network, Hamani Tijani to Nigerian authorities to face criminal charges.¹⁹

Migration remains a global phenomenon which will most often take place from less developed to areas of greater opportunities. Globalization with its open borders is turning less industrialized to dumping grounds. Both ways, Nigeria in comparison with her neighbours will continue to be flocked by unwarranted immigration from countries such as Niger, Chad and even Cameroun. At the same time, transit goods of all types from all over the world shipped to Togo and Benin Republics will at the end of the day be smuggled to Nigeria in which case Nigeria has a hard nut to crack with her neighbours by permanently expanding her security network along the borders and making international security a major policy plank.²⁰

On human trafficking and smuggling, Nigeria can initiate a memorandum of understanding on General Agreement on the Movement of Persons (GAMP) with her neighbours as being experimented in Europe to seriously check the menace. On the economic front, Nigeria must move closely with Benin Republic in particular by establishing industries in that country. Nigerian businessmen can also be encouraged to establish joint venture participation with potential investors in Benin Republic. This is to assist the country territory a dumping ground to foreign companies. On the home front, it would be necessary that Nigeria take these two options: the first is to increase coercive measures to combat smuggling and trafficking. This is a daunting task going by the observation of a custom officer on the Idiroko border axis who says that there are several illegal border routes between Benin and Nigeria alone.

Another option to curb smuggling in Nigeria according to Omoniyi²¹ is to approach the issue of industrialization with the fullest determination and remove whatever bottlenecks to full industrialization with particular reference to energy which is the major clog and encourage industries to produce quality products that can compete effectively with imported or smuggled products. Once Nigerian products are competitive and can match any product from anywhere in the world, the country can then truly benefit from globalization and smuggling will be rendered unattractive. And like other regions of the world, state security will have to be integrated into legislations dealing with international migrations and external relations.

Adeola and Ogirai²² opined that the menace of traffickers and smugglers who have turned armed criminals posing serious threat to the security of the nation has forced the Federal Government to make draconian laws against the affront. It got to an unbearable height during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo between 1999 and 2003 that the president had to close the borders with the Republic of Benin at least two times. The persistent and deepened cases of smuggling and trafficking in the sub-region have induced other heinous crimes causing serious security and political problems among the states.

Subsequently, in August 20, 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration ordered the closure of Nigeria's borders based on the reasons which include the smuggling of arms and light weapon, drug peddling and the unguarded influx of prohibited items into Nigeria's trade environment. The closure was also to checkmate the influx of fake and substandard goods into Nigeria and to ensure that farmers produce enough for the sustenance of their livelihoods as well as self-sufficiency especially with regard to the production and consumption of local food items in the country.²³

However, provision of useful information for the security operatives by the community dwellers can go a long way to help curb the menace of illegal movement and smuggling in the area as the National Public Relations Officer of Nigerian Customs Services, DC Joseph Attah, once told The Guardian. He noted that the porosity of the borders posed serious challenges for officers, as smugglers monitor their movements and strategically evade arrest. He urged members of the public to share information with Customs when they notice smugglers around their areas. Attah said:

The joint border drill is currently ongoing; so, operatives move around to intercept smugglers. But you can see that the borders are porous with many bush paths; that is where we need the media to help us sensitize the public. "There are some people there who are monitoring the officials; immediately the patrol team moves to the other side, they will call the smugglers to come and pass through the bush paths. "Officers will continue to do their patrol, they will continue to exploit intelligence to unravel illegitimate routes and trap the smugglers."²⁴

Another way to curb the problem in the sampled area is job creation by the federal, state and local government for the youths in the area. As Jimoh Alabi²⁵ earlier noted, joblessness among the youths of Idiroko prompt the people to engage themselves in smuggling of rice, turkey and other contraband goods from Republic of Benin to Nigeria, as these activities fetch them more money to cater for themselves and families.

Conclusion

Cross border migration and smuggling in Idiroko, Ipokia local government area, Ogun State, was examined in this paper. It was revealed that poor income, bad economic condition, poverty, unemployment, unfavourable climatic condition among others have been identified as major causes of cross border migration in the sampled area. Also, major considerations for choosing the destination area by the immigrants is to enjoy good access to land, commerce and better income. The factors mentioned above can only be addressed based on the findings of this paper that if Nigerian businessmen should be encouraged to establish joint venture businesses with potential investors in Benin Republic. This is to assist the country in making its territory free from being a dumping ground to foreign companies. Federal, State and Local Governments should create jobs for the youths in the area as joblessness among the youths prompt the people to engage in smuggling. Nigeria Government should also encourage industries to produce quality, not qualitative products that can compete effectively with imported or smuggled

products. Once Nigerian products are competitive and can match any product from anywhere in the world, the country can then truly benefit from globalization and smuggling will be rendered unattractive.

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