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The Effects of Arms Smuggling in Trans-Border Planning and Business Activities: The Nigeria – Benin Borders Experience

Abstract

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Many countries of West African sub-region had been through series of violent conflicts, some of which lasted for over a decade, while a good number of these countries are facing the problem of insurgencies as a result of the growing tendency of armed ethnic militia, others are faced with the problem of kidnapping, armed robbery and assassination. These are occurrences that are promoted by the availability and acquisition of small arms. The level of sophistication of the weapons used during these crises is a reflection of unchecked smuggling of arms and rising weak security structures at the borders. Smuggling of arms across the borders is a catalyst to the development of ethnic militia and armed conflicts in the sub-region, it promotes availability of arms, it flourishes and increase community violence and promotes criminal activities such as armed robbery and assassination. This paper tries to determine the socio-economic status of trans-border communities and then identify some of the factors that had led to arms smuggling business in the area.

Findings revealed that several factors were believed to have contributed to the trends of arms smuggling in the sub-region. These include the history of armed conflict in the sub-region, the political landscape, the large numbers of weapons available, traditional use of weapons, long and vulnerable borders and coastlines, the nomadic groups and the existence in some countries of large armed militias outside the control of states.

Introduction

Some scholars (Asiwaju, 2008) have agitated for well planned development of the border communities. That is, all infrastructural facilities such as physical infrastructural, economic facilities, social amenities and government presence should be more felt. But can this be possible with the spate of border insecurity? It should be noted that trans-border movement of goods and people is an occurrence which is believed to be the active facilitator of the demand for and supply of small arms and among neighboring countries with bilateral relationship within the region. This bilateral relationship which exists among such countries serves as a good platform for trans-border trade which consequently brings about economic benefits to both countries. However, some criminally minded individuals and groups take advantage of this relationship and engage in criminal activities including arms smuggling and this poses a serious security threat to the sub-region especially the communities at the borders.

Trans-border trade is a major activity in the West African Sub-region. It had been of tremendous advantage to the people of the sub-region due to the possibility of exchanging goods and services and

sharing of useful cultural values. It is worthy of note that trans-border communities play major roles in these activities across the borders. While many of the communities serve as routes of passage and as stop-over points where the traders can relax before continuing their journeys, others acted as places of exchange of goods and services.

However, conflicts in Africa, especially those in the West African sub-region, are propelled to bloody and uncontrolled proportions due to the easy accessibility and availability of small arms. In combating the problem posed by the proliferation and circulation of small arms, one is confronted with the demand and the supply for such weapons. Demand for small arms is provoked by bad governance, insecurity and poverty. Small arms are supplied mainly from external sources motivated by profit greed and desire for domination (WAANESA Report 2005). The supply is made through the borders in the act of smuggling.

The West African sub-region had been a point of focus on the smuggling and misuse of small arms with about 8 million small arms in circulation in the sub-region. This has dire implication for the sub-

region with its rising number of conflicts situations. However, with the recent violent conflict in Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, the number could be far above 8 million. (Report of ECOWAS Moratorium, 2003). Thus there have been series of cases of cross-border crimes which have negated the good idea of integration.

Justification for Study

The African Union (AU) and Economic Communities of West Africa States (ECOWAS) encouraged integration of citizens as one of the ways to bring about unity and diffuse the problems of European balkanization of African lands without their consents. The continent of Africa was partitioned with neither African interest nor involvement, but with the sole interest and participation of Europeans powers. It had in the wake of African independence and consciousness turned the border regions to regions of clandestine activities such as smuggling. This has generally laid them opened to suspicion and so targets of neglect. These imposed boundaries have remarkably mutilated ethno-cultural groups and have remained lines of separation rather than those of contact.

Border communities are very vital in the socio-economic activities of the countries since they are points of contacts between countries for the exchange of goods and services. They are usually places for the arrival of all sorts of goods that are coming into the country and as a result, series of activities including smuggling are expected to be going on in such communities. Thus, the study is significant and this paper tries to determine the socio-economic status of trans-border communities and then identify some of the factors that had led to arms smuggling in the area.

The Business Activities of Smuggling of Arms Across Nigeria-Benin Borders

On 19th August, 2010 all the daily newspapers reported the series of cross-border trading and crimes that recently took place with the arrest of one suspected killers of 2007 notable governorship candidate. According to the police, "efforts in conjunction with foreign collaboration led to the arrest of one Ben Faton Djideonou Aguemon alias "Matthew Asumo", a Beninoise. He specializes in snatching vehicles along Owode-Idiroko Road at gun point. He has confessed to taking various cars, especially jeeps, through the bush path into Benin Republic with foreign and local collaborators. Other suspects connected with a series of car snatching along the Owode, Sango-Ota and Idiroko axis have been arrested and are undergoing interrogation". In the suspect's confessions (just 25 years old) he said

"what I do is to clear Tokunbo (second hand cars) from Cotonou to Nigeria side and I have cleared many cars. I have been in this business for seven years, to clear small cars, we collect C400,000" (The Punch August 19, 2010 p. 5) . These statements confirmed our expression of smuggling business across the borders.

Also, the Vanguard, August 19, 2010 on its Crime alert had the headline "Smuggling Stolen Vehicles Across the Borders" with the confession of a suspect saying " It's a do-or-die operation with security agents at night". The suspect, Afisu Adekunle, a citizen of Benin Republic snatched Toyota Camry which was recovered by the police. The vehicle was snatched during an armed robbery attack at Mangoro Bus Stop along Abeokuta-Agege Motor Road by four heavily armed hoodlums from Benin Republic. The gang had been terrorizing Idiroko borders and environs, disposing motorists of their valuables including GSM phones. The suspect agreed that he was a car smuggler, locally known as *fiaya wo*" and was contracted by the gang to ferry the stolen car out of the country. The unfortunate thing about the smugglers is that some of them have names similar to Nigerians and until they declare their nationalities no one can really say they are not Nigerians. In the process of smuggling cars they smuggle or carry arms for other nefarious activities.

In a similar event, the State Security Services (SSS) intercepted 52 Kalashnikov rifles and tens of thousands of ammunition rounds heading for an area that has been the scene of religious violence. According to the agency report (THISDAY, August 19, 2010, p.8) five men including two students of the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria were arrested for trying to bring the weapons from neighbouring Chad Republic. The men hid the rifles, ammunition and about \$32,000 underneath vegetables and dried fish in two cars. The trafficked weapons concealed in car doors, packaged stock fish and other bagged foodstuff in a V-booth Mercedes Benz and a Peugeot 504 wagon taxi include over 50 different sets of AK-47 rifles, rocket launchers, assorted ammunitions, grenades, computer ware and N4,823,500 cash. The weapons were heading for Jos, the epicenter of religious violence in Nigeria's "middle belt" where dozens of ethnic groups and hundreds of Christians and Muslims have died fighting this year alone. Also, two robbery suspects that were arrested in Lagos said "we go for any Honda and Toyota products, we also snatch Nissan Pathfinders because there are ready markets for the cars". Their intercepted Honda Bulldog car was being used as a mobile armoury. Guns were cleverly hidden in the back door pad,

some of items recovered include a vehicle, a military assault rifle, two cut to size double barrel guns, 22 live rounds of 6m bullets and five live cartridges. Another bus abandoned contained a lot of gun in the engine compartment (The Punch, August 19, 2010 p.7).

Smuggling of arms across Nigeria-Republic of Benin borders has led to increase in incidents of armed robberies, kidnapping, rising waves of ethnic militias and their attendant violent conflicts. According to Eliagwu (2003), by July 2002, there have been no less than fifty violent conflicts in Nigeria leaving thousands dead, injured and homeless. With the increase in cross-border banditry and smuggling of arms there were grave consequences for both national and regional security as was evidenced with the attack of the daughter of Nigeria former president, Olusegun Obasanjo. During the attack, two kids Akinolu and Adeife Akindeko and a police orderly were killed. (Sunday Guardian September 28, 2003). According to the report, this incident was traced to Hamani Tijani, a 41 year old Niger Republic national whom security reports have identified along with members of his gang as being responsible for the snatching of over two thousands exotic cars and the killing of over one thousand people between 2000 and 2003. Also, in early 2003, there was a report on Republic of Benin television where cargos of sophisticated weapons intercepted by men of Republic of Benin customs service were displayed. The cargos were allegedly moved into the country by Hamani Tijani.

Smuggling of arms has largely continued to aid the formation of ethnic armies especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and has remained a source of worry to security experts who believed that their supply is through illegal means. In buttressing the danger posed by small arms smuggling, a former director in Nigeria foreign affairs ministry –Olusegun Akindeko during the 58th session of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament and International security in New York, said that the proliferation of arms constituted an impediment to development (Guardian, October 9 2003 pg 8). According to him, “these arms continue to have devastating effect on the African continent considering their capacity to fuel and prolong conflicts”. The rise in the formation of ethnic militia and ethnic related violence lend credence to the puzzle that security experts have not been able to unravel since November 1999 till now (2011), there have been at least over hundred ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria (Aluko, 2011).

Research Methodology

The data used in this study was obtained mainly from primary source through the use of questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussion (FGD) and the study area were nine communities along Nigeria/Benin border. The communities include Ketu, Kanga, Ilara, Ilikimoun, Alagbe, Idofa, Oke Agbe and Ijoun. Out of the 500 questionnaires administered, 470 were completed and returned and all the data collected were free from any influences.

The sample size of 500 was spread over the selected communities in the area. The sampling technique used was the Simple Random Sampling. The reason for using this method is because of its importance of giving each element in the region an equal opportunity of being selected for the sample. The random selection was conducted in such a way that it was representative enough at least having respondents from the selected communities at the border. The questionnaire contained closed questions. Closed ended questions gave the respondents the opportunity to choose from alternatives and it also gave room for easy analysis of data. The questions were divided into seven sections. The Interview involved the administration of guided questions which was administered over a period of 3 days. The interview bothered on socio-economic status, their views about smuggling and other trans-border crimes. Focused Group Discussions were held at Ketu, Ilara and Alagbe. The FGD examined the histories and cultural relationships of the border communities, the traditional characteristics and their existing’ inter-relationships. Those that provided information for the study included the communities’ leaders, the women groups, the youths and opinion leaders as well as security agencies at the border and these included the police, the customs and the immigration officials.

The method of data analysis used basically were: simple percentage and the frequency table for the test of hypothesis, the PPMC was used to test for the existing relationship between the variables in each of the hypothesis while the chi-square (x^2) technique was used to test for the level of significance of the relationship existing between every two variables in the hypothesis.

Research Findings and Discussions

From Table 1 below, it is shown that the respondents between the age of 20 and 29 years are 25.1% of the total respondents. The table also shows that 40.9% of the respondents are within the age range of 30-39, 26.8% are in the age range 40-49 while 7.2% are within age 50 and above. This indicates that the respondents are matured and understands the

environment. Table 2 shows the marital status of the respondents. 30.2% of them are single, 59.4% are married, 4.3% are divorcees and 8.1% of them are widowed. This means that a very good number of the respondents are responsible men and women. The next Table 3 indicates that 28.9% of the respondents had primary education, 46.8% had secondary education and 11.1% of them are educated to the tertiary level while 13.2% of them had no formal education. This indicates that literacy level is not that low among the respondents.

Table 4 deals on the employment status of the respondents. 9.8% of them are civil servants, 60.9% of them are self employed while 29.4% of them are unemployed. This indicates that a large portion of the respondents are actively engaged in a given form of employment or the other. The questions that deal on the activities in the communities indicate in Table 5 that 0.9% of the population had stayed for less than a year in the communities 27.2% had spent between 2-5 years, 44.3 had stayed there for between 6-10 years while 27.7% of them had spent above 10 years in the communities. Table 6 indicates that most of the respondents making up to 97.7% agree to the fact that smuggling go on in the community while 2.1% of them stated that smuggling does not go on in the community. Thus, it can be established that based on the respondents position, smuggling actually go on in the communities visited. Table 7 indicates that 9.8%, 61.3%, 12.3%, 14% of the respondents stated that drugs and crude oil, vehicles, arms (guns) and ammunitions and textiles respectively are smuggled through the communities.

According to Table 8, 99.6% of the population states that people come from afar to settle in the communities while 0.4% of them stated that people don't come from afar to settle there. This indicates that a very good number of the respondents in the communities are not indigenous people and that they are from different socio-cultural background and that interaction will be directly functional. Table 9 indicates that only 3.0% stated that those who come from afar to settle in the communities usually get

employed while 96.6% of them stated that they don't usually get employed. This indicates the possibility of idleness among the people of the community. Table 10, indicates that 3.4% of the respondents stated that the major occupation in the community is farming, 93.6% of them stated that it is trading while 0.4% of them stated that the major occupation is the civil service. Then looking at the various communities and the environment, one tends to ask the type of trading they are referring to. According to the respondents, 6.4% said there are adequate infrastructural facilities in the communities while 93.6% of them stated that there are no adequate infrastructures in the communities. In table 11, 3.4% of the respondents rate the socio-economic standard of the people of the community as good, 44.7% rate it as being poor while 51.9% rate it as being very poor.

On how the residents had been coping with the problems in the border region, the respondents indicate that efforts had been made to improve the socio-economic standard of the community as stated by 4.7% of the respondents, while 93.6% of the respondents stated that no efforts had been made, 1.7% of them stated that efforts had somehow been made. In table 12, 6.4% stated that the major problems in the communities is armed banditry, 2.1% stated that it is youths involvement in violence, **trans-border crimes** is the major problem according to 91.1% of the respondents while 0.4% of them stated that there are others which were not specified. Table 13, indicates that 51.9% of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that unemployment is one of the major causes of arms smuggling, 43.8% agree to this fact, 1.7% are undecided, while 2.6% of them disagreed. Which means a total of 95.7% confirmed unemployment as a major cause of trans-border business crimes. Table 14 indicates that 25.1% of the respondents strongly agree to the fact that arms smuggling is prevalent in the communities because it is safe to do such business there, 65.5% of them agree to this fact, 2.1% of them are undecided, 6.0% disagreed while 1.3% of them strongly disagreed. Again, it means 90.6% confirmed the act of smuggling business.

Table 1: Age

	Frequency	Percentage
Below 30 years.	118	25.1
30-39	192	40.9
40-49	126	26.8
50 and above	34	7.2
Total	470	100

Table 2: Marital Status

	Frequency	Percentage
Single	142	30.2
Married	270	57.4
Divorced	20	4.3
Widowed	38	8.1
Total	470	100

Table 3: Education

	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	136	28.9
Secondary	220	46.8
Post Secondary	52	11.1
Non-formal	62	13.2
Total	470	100

Table 4: Employment

	Frequency	Percentage
Civil Servant	46	9.8
Self Employed	286	60.8
Unemployment	138	29.4
Total	470	100

Table 5: Length of stay

	Frequency	Percentage
0-1 year	4	0.9
2-5 years	128	27.2
6-10 years	208	44.3
Above 10 years	130	27.7
Total	470	100

Table 6: Occurrence of smuggling in the community?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	460	97.9
No	10	2.1
Total	470	100

Table 7: Goods usually being smuggled

	Frequency	Percentage
Drugs & Crude oil	46	9.8
Vehicles	288	61.3
Arms (guns) and ammunitions	58	12.3
Textiles materials	68	14.5
Total	470	100

Source: Fieldwork 2010

Table 8: Presence of foreigners in the community

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	468	99.6
No	2	0.4
Total	470	100

Table 9: Employment opportunities

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	3.0
No	454	96.6
Not applicable	2	0.4
Total	470	100

Table 10: Major occupation in the community?

	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	16	3.4
Trading	440	93.6
Civil Servant	2	0.4
Others	12	2.6
Total	470	100

Table 11: Socio-economic status of the community

	Frequency	Percentage
Good	16	3.4
Poor	210	44.7
Very poor	244	51.6
Total	470	100

Table 12: Major problems in the community

	Frequency	Percentage
Armed banditry	30	6.4
Youths involvement in violence	10	2.1
Trans-binder crimes	428	91.1
Others	2	0.4
Total	470	100

Table 13: Unemployment is one of the major cause arms smuggling

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	244	51.9
A	206	43.8
U	8	1.7
D	12	2.6
Total	470	100

Table 14: Arms smuggling is prevalent because there is safety for such activities in this community

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	118	25.1
A	308	65.5
U	10	2.1
D	28	6.0
SD	6	1.3
Total	470	100

Source: Fieldwork 2010

Fo

Response	M	F	Total
Yes	94	68	162
No	114	64	178
May be	76	54	130
Total	284	186	470

Fe

Response	M	F	Total
Yes	97.8	64.2	162
No	107.6	70.4	178
May be	78.6	51.4	130
Total	284	186	470

$$\text{Chi-square } X^2_c = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

$$X^2_c = 0.074 + 0.19 + 0.43 + 0.113 + 0.291 + 0.066$$

$$X^2_c = 1.164$$

Degree of freedom

$$df = (nr - 1) (nc - 1) \text{ where } r = 2, c = 3$$

$$df = (2 - 1) (3 - 1)$$

$$df = 2$$

Level of Significance = 5%

$$X^2_t \text{ at } 0.05^{(2)} = 5.991$$

$$X^2_t = 5.991.$$

In the process of subjecting our data to further statistical analysis, we tried to test a hypothesis on whether trans-border communities have negative perception about arms smuggling. Hypothesis 1: Trans-border communities have negative perception about arms smuggling. The tabulated value for X which is 5.991 is greater than the calculated value for X which is 1.164, the hypothesis that trans-border communities have negative perception about arms smuggling is therefore accepted.

Challenges of Combating Arms Smuggling Across Nigeria-Benin Border

The problems of combating the transborder crime as obtained from the communities have been hampered by the following factors: The first is that in Africa, border communities are normally located in inaccessible fringes of their nation-states, and almost always form the most neglected parts of the generally neglected rural landscapes of their states. Because of this special feature of neglect and the concomitant unemployment and overall underdevelopment that prevail in these locations, their inhabitants, who must always survive and who sees these clandestine socio-economic activities as a compensating opportunity, find their attraction irresistible.

Second, some government policies are not in line with the prevailing socio-economic realities on ground. For instance, customs duty on many goods is rather on the high side, the age limit of Tokunbo (second hand) vehicles allowed to come into the country do not take care of the low income earners; in terms of costs, etc. Thus, until and unless government policies and our socio-economic realities are reconciled, these trans-border crimes may remain unabated. Third is the collaboration and co-operation

of the border security officials, which is sometimes enlisted-largely because of the poor remunerations packages, unfriendly working environment and lack of logistics of their jobs, have made it another high contributing factor.

The solution to this trans-border crime simply lies in the resolution of the afore-listed problems, as well as in marking out the frontier zone as distinct regions. By and large, the socio-economic activities can readily be seen in the social and economic life-style of the “big-timers” in this line of “trade”. For instance, the richest, the most popular, the most exotic mansions, the most luxurious cars, the most beautiful women and the highest titleholders in these localities belong to those occupational brackets. Also, the Nigeria-Benin boundary which separates two nation-states in an unequal relationship, which is porous, provide ready employment to many unemployed able-bodied persons by way of smuggling, is seen as a means of compensating them for arbitrary surgery done to their land by the European powers. Both scholarly interest and governmental presence dwindles as one moves towards Nigeria-Benin border region. This is readily observed in the decline of all modernization and developmental or infrastructural facilities such as physical infrastructural, economic facilities and social amenities, towards this region. The result has been the heavy presence of clandestine activities such as human trafficking and smuggling in the region.

The general findings of the study shows poor socio-economic conditions, trans-border crimes such as smuggling including smuggling in arms which are usually concealed in other smuggled goods such as rice, textile material and even vehicles. In many

cases, some of such smugglers impersonate clergy men while they smuggle arms into the country, many even go to the extent of paying physically challenged persons to be in possession of such contrabands as arms with the hope that security agents will not suspect them. In many other cases, such contrabands are usually being transported through non motorable narrow paths with the use of motor cycles to cover a journey that could last over three hours such as from Kanga through Alagbe to Ayetoro or Abeokuta in Ogun state. Despite the prevalence of smuggling in this region, violence is very minimal, or hardly noticed.

Recommendations

In order to develop border communities and effectively control the menace of arms smuggling, the following recommendations which are within the context of both trans-border communities and arms smuggling and within the framework of sub-regional peace and stability in West African are made.

1. Interventionist approach, which canvases for the establishment of specific project designed to take the communities out of the socio – economic plight should be embraced.
2. Border communities forum, which should be a pressure (non- partisan) group, should be established with a view to organizing lectures, conferences, symposia e. t. c. on border related issues especially smuggling and how it can be managed.
3. Fields of joint initiative on both sides of the borders region should be established. This will entail increasing cross-border cooperation which will make the borders more of lines of contact than those of cooperation.
4. The governments of both countries (Nigeria and Benin) should work towards the infrastructural development of the countries border communities.
5. Government should provide basic social amenities and services in all key communities in border regions. Such amenities should include educational facilities, electricity and communication facilities. Government should conduct a socio – economic survey of all communities in the border areas with a view to determining the feasibility of regrouping them so as to obtain the threshold required to support these amenities and services.
6. Over concentration of border inspection agencies at the borders should be reconsidered.

Although the recommendations above focus on Nigerian-Benin border regions, the issues raised are relevant to all border regions the world over. To reduce smuggling in arms to its barest minimum, attention must be paid to the development of border

communities and this must be at the same pace with the central part of the country.

The existence of inequalities between countries of Africa and their respective administrative and political centre and her periphery has necessitated the need for paying greater attention first to the periphery and then the entire geographical milieu in order to first elevate the socio-economic conditions of the periphery and on the long run bring about effective control of smuggling in arms (including other contrabands) and reduce the spate of violent conflicts in the country in particular and in the West African sub-region in general.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study has determined the socio-economic status of trans-border communities and then identifies some of the factors that had led to arms smuggling in the area. The discussion of trans-border communities and the problems of arms smuggling has led to the realization of some fundamental issues which must be genuinely appraised and addressed in order for the efforts at reducing arms proliferation to achieve meaningful results. The partitioning of Africa that took place in November 1884 was purely a European affair as there was neither Africans interest nor involvement and participation. The result was that conflicting and incompatible ethno-cultural groups were forced on one another while, some other ones were mutilated, consequently, the border regions have remained boiling spots. The effect of this is their continual neglect by successive governments culminating in their under development.

All border scholars believe that political, administrative, physical, social, economics, as well as modernization and development evidences dwindle as one approaches border regions. While territorial boundaries of Europe have experienced re-alignments and deliberate government policies to develop them, those of Africa are being dogmatically maintained and without any extra effort at their socio-economic development. Developing border communities and infrastructural facilities must be seen as a major step towards stemming the tides of arms smuggling along the borders, the long term effect of which will be effective management of conflict in the sub-region.

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