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National Security: The Role of Border Communities for the Sustenance of Peace in Nigeria

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Abstract
Security has become one of the leading challenges besetting Nigeria today; like Fulani-herdsmen attack, Kidnapping, Banditry, among others. These problems that are threatens the peace and tranquility of Nigeria and its neighbors where linked to the nature of Nigerian porous border and lack of commitment on security issues from the community members. The main focus of this paper is to examine the security issues related to the Nigerian border with Niger republic; and the communities' effort towards tackling such challenges with particular reference to Illela (Nigeria) and Konni (Niger) borders. The study has discovered that citizens/border communities, security agencies and government officials are responsible for either efficient or inefficient security of these countries. Therefore, this paper posits that for the effective national security of Nigeria and beyond, there is need to do among others, the mobilization and proper utilization of border communities for participatory security measure; law enforcement agencies along the borders are to be well equipped; and above all the implementation of socio-economic (developmental) programs across the nation. Anchored on the Symbolic Interactionism Theory, the paper relies on both primary (questionnaire/interview) and secondary sources (text books, journals, theses, dissertations and internet).

Keywords*:* Border communities, insecurity, national security, insecurity, sustainable peace.

Introduction
The prosperity and security of any nation are fundamentally undermined when its borders remain open and porous, facilitating the unregulated movement of individuals and goods. Government officials, local communities, and security personnel must implement effective regulatory measures to safeguard national boundaries (Arzika, 2008). Historically, Nigeria and the Niger Republic emerged as colonial constructs shaped through a series of negotiations, treaties, and conquests between Britain and France from 1890 to 1906. Despite their formal independence in 1960, the two countries share an extensive land boundary of approximately

1,497 kilometres (Arzika, 2008). However, colonial demarcations did little to separate communities economically, socially, or culturally, as cross-border interactions remain a routine aspect of daily life.

Despite these cross-border activities, persistent security challenges arise along the international boundaries, including arms smuggling, illegal migration, robbery, terrorism, and human as well as currency trafficking (Ahmed & Chilaka, 2013). Such breaches in border security adversely affect not only the immediate border communities but also the broader socio-economic and political relations between Nigeria and Niger. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders with its neighbours—Cameroon (1,690 km), Niger (1,497 km), Benin (774 km), and Chad (87 km)—exacerbates these challenges, posing serious threats to national and regional stability (Ahmed & Chilaka, 2013).

Furthermore, these security issues significantly impact the relationship between Nigeria and Niger, posing threats to the peace and stability of the West African sub-region (Vanguard, 2012). For instance, insurgencies by groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West African Provinces (ISWAP) have profoundly affected not only political relations but also socio-economic conditions across Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. Resources intended for developmental projects are now diverted to address the needs of millions displaced by armed conflict, banditry, and kidnapping, including the maintenance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps across the region (Vanguard, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria and the Niger Republic are distinct political entities sharing lengthy common boundaries. The border communities possess intertwined historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic backgrounds. Despite political separation by arbitrary colonial demarcation, socio-cultural and economic linkages have endured, fostering vibrant cross-border interactions (Adnan, 1993). These ties are evidenced through informal relationships, with institutions such as marriage, religion, and cultural norms remaining largely unaltered, thus reinforcing close communal bonds and frequent interaction across borders (Adnan, 1993).

Moreover, residents of these border communities often conduct their daily activities across national lines, frequently unaware of their transgression until confronted by security authorities (Idris, 2009). Such fluid movement has facilitated various cross-border crimes, including smuggling, human and drug trafficking, illegal migration, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), cattle rustling, and kidnapping for ransom. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders exacerbates these issues, as there are approximately 1,486 illegal routes and only 84 official crossings between Nigeria and Niger (Onuoha, 2013).

These routes further connect to other African nations such as Mali, Libya, and Algeria, compounding the security challenges of international terrorism, arms smuggling, and human trafficking. These issues adversely affect the longstanding socio-economic and political relationships between Nigeria and Niger. Substantial financial resources meant for development are instead redirected towards addressing security crises and humanitarian needs. Consequently, communities along the Nigeria-Niger border, especially near Illela-Konni, are significantly impacted, as criminal activities and insurgent threats transcend boundaries (Onuoha, 2013). This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the diverse roles of stakeholders, particularly border communities, in sustaining peace and security.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Symbolic Interactionism (SI), a variant of Interaction Theory, as its theoretical framework. The foundations of SI were laid by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, who explored how individuals both shape and are shaped by society through meanings developed in social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Herbert Blumer further developed and popularised the concept, coining the term "Symbolic Interactionism" in the early 20th century. Today, SI is recognised as a major sociological perspective, offering valuable insights into the processes by which societal norms and individual identities are constructed and maintained (Blumer, 1969).

Interactionism focuses primarily on micro-level social processes, examining how individuals and small groups interact within various contexts. Proponents, such as Gallagher (2001), contend that people form beliefs, values, and identities through these interactions, and that variability in attitudes and cultures arises from such engagement. The theory posits that social context informs behaviour, and that these ongoing interactions underpin the construction of social realities. Importantly, the methodology associated with SI privileges qualitative data,

asserting that statistics alone cannot fully capture the complexities of human experience (Gallagher, 2001).

Despite criticisms, including its lack of systematic structure and testability, Symbolic Interactionism remains pertinent to this study. It provides an interpretive lens to understand how borderland communities, through continuous interaction, shape and are shaped by shared social meanings. The dynamics of security and insecurity across international borders can be attributed to the consequences of such interactions, which may manifest positively or negatively. Crimes such as smuggling, trafficking, and terrorism are viewed as outcomes of social interactions within these communities, aligning with the theory's core assertion that actions and meanings are shaped by interaction (Blumer, 1969; Gallagher, 2001).

Literature Review

National Security

National Security has been re-conceptualized, and moves it away from a narrow focus on defense against external threats and anchors it on threats from the domestic environment which usually associated with good governance, human rights and democracy. The new concept has to do with common security large-scale threats such as epidemics, ecological problems, and sudden demographic disorders and massive undocumented movements (Afolayan, 2016). These among others have constitute for most countries formidable threats to their national security, especially international border crossings by arms dealers, terrorists and smugglers which mostly exceed the capacity of many nation-states as single actors to solve. The problem has motivated some citizens to turn towards alternative sources of security that are essentially non-state form such as local/communitarian or private security (Nnoli, 2006).

Border Communities

This refer to the inhabitants of the land on either side of border. These communities further viewed as a group of people living within the geographical zone at the border of nation-state. These may also include people like security personnel, border guards, border refugees, legal inhabitants, aliens, criminally-minded individuals, among others (UNDP, 1996). In this regard, 'border' area has been replaced with 'borderland'. This replacement has further provided the key to the understanding of how 'borderland communities' interact and the ways in which common security challenges influence their socio-economic and political activities that take place across border (Afolayan, 2016). This among others links people on both sides of the border that breaks down artificially imposed barriers, and generates positive and negative interactions.

International Border

This is used interchangeably with country's boundary and is a region or area straddling a boundary or the area adjacent to a trans-boundary. In other words, international border simply means a line separating two or more independent countries, nation-states, administrative divisions, or other areas. Hinjiri (1993) defined border either local or international as a line of demarcation that excluded one nation-state from another or as being essentially legal limits for the areas of jurisdiction of country's political regimes. However, Guo (2004) has classified borders into two, that is natural border (boundary) when naturally demarcated by certain features of the surface of the earth (like rivers, seas, mountains, valleys, etc) and artificial border (boundary lines) which has been artificially or arbitrarily created by men (man-made) from objects such as walls, stones or lines.

Trans-Border Crimes

Criminal and anti-social activities along international borders frequently involve non-nationals or local community members, posing threats to societal peace and stability. Such crimes include human and currency trafficking, smuggling, arms banditry, cattle rustling, and robbery. The involvement of foreigners in these criminal acts in Nigeria and Niger is often seen as a spillover

effect of civil wars, drought, and economic decline in the region (Alli, 2011). These problems sometimes generate suspicion among ethnic groups within the same country and undermine cordial relationships between border communities (UNDP, 1996).

Media reports have revealed that cattle rustlers and Boko Haram (BH) insurgents often originate from neighbouring countries, Niger, Chad, Mali, and Cameroon, conducting attacks in Nigeria before retreating across borders to evade security forces. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders facilitates such criminal activities, as there are reportedly over one hundred illegal routes between Nigeria and Niger alone (Onuoha, 2013). In response, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin established the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to patrol and secure vulnerable border regions.

Peace

Historically, the term "peace" has signified harmony, tranquillity, agreement, treaty, and reconciliation. Galtung (1967), a Swedish peace scholar, distinguished between "positive peace" and "negative peace." Positive peace refers to the presence of desirable conditions within the mind and society, such as harmony, justice, equity, hospitality, and the absence of indirect or structural violence. In contrast, negative peace is defined by the absence of war or direct conflict, representing a state free from open violence, assault, or acts undermining societal progress (Galtung, 1967). Wabel (2007) further conceptualised peace as comprising inner (implicit) and outer (explicit) dimensions.

Inner peace pertains to the individual's psychological state, encompassing mental calmness and serenity of spirit. Outer peace, however, is reflected in the behaviour of individuals or groups, shaped by cultural norms and characterised by the absence of hostilities or warfare (Wabel, 2007). Mechanisms for fostering peaceful co-existence involve methods to create and sustain harmonious relationships at personal, familial, and societal levels. Prevention plays a vital role, encompassing activities that inhibit the outbreak, escalation, or recurrence of conflict, and supporting reconciliation, recovery, and development.

Role of the Border Communities on National Security

First, community members play a crucial role in national security through participatory security practices, as described by Njideka (2017). Their local knowledge enables them to identify hidden criminals and provide valuable information to law enforcement agencies. Effective crime prevention thus requires community cooperation, as security threats cannot be addressed without active involvement. In Illela-Konni, residents have formed vigilante groups with the support of community leaders and local authorities. However, grievances against security personnel sometimes discourage community members from sharing critical information, often due to fear of reprisal or lack of protection for informants (Interview, April 2017).

Second, traditional rulers and community leaders serve as pivotal authorities, mediating disputes and maintaining local stability (Premium Times, 2017). These leaders possess intimate knowledge of community members, facilitating informal channels for peace and conflict resolution (Adnan, 1993). In Illela-Konni, traditional rulers enjoy trust and respect, aiding their ability to defuse tension and foster inter-border stability. Regular collaboration between Sokoto State and Illela local government with traditional leaders extends to areas such as security and public health, demonstrating the integration of customary authority into formal governance structures (Interview, April 2017).

Third, community union leaders, including those of transport workers, traders, herdsmen, and butchers, act as development facilitators and custodians of security within their respective domains (Emeka, 2017). Their roles encompass peace promotion, conflict resolution, awareness creation, and human rights protection. These leaders routinely mobilise and sensitise members on personal and collective security. For example, transport unions develop measures to prevent

the boarding of criminal passengers, while butchers and traders ensure that livestock is sourced ethically, avoiding stolen animals. Registration and regulation of sellers by union officials also help monitor suspicious activity and reduce criminal incidents.

Finally, government officials at all levels have the primary responsibility for safeguarding lives and property. In Illela-Konni, state and local governments have deployed multiple security agencies to enforce border regulations and apprehend cross-border criminals. Regular workshops and monthly security council meetings foster intelligence sharing among security agencies, community leaders, and traditional rulers. These meetings also provide a platform for bilateral engagement with Konni Department officials when cross-border issues arise. Such multi-level collaboration underscores the importance of integrated security strategies in maintaining peace and stability in border communities (Interview, April 2017).

Methods and Materials

This research utilises both qualitative and quantitative approaches to enable a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter, drawing on information from a range of sources. Primary data were gathered through fieldwork, involving personal discussions and face-to-face interviews with security personnel, government officials, civil society members, community leaders, farmers, traders, civil servants, smugglers, and other relevant stakeholders from Illela and Konni. The interviews, conducted in both Hausa and English, were unstructured, allowing for flexibility and the collection of rich, descriptive data. Additionally, a snowball sampling technique was employed to access high-profile respondents, with twenty-two interviewees purposely selected to ensure clarity and depth of understanding. Secondary data were sourced from published and unpublished materials, including theses, books, journals, official records, and online sources, thereby broadening the theoretical framework and minimising bias. Data analysis combined qualitative insights from interviews with logical and analytical reasoning applied to quantitative sources.

Discussion/Findings

Since the community members particularly traditional rulers/community leaders occupied central position towards security either local or international, otherwise known as participatory security; where members of the community would be given opportunity to take part in the security affairs of their respective societies and nation at large. Their participation is associated with certain constraints some of them are as follows:

First, members of the communities have grievances against security personnel and governments at all level. This sometimes makes them to be less active. For instance, to disseminate relevant security information or even to arrest suspect a times would have some risks attached to it; where informant would end up bearing the consequences for what he/she does or not. Thus, the identity of informants must be made a top secret which need adequate protection. This has to do with certain inhuman behaviors of some personnel especially police towards their informants. Moreover, this also leads to often security agencies would not get the needed information as when due from any member of the community for fear of their lives by those implicated or their agents (interview: April, 2017).

Second, another problem may not be unconnected with weak existence traditional institutions. This is to say traditional rulers have no much to say in the security affairs; because of the current cut and paste democracy that neglects our pre-colonial local values in both Nigeria and Niger. The problems have weakened the capacity of traditional rulers to ensure total security in both communities within the study area, when the society faces security challenges as it does at the moment. In Nigeria, the problem is related to the present constitution of 1999 which does not empower our traditional institution. Unlike in the past, today's traditional rulers have been left with no judicial power or right to apply punishment directly. Another problem with

contemporary traditional institution is what many called deficit of trust, because some of them have auctioned the dignity of the institution to money bag politicians; who use them as medium of achieving their personal political goals (Premium Times, June 9, 2017).

Third, in respect to the primary function of Government at all levels as stated earlier to provide top security for lives and properties of it citizens. Government should be held responsible for either or not deploying required security agencies with equipment to effectively man the border according to the lay down rules of engagement, and arrest trans-border criminals. At state and local levels government should committed to organize workshops on security matters in order to enlighten the public and support them to be fully aware on the importance of self and societal security. Nevertheless, some respondents/interviewees have pointed an accuse fingers to the governments for not providing the communities in question with socio-economic and political infrastructure that could lead to their rural development. This would further alleviate the chronic poverty (that considered as facilitating factor of national insecurity) affecting the majority populace living within the area of study. However, this development/empowerment should be based on button-top strategy which would develop the capabilities of individuals and communities to make them proactive on security of their environments (Commission of Human Security, 2003).

Fourth, associations or unionism mostly where leaders and followers (executives and members) cooperates in order to achieve certain goals through different ways; in respect to security of all is not without challenges. In the course of research it had been reported that in a place where people of different characters met, there is an element of mistrust and outsmarting from errant members. For example, two bus drivers were suspended for two weeks in February (2017) on the ground of serious misconduct. Another issue affecting the unions has to do regular over charging international transporters by border security operators for conveyance of trans-border passengers.

This according to them would discourage them from disclosing information about trafficked persons boarded in fancy cars and Nigerian vehicles with Niger's number plate. To some kabu-kabu operators, they are aware on the implication of patronizing illegal routes in the bush or taking more than one person as suggested by officials; but claimed that unemployment is what necessitates them to risk their lives in carrying suspect travelers (with highest fee) through deep bush to avoid arrest from security team. By implication the operators are known or unknown to them assisting criminals, instead of exposing them. This also is the issue with some bad elements among the animals sellers, a time connive with thieves to help them sell up their catches in which the former would take his share and handed over the remaining balance to rustlers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the prevalence of crimes such as smuggling, trafficking, and robbery within the study area is significantly facilitated by Nigeria's porous borders, which enable various cross-border criminal activities. With over a hundred illegal routes between Nigeria and Niger, these pathways are exploited by transnational criminals, whose operations often extend to other African countries such as Mali, Libya, and Algeria. Towns like Illela and Konni have become focal points for the trafficking of arms, stolen goods, drugs, and hostages, thus contributing to armed robbery, communal crises, cattle rustling, and kidnappings across Nigeria (Sagir, 2015). Communities along the border are disproportionately affected by such insecurity, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated efforts. It is essential that stakeholders—including political leaders, security agencies, local communities, and traditional rulers—collaborate through bilateral agreements and local initiatives to effectively address cross-border crime and enhance national security.

Recommendations

The paper has offered the following recommendations:

1. Security agencies and local authorities should engage border communities through community policing campaigns and workshops. Residents, familiar with their environment, can identify and report suspicious activities. Timely response from security personnel, alongside strict protection of informants' identities, will build trust and encourage greater community participation, ultimately enhancing efforts to combat cross-border crime and improve overall security.
2. The government should review border policies to identify all illegal routes and recruit trusted local residents for surveillance patrols on these unauthorised paths. These patrols should be supported by well-equipped security personnel to ensure effective monitoring, as trans-border criminals and syndicates frequently exploit these routes, particularly among Illela-Konni communities, due to poor conditions, especially during the rainy season.
3. Traditional rulers are to be given define statutory functions and power to oversee the affairs of their subjects. These great people that enjoy and command respect in the society should be empower to work hand-in-hand with security operatives deployed within their respective societies; this would facilitate the peaceful coexistence and check the issue of insecurity within their territories and beyond.
4. All levels of government should fulfil their constitutional duties to tackle poverty and promote human development by implementing effective policies addressing unemployment and youth school dropout. Reducing poverty and joblessness, especially among young people, will help address the root causes of insecurity in the area, as frustration from unemployment often contributes to rising security challenges both locally and internationally.

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