

Managing Land Borders and Smuggling of Food Commodities in Saki South-Western Nigeria: Socio-Economic Implications

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Abstract

Border is one of the most visible signs of the sovereignty of a state on its territory. In spite of the resilient efforts of Nigeria's border security agencies to ensure the safeguarding of Nigeria's territorial sovereignty, smuggling remains unabated and its dynamics is characterised with strong link between the smugglers and itineraries. The main objective of this paper is to examine the socio-economic effects of smuggling of food commodities from Republic of Benin to Nigeria through Okerete borderland route, Saki. The methodology used for the paper involves descriptive survey design while interviews were conducted among the patrol teams of custom officers in Saki, and secondary sources such as journal article, internet materials and current situation in the country serves as sources of data collections. The paper concluded that the spate of smuggling of foods commodities mostly rice and frozen foods across Saki borderlands has undermined income generation, rule of law, social vices in the communities, uncontrolled market economy and price fluctuation of commodity like rice and vegetable oil, health deterioration from these substances, and encourage drop-out (child abuse) in these communities.

Keywords

Border, smuggling, food commodity, border management

Introduction

The role played by insecure international borders of a country in the entire national security has attracted robust scholarly attention. Indeed, scholars such as Addo (2006), Eselebor (2010, 2013), Okeke *et al.* (2014) and Akinteye (2016) have argued that insecure international borders can fuel instability and social disorder. The threat posed to national and international security by

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transnational crime is not an inadvertent by-product of long term trends. Rather, it is an inevitable consequence of the activities of individuals and organisations as corrupt state institutions which undermine the rule of law, threaten the integrity of financial and commercial sectors of society, contravene legal and social norms, conventions, transgress national sovereignty and violate national borders.

One of the global concerns of post-cold war society is the management of security challenges of both its populations and territorial sovereignty. This has caught the attention of states to deter enemy within and without. Borders (land, sea or air) remain the most visible sign of the sovereignty of a state on its territory. Thus, its management is crucial to the state mechanism assigned and other actors in reducing the crime rate and safeguards the territorial integrity of the state. However, the phenomenon of smuggling activities as one of transnational crime is a widespread and problematic scene across the globe. In African countries, smuggling activities has assumed alarming rate and has hindered the economic growth and development over years. It was estimated that about 35,000 volumes of various goods, such as narcotics, arms and ammunitions, clothing materials, used cars among others items are smuggled every year (UNODC, 2005 cited in Omotosho, 2013). In sub-Saharan African, Nigeria is the most populous country approximately 250 million people and she occupies a central position as a country of destination for this criminal enterprise while smuggling activities as one of the commonest crimes across Nigerian borders (Ajakaye, 2008; ECOWAS, 2009).

Saki borderland like other border routes in Nigeria is susceptible to smuggling activities and all sorts of social vices across the international borders as a result of social problems such as high rate of poverty, unemployment, and the mentality of quick rich syndrome among the youth. This makes it difficult for the custom officers to generate more revenue or duties on import goods and deter unwanted goods. In the view of Mustapha (2002) he observes that smuggling activities rob the nation of her revenue earnings and hence effect provision of social service to the entire community. Thus, dire a negative effect on the country economy and ineffective planning. This paper therefore, set out to examine the border management efforts of Nigerian Customs Service patrol team in preventing smuggling of food commodities along Saki borderland route and the socio-economic implications of smuggling of food commodities in Nigeria.

Conceptual Analysis

Border/Boundary

Border and boundary are twin concept that interchangeably used in the discourse of border studies. Eselebor (2013: 51) sees boundary as a line that marks the confines or divide two contiguous territories which denies the

physical limit of state's territorial and physical jurisdiction while border is a region or area straddling a boundary or the area adjacent to the boundary. In this context border is not fixed as boundary does but performing the same functions of eliminating and combating the unwanted migration of both person and goods. Ikome (2012) sees international border as sharp edge of the territories within which states exercise their jurisdiction in lines that mark the termination of the terracing of one state or *political* unit and that of another. He argued further that the significance of demarcation is to allow states to consciously identify its territorial limit to which it can make laws signing of bilateral & multilateral agreement and has monopoly of the use of physical force within its territory. Politically, border is a geographical area or jurisdiction where states exercise their control over all physical resources. Borders are sites for the display and performance of state sovereignty (Coplan, 2012). In other word, border remains the most visible sign of sovereignty of the state where the political power is being exercised. Border is an area where countries exercise her sovereignty power and rights to control and monitor movement of goods, people and craft entering and exiting their territorial jurisdiction. It is a place where law enactments are complied with such as commercial policy, food safety, customs procedures and migration processing occurred therein. Anderson (2007) opines that border is not simply lines on map where one jurisdiction ends and another begins.... Borders are political institutions; no rule-bound economic, social or political life in advanced societies could be organised without them. This shows that borders are institutionalised in legal and democratic context and encoded in a social reality of identity which indicate boundary between us and them. As an institution established by political decision and regulated by legal framework, the state has absolute control (sovereignty) over its territories and can impose this control on its frontiers through the force and prerogative of rule made internally, to impermeable and unwanted external influence and illicit migration of goods, persons and capital that may jeopardise the socio-political economy of the state.

Smuggling

Smuggling as one of the transnational crimes that is detrimentally lucrative in Nigeria is characterised by several dynamics and trends of globalisation phenomenon and needs to be taking into account, in action, to prevent it. Smuggling is an act of invading tax or a duty that supposes to pay into government pulse on particular goods that passing through the border. The Nigerian Customs (2013) defined smuggling as false declaration of goods, wilful underpayment of custom duties, trafficking prohibited or restricted goods, use of unapproved routes and ports, forging of custom document and touting in customs goods and document. Smuggling is a crime against state because the traffickers of prohibited and illegal migrant jumped the state regulation thereby both migrant and item smuggling into other country has no

documentation which can be used to verify the purpose of migration and to determine the authenticity of such items. This poses serious security threat to both state and infringe the peace and sovereignty of the host country while initial country become anarchy. Smith (2003) argues that the nature of smuggling is an elusive, secretive and subtle practice that most always involved the illicit cross of political boundaries. He argued further that smuggling has the potential to seriously undermine the state authority and portrays the state as a social force within border communities which like other forms of social banditry that can be used to analyse social economics, attitudes towards violence and the rise of government authority, as seen in the decades following the American war of independence, both in the American Republic and neighbouring British colonies to the north. However, smuggling items that are smuggled across international borders include small arms and light weapon (SALW) such as Semi-automated pistol, rifles and carbines, automated rifles, sub-machine gun, heavy machine, hand-held and mounted grenade launchers, man-portable anti-tank, anti-aircraft gun, explosive devices etc while others may be drugs like cocaine and heroin, Indian hemp, narcotic drugs, adulterated and expired food items and psychotropic substances. Others are rice, vegetables and cosmetic materials.

Border Management

Border management is the government functions of immigration, custom and excise, policing with the aim of controlling and regulating the flow of people and goods across a country's border in the national interest (particularly, economic, development, security and peace) (Okumu, 2011). The task of managing borders is in twofold; firstly, to control and monitor in order to detect and screen undesirable goods, items and individuals that could be a risk to security and secondly, to promote a balance between fences and walls. This requires specific state security institutions officially assigned at the border post. Eselebor (2013) refers border management as constitutionally assigned functions of immigration, custom and excise, drug law enforcement and other forms of policing, with the aim of controlling and regulating the flow of people, goods and services. It is the legislation or procedure formulated by the state guiding the crossing or movement of persons or goods across the international borders and compliance is ensured by the security agencies at the country frontiers. He emphasises further how different security agencies organised and fit into a unified concept of border management. Border management includes maintenance of physical infrastructure such as beacon that mark the physical limit of country territory, building infrastructure that house the agencies, patrol gadgets etc.

However, in this globalised world, where cross border criminals surpasses the primary concern of and infringe on sovereignty of the state, management of

border is therefore imperative to individuals, organisations/institutions and different regional and sub-regional government. Today, managing borders are compounded by globalisation that tears down traditional borders through advancement in technology and transformation of international relations. At the moment crime are committed without crossing borders and huge amount of goods are sold through cyberspace. Thus, the internet has not only made it more difficult to manage borders and to combat cross border crimes, but has also effectively dismantled border by allowing imports without going through customs (Okumu, 2011).

This is more reason region and continent should develop a concept that will improve entrance security. Marenin (2010) observed that from mid-1990s, there has been a growing demand to coordinate the work of different agencies at the border in order to facilitate trade and enhance security.

Failed State Theory

A failed state is the one that has shattered social and political structure. The term "failed state" is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government (Patrick, 2007 cited in Okeke *et al.*, 2014). The main priority of sovereign government is to be able to secure and protect its territory, its independence and lives and properties living within that territory, where the socio-economic and political condition will strive better. This failing state attributes to ineffectiveness of central government to practically control its territory, alarming rate of corruption and criminality, refugees and involuntary movement of populations across boundary, and sharp economic decline. Thurer (1999) notes that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic form of internal violence. In other word, when a state mechanism and institutions of government are collapsed, it will lead to breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. A failed state is the one that is unable to provide adequate security and other basic necessity of life to its population. Thurer notes further by highlighting some of the characteristics of failed state in order to make it precise. These includes:

- I. Loss of physical control of its territory, or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force,
- II. Erosion of authority to make collective decision,
- III. An inability to provide reasonable public services, and
- IV. An inability to interact with other state as full member of the international community.

However, the position of the research is that Nigeria as a state falls into category of failed state because of inability to provide effective principle of border security management and legitimate use of physical force to reduce trans-border criminalities at its international boundaries that brings about

internal threats through proliferations of arms and hard drugs as a result of weakness of its institutions to share notes and infidelity of border town dwellers to reveal the syndicate hide-out to security personnel in order to curb the menace of cross-border crimes at Nigeria international borders.

Smuggling of Food Commodities in Saki: The Motivating Factor

Smuggling of food commodities is an illegal act of transporting the consumable substances across international borders or transportation of embargoed goods and services such as drugs, Can fruit, vegetable oil, rice, frozen fowls etc. This is stimulated by illegal trade business through the circumventing of the duties/taxes rate on such item. However, Saki is one of the Yoruba speaking ancient semi-urban city that is located on the Latitude 8.4 North and 30.42 Longitude East with approximately 170 kilometers to capital city, Ibadan, Oyo State and the largest border town in Nigeria with the Benin Republic (Kolajo, 2007). It has population of about 250,256 head count according to NPC (2006). Saki is known as agrarian society, iron pot-making and commerce with relatively small civil workers but the problem of social factors such as unemployed young graduate, get rich-syndrome, proximity of the town to the neighbouring country, migration of their ancestors, encourage the youths to engage in this vice.

Eselebor (2013: 332) observes that smuggling thrives in our border environment because criminal offenders know that law enforcement is weak and the risk of apprehension is low. In these sense, one of the motivating factors that makes smuggling of consumable goods thrives in this corridor of the state is her proximity to border that led to sub-Saharan francophone countries (Benin Republic, Togo, Burkina Faso) and ineffective of custom officers patrol team to monitor and control the smugglers. However, the globalisation phenomenon that emphasises interconnectivity, interdependence and interrelationship of all state of the world is another motivating factor which continue to increase smuggling activities and engendering the socio-economic and security of the nation. The use of communication and financial facilities facilitate the easy transaction among the smugglers such as mobile phone, internet gadget, automated teller machine and other technologies contribute negatively to socio-economic of the developing country.

Akano (2006) cited in Omotosho (2013) opines that the trend of smuggling has become an institutionalised behaviour and a criminal enterprise in the sense that border town dwellers provide the essential impetus for the thriving of smuggling activities in and around Nigeria borders. Corroboratively, the study shown that about 500 warehouses, where various smuggled items are secretly kept were discovered by the Nigerian Customs Service in Saki town, Oyo state, western Nigeria (Omotosho, 2013). Others like proximity to the border couple with unemployment saga in the community contributes to the social vices

engagement. As proverbial saying ‘an idle hand is the devil’s workshop’. The majority of both graduate and drop-out engage in this criminal act of smuggling, get rich syndrome, depressed economy and lack of inter-agencies collaboration among the border security personnel and corrupt uniform officer encourage smuggling activities. Moreover, one smuggler that was interviewed said the heavy taxes on goods encourage the smugglers to engage in purchasing such goods in large quantity and at low taxes or levies from manufacturing countries to the demand countries, who places higher taxes on the same goods or closed the international borders for such commodities, encourage and motivate the smugglers to use the difference in engaging in illegal transportation of such goods for profit oriented.

The Efforts of Patrol Team (Custom officers) in Managing Borderland in Saki

Managing border is one of the crucial roles of institutions of government like immigration, custom and excise, police force etc with the aim of controlling and regulating the flow of people and goods across a country’s border in the national interest (particularly, economic, development, security and peace) (Okumu, 2011). Nigeria Custom Service is one of the security agency constitutionally assigned to the borders for the collection of custom revenue and anti-smuggling effort. The agency was founded during the British Colonial Administration in 1891. In 1922 Department of Customs and Excise emerged and the affair was promulgated by the Act of Establishment No. 55 of The Custom and Excise Management Act (CEMA) of 1958. However, a new Nigeria Customs Service Board was established by Decree No. 45 of 1st of June, 1992 as amended by Decree No.77 of 25th August, 1993. This is when the Nigeria Customs Service was removed from the civil service structure to become a Para-military outfit. The agency are saddled with the responsibility of administering the laws governing import, export and transit of goods duties at the sea, land and airport, as well as the verification of transport modalities for these goods, prevention of smuggling and the arrest and prosecution of smugglers. Nigeria Customs Service has six departments under which the functions and responsibilities are being carried out daily. These are:

1. Customs Department
2. Excise and Industrial Incentives Department
3. Enforcement and Drugs Department
4. Investigation and Inspection Department
5. Economic Relations, Research and Planning Department, and
6. Finance, Administration and Technical Support Services Department.

However, the custom patrol teams at this route were unable to perform their constitutional task due to inadequate and ill-equipped gadget and modern communication tools such as patrol vehicle that is suitable for the kind of road

at okerete rivers (river that demarcate Benin and Nigeria) for monitoring the smuggling activities.

The Socio-Economic Implications

Smuggling is one of the social crimes that have a grave consequence in the social and economic life of any environment that engage in it. The cabals who engaged in smuggling activities took the advantage of high rate of poverty, unemployed graduates and currently non-payment of wages/salaries in the border area to perpetrate this evil business that destroy the socio-economic development of the community. The attitudinal behaviour of the dwellers in terms of informing the border security patrol about the hide-out and secret warehouse of the smugglers makes monitoring difficult for the customs officers because those syndicates are well known community members who were directly or indirectly influencing and controlling major economic resources in the town such as petrol filling station, supermarket and recreation centers, where others work.

Nigeria Rice Development Association (NRDA, 2016) observes that the country was losing a whopping of 9.7 billion naira monthly from an estimated 80,000 metric tones of rice smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic alone. The tax loss on the account of smuggling through the import duties which can be used for social amenities such as medical facilities, education, road networks, electricity and good water supply has been short changed by the syndicate at the expense of the masses. Smuggling at this corridor of country affects the farming system and local industries (the small and medium enterprise). The study confirmed that youths are more interested in smuggling act rather than farming as a result of quick money realised from the menace job while the production of local rice is at lower-ebb.

Oyewole (2002) has noted that some of the incentives that can stimulate the local industries should be the reduction of import duties on machinery spare and raw materials, setting strict monitoring of quality standard, and empowering custom officials to track down smugglers. The high rate of import duties on rice and frozen foods serves as link attraction for the smugglers when compared with the transit country (Benin). The prices of vegetable oil, rice, frozen food items etc at borders area are relatively moderate when compared with the price in cities within Nigeria countries. Price fluctuation and market economy are uncontrollable by the government again as a result of porous border. For instance the price of rice are sold at the rate of 13,000-14,000 naira in Saki, in Ibadan and Lagos are between 17,000-20,000 naira, frozen fowl are sold at 12,800-13,500 naira in Saki, Ibadan and Lagos 15,000-17,000. This has also led to commodities monopolisation because the syndicates have their link to marketers at the cities who received the commodity overnight solely to their store before distributing it to retail and wholesale at their convenient price.

Inclusively, incessant close and open border policy in Nigeria facilitate crime across the national and international borders; inconsistency of Nigeria policy formulation on borders coupled with globalisation that eroded traditional physical border and promote cross border criminalities.

Concluding Remark

From the above discussion, it is apparent that the smuggling of food commodities in Saki environs is regarded as normal routine and legal business among the youths, unemployed graduates and underemployed people who are deprived of the basic economic resources such as capital, equipment, engage in this crime. Also the proximity of the town to the neighbouring countries prone and influence the young community dwellers to join bandwagon as a means to get rich quick. This also encourages drop out and undermine rule of law. The weakness of customs officers in terms of corruption and manpower requirement coupled with epileptic policy of government on either to close or open border pave way for border porosity where income generation and uncontrolled market economy/price fluctuation were undermined. The theory used focuses on a failed state which shattered social and political structure. The term "failed state" is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some basic condition and responsibilities of a sovereign government (Patrick, 2007: 644-662 cited in Okeke *et al.*, 2014). The main priority of sovereign government is to be able to secure and protect its territory, its independence, lives and properties of the citizens living within that territory where the socio-economic and political condition will strive better. This failing state attributes to ineffective of government to establish main border post at Saki where custom will collect import duties on all goods (income generation) conveniently and ensure proper monitoring and controlling of the borders.

The Way Forward for Nigeria

1. First and foremost, there should be an attitudinal change on the part of government in providing every necessary logistics needed for patrol team in curbing the criminal activities in our international borders. Citizen should also see it fit to promptly report the hideout of these perpetrators for punishment and the enforcement agency at the borders should desist from bribes and incentive material from the smugglers.
2. For the proactive monitoring and control of our international borders, funding and procurement of sophisticated weapons, procurement of surveillance vehicles for patrol teams, as well as communication gadget for easy communication among the custom officers and other border security personnel. The training and staff development locally and internationally for the custom officers that will enhance their exposure needs prompt attention.

3. There is need for Nigerian government to upgrade Saki borderland to an approved border post like others because this town is the largest border community in Nigeria and can generate greater revenue from import duties and create more employment opportunities, for this will reduce crime rate and other related social vices.
4. In order to reduce the crime rate in our society, government at all levels should address the problem of unemployment by providing job opportunities for unemployed and underemployed graduates and engage school drop-outs in vocational/apprenticeship jobs. This to some extent will reduce prevalence of poverty that breeds crime in the society.
5. There is need for drastic change in the criminal justice system through prosecution and punishment of offenders which can deter conscious criminal acts. And at the same time there should be a reward for patriotic and virtuous act in the country. This is to corroborate Akindele and Vogt (1983) that to combat smuggling and other ills, which presently worsen the slump in the country, a complete regeneration and reformation of society should be effected to inculcate patriotism and stem the craze for material acquisition.

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