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Transborder Crimes and the Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa: Insights from the Nigeria-Benin Republic Borders

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Abstract

Transborder crimes and the operation of criminal syndicates have emerged as major threats to security and efforts to advance integration in West Africa. The proliferation of transborder criminal syndicates and rising criminal activities has made member states take steps to curtail these growing challenges, sometimes with unintended consequences on the free flow of factors of production as enshrined in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement. Informed by the need to understand the challenges that transborder crimes pose within a specific context, this study examines transborder criminal activities across the Nigeria-Benin Republic border. The study assesses three forms of criminal activities along the two countries' borderlands and their implications for the security of the two countries concerned. The qualitative method was adopted, and data for the study was derived from mostly secondary and less primary sources. These criminal activities affect the national security of the two countries and impact efforts to advance integration in the sub-region. The study recommends the implementation of joint border security reforms.

Keywords:

Transborder crimes; criminal syndicates; borderland; security; Nigeria; Benin Republic.

ECOWAS was established in 1975 with the objective of promoting cooperation and advancing development in economic, political, social and cultural relations among member states. Four decades after, the organisation can be said to have achieved relative successes in the areas of economic integration, enhancing social relations among member's citizens, evolving a security architecture and striving to advance democratic governance (Jaye and Amadi 2011, 3-6; Dokubo 2009, 149; Adeniyi 2000, 16). Despite these, the sub-region is still confronted with number of challenges of which transborder crimes and the activities of transborder criminal syndicates remain significant (Darkwa 2011, 7).

Given the nature of transnational migration among people in the sub-region, ECOWAS has had to contend with the activities of transborder criminal syndicates (Dokubo 2009, 150; Adepoju 2005). This is despite efforts by member states to secure their borderlands. Due to several factors, such as porous borders, weak state institutions, and the cross-cutting nature of ethno-linguistic affiliations in the sub-region, criminal syndicates have found it easy to maintain their networks of operations (Williams and Haacke 2008, 122). Indeed, transborder criminal activities remain an important business enterprise in West Africa (Constanze 2014, 3). Syndicates that operate through borderlands deployed numerous tactics in the conduct of their business of which corruption and monetary compromise of officials of state institutions and the use of force remain pre-eminent (Oche 2009, 249).

Several efforts such as anti-crime border patrol, joint border security measures and anti-human trafficking modalities have been adopted by member-states in collaboration with international organisations to curtail the incidence, but with little success (Akinsuyi 2002, 47). In his study, Omoniyi also revealed that the government has taken various measures both at national, bilateral and at multinational levels to respond to the challenges of the criminal activities of some undesirable elements in the society but all the efforts of the government have not yielded the desired results (Omoniyi 2023, 19).

Giving credence to this position, the United Nations Office for Drug and Crime (UNODC) in its 2015 report notes that, 'the use of the African continent as a trans-shipment region for cocaine trafficking to Europe continues, with countries in West Africa being reported as transit countries (UNODC 2015, 56). The report also notes that West Africa appears to have become an established source of the methamphetamine smuggled into East and South-East Asia via Southern Africa or Europe (UNODC 2015, xiii). Stressing the debilitating effects of trans-national drug trafficking, the report notes that, "the vulnerability of Africa to drugs trafficking and crimes remains a grave concern because the illicit flows bring with them other forms of organised crime, and undermine security, health and development in an already fragile region (UNODC 2015, xiii; UNODC 2013, 3). It was found that the weak border security in sub - region had attracted international criminal networks to Nigeria (Omoniyi 2023, 13).

The Nigeria-Benin Republic borderlands can be said to be the most important in West Africa as it connect Nigeria, the largest economy in term of GDP, manufacturing base, volume and weight of external trade with the rest of ECOWAS member states to the West ([Hoffman and Paul 2015](#), vii); ([Constanze 2014](#), 3). The borderlands between the two countries run from south to north along a roughly 700 km stretch. At the Nigeria end, the borderland runs through six subnational units.¹ Although there is no accurate data, however, the extent of unrecorded and informal transborder trade transaction between Nigeria and its neighbours notably Benin Republic is enormous and staggering ([Hoffman and Paul 2015](#), 16); ([Constanze 2014](#), 4). While the State losses huge revenue as a result of informal trade that is legal, the most troubling dimension of informal trade network between the two is the increasing rise of illegal transborder criminal activities. The most notable are drug trafficking, human trafficking, armed robbery, car snatching, trade in contraband items, trafficking in weapons among other criminal ventures ([Constanze 2014](#), 5-6).

Given the importance of the Nigeria-Benin Republic borderlands to trade, commerce, and other forms of transborder activities in West Africa, it becomes important to conduct a context specific study on the menace of 'select' transborder crimes and their implications on security to both states and the sub-region in general. We also examine the security implications of such criminal activities on the two countries and how it impacted regional integration.

This study adopted qualitative research using the case study method. Primary and secondary sources of data were employed. The three criminal activities selected for consideration were smuggling of contraband goods, transborder armed robbery and car snatching, and human trafficking. The method of data analysis entailed content discussion of the documents gathered as they relate to the three transborder crimes. The study was divided into five sections. Following this introduction is the conceptual and theoretical issues on regionalism and integration. This is followed by review of literature on transborder crime, criminality and criminal syndicate. Then comes the discussion of the dynamics of transborder crime along the Nigeria-Benin Republic border areas with specific focus on human trafficking, smuggling, armed robbery and car snatching. The study then examines the effects of these transborder crime on Nigeria and Benin Republic, their impacts on integration in West Africa and then comes the conclusion.

On Integration: Definition and theoretical position

As [Sakyi and Osei Opoku \(2014, 1\)](#) note, literature and reality have made it clear that economic, geopolitical, and socio-cultural relationships across the globe are changing rapidly. These changes have resulted in the dramatic rise in the number of regional trade agreement institutions since the end of the Cold War. These new economic integration mechanisms are expected to drive economic growth and

improve the living conditions of citizens in member nations. Attempts at integration in Africa date back to 1910 when the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) was formed. As states in Africa achieved political independence, the call for the formation of regional organizations to drive economic cooperation and political unity was strongly echoed by early political leaders. Their efforts culminated in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The 1985 Lagos Plan of Action and the recognition of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as veritable sub-regional structures for advancing economic cooperation and integration represent further attempts by the OAU and later the African Union (AU) to advance the course of integration in Africa. Thus, African leaders have consistently promoted the idea of regionalism mainly because of its potential socio-political, economic, and other allied benefits ([Hartzenberg 2011](#)).

It is important to note that while the concepts of regionalism and economic integration are often used interchangeably, the two are not necessarily the same in meaning and in practical manifestations. Regionalism is much broader and involves forming entities of countries with shared political, economic, social, cultural, and geographical demarcations. On the other hand, economic integration is often considered within the framework of economic theory especially as it relates to its contribution to understanding the economic aspect of regionalism and integration in its broader sense ([Sarkyi and Osei-Opoku 2014](#), 4). The elusiveness of what constitutes regionalism, its relationship with economic integration and their link with integration have been well captured by [Mansfield and Milner \(1999\)](#).

Ravenhill in [Odijie \(2022\)](#) also, recognized different types of integration in Africa since independence, but he distinguished between political regionalism and economic regionalism. He defined political regionalism as involving institutions whose primary goal is to promote a sense of collective identity to enhance the voice of a group of states in global affairs. He also identified a second form of regionalism in Africa, economic regionalism, which he conceptualised as collaborative action by states to remove barriers to the flow of goods and services, migration, and capital ([Odijie 2022](#)).

At the beginning when the theories of integration were developed, there was much discussion on how to conceptualise integration. If integration is conceived both as a process and an end product, then it could be defined as a process that leads to a predetermined state of affairs ([Laursen 2008](#), 4). Arising from this, Deutsch et al conceive integration as the 'attainment, with a territory, of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a 'long time', dependable expectation of 'peaceful change' among its population (Deutsch, et al. 1957, 5-6). Thus, when a group of people of states have been integrated this way, they can be said to constitute a 'security community'. Hass in his classic work on the European Coal and Steel Community, define integration as "the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded

to shift their loyalties, expectation and political activities to a new centre whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states ([Hass, 1958, 16](#)).

The logic of political integration was first systematically theorised using the lens of neo-functionalism by Hass in his seminal work on the European Coal and Steel Community, 'the Uniting of Europe' ([Burley and Mattli 1993, 53](#)). According to [Haas \(1970, 610\)](#), neo-functionalism as a theory of integration is concerned with 'how and why nation-states cease to be wholly sovereign, how and why they voluntarily mingle, merge, and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts between and among themselves. Much as reality has shown that integration is on full course noting the differential in the process, coverage and depth of cooperation and integration across regions of the world, issues of sovereignty remain a major challenge to advancing integration in terms of depth and substantive issues that states engage in integration are willing to submit to the authority and institutions above the nation-states. As [Mwanawina \(2011, 465\)](#), notes the greatest dilemma facing states relates to how far they have to shed their ability to control and dictate the internal affairs of their countries in favour of agreement and treaties they have voluntarily entered into. This dilemma is clearly apparent and reflects in the way and manner states in West Africa have stalled the process at advancing the depth of the process of integration giving the states continued hang-over on the issue of sovereignty ([Mwanawina 2011, 481](#); [Nzewi 2009, 5](#)). Notwithstanding the dilemma of sovereignty and other criticisms that have been levied against regional integration, neo-functionalism remains relevant in explaining the processes and progress of integration within ECOWAS.

Transborder crimes, criminality, and criminal syndicates: A review of extant literature

Transborder crimes are set of criminal activities whose perpetrators, perpetration and repercussions extend beyond territorial borders ([Sunday, Oji and Okechukwu 2014](#)). [United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime \(2000\)](#) notes that crimes are said to be transborder if: they are committed in more than one state; they are committed in one state but a substantial part of their planning, direction or control takes place in another; they are committed in one state but involve an organized criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one state and finally, they are committed in one state but have substantial effects in another state. Crimes including human, drug and arms trafficking, armed robbery, money laundering, mineral resources and contrabands smuggling amongst others constitute transborder crimes when they transcend national borders ([Addo 2006](#)). Aside contravening laws and conventions, these crimes constitute major threat to democracy and undermine security and regional integration ([Ening 2011](#); [The Sun 2007](#)).

Transborder crimes are perpetuated when capability, opportunity and motivation coalesced (Sunday, Oji and Okechukwu 2014, 50). The capability upon which crimes are committed across borders includes the criminal syndicates and the materials by which these crimes are perpetuated. Studies have shown that opportunity for transborder crimes is enhanced where there are some ease of transportation and communication, porous borders that guarantees easy movement of people and commodities, lack of mechanism to monitor movement across borders and weak governmental institutions (Onuoha 2013; Wakili 2009, 89). Likewise, transborder crimes have the tendency to be committed in states characterized by widespread poverty, corruption and transborder trade liberalization arising from integration process (Wakili 2009, 89). This is the situation in West Africa where the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme had rolled back the states thus accentuating poverty and creating the enabling environment for rising criminalities and the emergence of criminal syndicates (The Punch 2012, 3). In his study, Omoniyi (2023) asserted that criminal activities across Nigerian borders are high and have been identified but the responses towards addressing them both at national and sub- regional levels have simply fallen short of creating a secure, stable and peaceful environment for Nigeria economic development and socio-political advancement” (Omoniyi 2023, 19).

Demonstrating how failing economies and poor governance aided the proliferation of transborder criminal syndicates and rising crimes Alemika, notes that:

unscrupulous economic factor manifests in ineffective managerial decisions; regulations distorting link between supply and demand; weak economic regulation incapable of preventing illicit market; large informal sector impairing trade regulation in and across state borders and deprivations such as mass poverty, unemployment, low income and wide economic appetite for foreign-made goods. Harsh political factor includes weak regulatory capability over economic activities; political instability; armed conflicts and war and political corruption facilitating collaborations between criminal gangs and government officials. Weak legal factor includes ineffective legal platform and excessive prohibition of goods and services needed by majority of the population without corresponding effort at industrialization (Alemika 2009, 15).

Dokubo (2009) and Adepoju (2005) note that transborder crimes have the opportunity to be committed in regions with protocol for free movement of persons among member-states especially where there exist relative differences in economic endowment. It is argued that such condition will prompt citizens from the economically disadvantaged member-states to always want to move to member-states with economic advantage thereby leading to illegal migration. This was the case between Nigeria and its neighbours, notably Benin, Chad, and Niger Republics and Ghana in the 1980s.

Importantly, transborder crimes do not just happen. Transborder criminal gangs are driven by mirage of motivations. Although there is no consensus among authors

on what motivate transborder syndicates as motivation is largely informed by policy ends. However, most literature affirmed that transborder criminals are often motivated by financial benefits, and other socio-political inducements ([Alemika 2009](#), 10). Besides, other inducement includes the get-rich-quick syndrome, insatiable appetite for foreign made goods, pecuniary interest and the mentality of the border communities that participation in transborder economic activity whether legal or illegal is their own birth right ([Oche 2009](#), 249; [Flynn 1997](#)).

Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Armed Robbery and Car Snatching along Nigeria-Benin Republic Borderlands

Nigeria-Benin Republic border has become major theatre and centre of attraction for criminal syndicates and route for high level transborder crimes in West Africa. Transborder crimes have become fundamental social problems and heighten security concern between the two countries. The most prominent of the social concern relates to the operations of criminal elements engaging in human trafficking business. Their activities have become a fundamental security threat to the citizens of the two countries. Human trafficking thrives in West Africa because of the significant presence of Nigerian traffickers with operational bases in Benin, Togo, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and South Africa ([Ikoh 2013](#)). Study revealed that the targets of trafficking in West Africa are mainly children, women and economic migrants ([Akinyemi 2019](#), 48).

While the root causes of human trafficking are complex and interrelated, poverty is a primary factor. Other identifiable push factors include traditions and cultural values, gender discrimination, social changes altering migratory patterns, labour requirements, among others. These factors are worsened by situations of instability or conflict in some regions, especially West and Central Africa. However, increasing demand also seems to be a crucial factor in the rising incidence of human trafficking in Africa. Trafficking victims often become prey not only to sexual exploitation and economic exploitation, but also forced participation in conflict. Whereas trafficked girls feed prostitution rackets in Europe, boys are often enlisted in the illicit sale of arms and drug trafficking ([Aning 2007](#), 5; [Ndiribe 2006](#)).

Even though there is no accurate data on women and child trafficked, a general trend shows increase in human trafficking, especially in Central and West Africa ([Andrés 2008](#), 210-211; [Aning 2007](#), 5; [UNODC 2005](#), 12). Nigerians were right at the heart of the human trafficking business in West Africa as perpetrators and victims. The fact that reported cases of rescued victims by government agencies and those deported from abroad are rife attest to Nigeria's centrality to the human trafficking business in West Africa ([Oche 2009](#), 258). For instance, the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons, NAP TIP rescued 777 Nigerians trafficked to Benin Republic in 2014 ([United States Department of State 2014](#)). In the same vein, Nigeria

Immigration Services rescued 25 victims trafficked outside Nigeria who were handed over to NAPTIP at Seme border in 2014 ([News Agency of Nigeria 2014](#)).

The United Nations International Children and Education Fund, UNICEF rescued 7,800 children trafficked from Togo, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger at Porto-Novo and Parakou in Benin for child labour in 2013 ([United States Department of State 2014](#)). A 33-year Nigerian woman was arrested by the Nigeria Immigration Services while trafficking eight Nigerians across Seme border in 2012 ([Olatunji 2012](#)). Similarly, NAPTIP rescued 1,257 persons trafficked across Nigeria-Benin Republic border in Benin between 2003 and 2006. Stressing the depth of the crisis of human trafficking in Nigeria, Mr Josiah Emereole NAPTIP Intelligence Officer disclosed at the third International Conference for women and children in Lagos that a population of 750,000-1 million are trafficked within and across Nigeria borderland yearly and 80 percent of Nigerian ladies so trafficked are forced into prostitution in Italy and Southern Europe ([Onanuga and Adepoju 2013, 4](#); [UNODC 2015, 27](#)).

Aside its many implications on the national and human security, human trafficking has become a major source of worry, embarrassment and ridicule to Nigerian embassies abroad. In an interview with the European Correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria, NAN, the Nigeria's ambassador to Russia, Asam disclosed that:

the major consular challenge in Moscow is the influx of trafficked persons from Nigeria. No fewer than 200 girls are trafficked every month and we have many of them exposed to danger... we have deported over 240 girls since 2012. You will be shocked at the extent of resistance from the girls. These girls are not tourists, students or government officials, yet they were given visas from the Russian Embassy in Abuja ([The Nation 2013, 19](#)).

Relating a similar story, the Nigerian Ambassador to Mali, Mr Iliya Nuhu in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria lamented that:

an average of 30 Nigerian girls are being trafficked into Mali daily. The problem had grown in magnitude and sophistication, a "kind of modern-day slavery" with Nigerians going to their villages or towns to recruit young girls. Traffickers are taking advantage of Nigeria's economic problems to lure their victims with the promises of setting them up in "very lucrative businesses abroad". They go to Nigeria to source these girls and sell them off to their cronies not only in Mali but other countries. Since August, we have assisted not less than 30 of these girls to return to the country ([The Punch 2012, 13](#)).

Meanwhile, more cases of repatriation of trafficked victims by anti-trafficking agencies have been reported from Nigeria and Benin Republic ([Olayinka 2011, 47](#)). There continued to be consistent reported cases of Nigerians rescued from traffickers within Nigeria's borders with its neighbours notably Benin Republic and outside the country notably Europe. Likewise, officials of relevant agencies notably NAPTIP continue to raise alarm in relation to the fate of Nigerians trapped in countries in

the Sahel and North Africa (Idoko 2009, 7; Busari 2008, 27). Officials of NAPTIP also continue to sensitize the public about the agency's efforts at repatriating and rehabilitating victims of human trafficking in particular children that were trafficked for forced labour within the sub-region (Nwokolo 2008, 4).

While human trafficking has serious implications on human and national security, smuggling of contra-band goods across Nigeria borders with Benin Republic impact the economy of the Nigerian state. By-passing official routes, criminal syndicates on a daily basis smuggled banned and unbanned goods from Benin Republic into Nigeria deriving the Nigerian state billions in revenue from duties. From the Nigerian side, refined petroleum product is daily smuggled into Benin Republic. Smugglers engage in the use of numerous illegal border routes, forgery of official documents, and corruption of borders officers to get ease of passage for their goods. The porous and ungovernable nature of the Nigeria-Benin Republic borderland greatly aid the thriving of smuggling business between the two countries and the rest of the sub-region (Addo 2006, 1).

The Nigeria border security agencies and the Nigerian Police Force are doing their best at curtailing the activities of smugglers as indicated by the consistent reports of seizure of smuggled goods. For example, it was reported that the Federal Operations Units (FOU) a special branch of the Nigerian Custom Service, Ikeja Unit impounded 195 Vehicles including 95 scraps worth N228.2 million, with payable duty valued at N79.6 million between January and June 2015 (Ebosele 2015, 40b). The special unit was also reported to have impounded 22,742 bags of rice valued at N113.5 million and with a payable duty valued at N34.1 million. The unit also impounded assorted general merchandise including new and used textiles, new and used shoes, vegetable oil, insecticide, wine, spaghetti and noodles, soaps and detergents valued at N119.8 million with payable duty of N24.2 million. The number of seizures recorded by the unit between January and June of 2015 was put at 1,030 valued at N592.6 million (Ebosele 2015, 40b). Similar accounts of seizures of goods were reported for 2014. Giving the breakdown of the activities of the Unit, controller of the FOU, Ikeja, Turaki Adamu disclosed that the Unit recorded 2,914 seizures valued at N2.065 billion between January and December 2014 (Oseghale 2015, 44). For the year 2012, the Special Unit recorded seizures put at 3,313 with duty paid value estimated at over N1.2 billion (Ebosele 2013, 38).

The activities of smugglers have serious detrimental effects on the Nigerian state in relation to revenue loses. On rice smuggling alone, available statistics from the Nigerian Custom Service revealed that 5.5 million metric tons of rice are consumed yearly in Nigeria. Of this 1.8 million are produced locally while 3.7 million tons are imported and of this figure nearly 50 percent are smuggled into the country. The revenue loss arising from this is put at N3.3 billion yearly (Dada 2014; Ezem 2013, 18). The figures above exclude revenue loss arising from smuggling of textiles, frozen poultry products, used tires, fairly used cars, pharmaceutical products, assorted wines and spirits among others (Ogundare 2008, 14; The Comet 2004, 23). While

the concerted efforts of the Nigerian Custom Service to combat smuggling had yielded appreciable results as indicated by the increase in revenue generated by the agency for the Nigerian state in recent time, yet the activities of smugglers continued unabated on the stretch of borderlands between Nigeria and Benin.

Transborder armed robbers and carjackers complete the dangerous quartet of transborder criminals whose heinous activities had constituted security threats in Nigeria and Benin Republic. While their criminal activities had proved worrisome for the two countries, it had been more troubling for Nigeria that bears the greatest brunt of the consequences of their operations ([Nigerian Tribune 2003](#), 10). Nigeria and Benin Republic have witnessed series of armed robbers' raids on banks, other financial institutions and business outlets and the snatching of exotic cars at gun point perpetuated by transborder criminal syndicates operating from the two sides of the borderland. For example, it was reported that the Nigeria Police Force arrested a gang of eight-man armed robbers from Nigeria who carted away N100 million when they raided a bank in Port-Novo, Benin Republic in 2014. The gang was reported to have been involved in many robbery operations in Mali, Benin Republic, and other West African countries. Items recovered from them include two AK-47 rifles, 11 AK-47 loaded magazines and a Toyota Sienna bus used in their operation ([Usman and Onyegbula 2015](#)).

Of the forms of transborder armed robbery, the snatching of luxury cars especially from Southwestern Nigerian cities for onward sales in Benin Republic is the most widely reported. Reports about gunpoint snatching of cars worthy millions of Naira that often vanished into thin air once they found their way into Benin Republic territory are not only numerous but legion ([Olisah 2003](#), 1). For instance, it was reported that a top-of-the-line Range Rover Utility Vehicle belonging to the Managing Director of Socopao Nigeria Limited was snatched at Agege, Lagos state by a four-men gang in 2013 ([Alade and Igbokwe 2013](#); [Oseghale 2013](#)). In the same manner, a 2006 Range Rover Sport belonging to a popular Nigerian Yoruba musician was snatched at gun point also in Lagos, taken to Cotonou where it was sold off. While there have been numerous reports of arrest of such gang members within Nigerian border many still manage to evade arrest by escaping to Benin Republic where they seek sanctuary ([Alade and Igbokwe 2013](#); [Oseghale 2013](#)). While the Nigerian authority had sought the cooperation of Benin Republic government for the arrest and extradition of identified car snatchers such has not easily come forth. Reports attribute this reluctance to the allegation that leaders of some of the car-snatching syndicates have links with politicians and top government officers in Benin Republic ([Alli 2003](#), 7; [Williams 2003](#), 1).

The foot dragging and inability of security agencies from Nigeria to secure the cooperation of their counterparts in Benin Republic was reported to have informed the decision by the Nigerian government under former President Obasanjo to order the total seal off of Nigeria border with Benin Republic in August of 2003 ([Nigerian](#)

[Tribune 2003](#), 10; [Okoro 2003](#), 9). The hard stance of the Nigerian government under President Obasanjo forced the Beninese authority to expedite action on their investigations of suspected syndicates. The border closure and shuttle diplomacy between Obasanjo and Kerekou that arise thereof resulted in the signing of a bi-lateral agreement between Nigeria and Benin Republic in which the latter commit to extradite all suspects to Nigeria and returned all stolen vehicles that can be traced to have been stolen from Nigeria. This agreement led to the extradition of a Beninese, Ahman Tedjani that reports noted to be leader of a notorious car-snatching syndicate ([Akinmade 2003](#), 1; [Olisah 2003](#), 1).

Implications of Transborder Crimes on Nigeria and Benin Republic

Transborder crimes did impact negatively on nation's economy, social relations, distort policy, compromise governance process, undermine national and human security among others. Transborder crimes that is prevalent in the borderland between Nigeria and Benin Republic did impact on various facet of policy and governance process in the two countries and posed challenges to regional integration in West Africa ([The Punch 2005](#), 16; [UNODC 2005](#), 6-9; [Ening 2011](#), 77-79). Of the three transborder crimes considered in this study, Benin Republic can be said to be negatively affected by two which are; transborder armed robbery and human trafficking while smuggling of contrabands affects it positively. On the other hand, Nigeria's is negatively impacted by the three criminal activities. Available statistics notes that the citizens of both countries are victims of human trafficking ([UNODC 2013](#), 24-31; [UNODC 2005](#), 25-27; [Andrés 2008](#), 10; [Addo 2006](#), 8).

Victims trafficked from Nigeria and Benin Republic are forced into child labour, prostitution and domestic servitude within the sub-region, South Africa, Europe and Middle East ([Ogundare 2008](#), 14). Noting the serious implications of human trafficking on Nigeria and victims of the illicit human flesh trade, the Nigerian Tribune argued that trafficking of women for prostitution has given the country a very bad name. The paper however, notes that the shame and stigma, associated with the illicit trade in human for Nigeria though worrying were less so than the health implications. This is because many of the girls deported were diagnosed with HIV, the paper notes. Many of them had been taken through the Republic of Benin to a very demeaning life of sex slavery in Europe ([Nigerian Tribune 2003](#), 10).

Nigeria and Benin Republic have both been affected by the activities of transborder armed robbers and car theft gangs. For instance, it was reported that between the year 2000 and 2002, over 2000 exotic vehicles were stolen from Nigeria by a gang of robbers led by Tidjani Hamani whose sanctuary is Dirin, Benin Republic ([Ahmed and Chilaka 2013](#)). Besides, the two countries have been largely affected by the activities of transborder armed robbers who have carried out series of daring

attacks on banks, bureau de change operators, business outlets and on members of the public. Security personnel notably officers of Nigeria Police Force have lost their lives through attacks by transborder armed criminals. Reports of robbery operations in which Nigerian security personnel have lost their lives while trying to combat the criminal elements abound ([Oseghale 2013](#)).

The thriving smuggling of goods banned by the Nigerian state into the country through Benin Republic also impacted government policy directed at promoting local production and self-sufficiency in the production of certain goods in Nigeria. Aside this, smuggling results in the loss of revenue as smugglers' principal motive is that of evading the payment of duties aside contravening national laws on the importation of goods. The smuggling of petroleum product across Nigeria borderland into Benin Republic distort government policy and create artificial scarcity of product in cities closer to border areas. All of these negatively impact government policy, people's lives and living, threaten human and national security and often lead to strained relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic.

Indeed, the activities of transborder criminal syndicates is constraining efforts at enhancing the depth of integration in West Africa ([Adetula 2009](#)). This is because the activities of criminal gangs is forcing states in the sub-region to enact policy position and take steps to protect their borders from the incursion of gangs and thus protect national security. While this might be deemed as necessary and in line with the tenets of sovereign right of state, such steps might constrain free flow of people, trade and finances and thus be in direct contravention and violation of ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of People, Goods and Services and the Protocol on the Rights of Residency and Establishment which all the 15 member states adhered to be bound by ([Dokubo 2009](#), 151). The continued maintenance of security check-points along the highways linking Nigeria with Benin Republic and with Niger and Chad Republics to the north and the closure of Nigeria border with Benin Republic in 2003 to curtail upsurge of car-snatching represent some of such steps taken by Nigeria directed at strengthening national security and protecting sovereignty but which constrain integration efforts ([Adeola and Oluyemi 2012](#), 5; [Nigerian Tribune 2003](#), 10); In their study, [Agwu & Nte \(2023\)](#) also recommend that Nigeria should adopt strict border control measures as it is done in USA and Western Europe. Joint Border patrols by Nigeria and Benin Republic security agents should also be fully implemented to curb criminalities and reduce smuggling within the region ([Agwu and Nte 2023](#)).

Indeed, the issue of sovereign right of state to take certain steps to protect national security often runs contrary to the spirit of integration, especially when members of such integration efforts have not evolved into a strong institution and governance process that can adequately address some of the likely fall-outs of borderless border among members as it relates to free flow of persons, goods, service and the right of residency and establishment. This is the stark reality confronting ECOWAS

as it strives to advance and deepen integration in West Africa and countries like Nigeria have found it difficult to balance the need for sovereignty and promotion of integration process.

Conclusion

Like all national boundaries in Africa, the Nigeria-Benin Republic borderland was arbitrarily drawn, forcefully imposed and artificially created by the colonial authorities at the turn of the century. The nature of state formation in Africa and corresponding boundaries delimitation have resulted in the partitioning of ethno-national and linguistics groups, environmental belts, natural resources areas and water basins between and among contemporary sovereign states on the continent. One of the implications of this is that borderlands on the continent are a space of contestation and confrontation. At the same time, borderland on the continent but especially in West Africa is becoming space for cooperation. Through bilateral arrangements, institutions and structures of ECOWAS and initiatives of communities that straddled border areas, cooperation in solving common challenges is fast becoming the norm for communities and states interaction on borderlands and border related issues in the sub-region.

Notwithstanding growing optimism about transborder cooperation, the activities of transborder criminal syndicates are undermining human security in borderland communities, straining state relations on border issues, and undermining ECOWAS integration efforts. This is particularly the case along the stretch of borderland that connects Nigeria and Benin Republic, one of the most important borderlands in the sub-region. While the Nigeria-Benin Republic border region is renowned in West Africa for the volume of transborder trade it handles annually, it has also become a major hub for transborder crime, with criminal syndicates whose bases and reach traverse the continent and beyond. While numerous transborder crimes are perpetrated in this all-important borderland, this study focuses on human trafficking, smuggling, and armed robbery/carjacking. The study assesses the dynamics of these crimes, their implications for bilateral relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic, and their impact on integration.

The study finds that human trafficking, smuggling, armed robbery, and car snatching have negative impacts on the Nigerian economy, distort policies, result in revenue loss, undermine social cohesion, and pose a threat to national and human security. Although Benin Republic benefits economically from revenue obtained from port and duties on goods smuggled into Nigeria, it is negatively affected by all other forms of transborder crimes prevalent along its border with Nigeria. Both governments have initiated efforts aimed at curbing transborder criminal activities. In 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria enacted the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act, which established the National Agency for

the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Related Matters (Tsokar 2015, 22). The Nigerian government has partnered with international organizations in its fight against human trafficking, and ECOWAS has also initiated policies and programs aimed at fighting the scourge of human trafficking in the sub-region (Sylvester 2010, 6; Daily Champion 2006, 11). Nigeria and Benin Republic have signed bilateral trade agreements and evolved joint initiatives aimed at improving trade relations and curtailing the activities of smugglers (ThisDay 2014, 15; The Nation 2008, 10; Ugwoke 2005, 3). The two countries have also agreed on a border security arrangement and evolved joint border patrol initiatives directed at strengthening security and curbing the activities of transborder criminal syndicates (Adams 2003, 19; Kehind and Komolafe 2001, 32).

Despite these efforts, transborder crimes and activities of criminal elements continue to be a major challenge along the Nigeria-Benin Republic border areas. Therefore, it becomes imperative for Nigeria and Benin Republic to double their efforts in their fight against transborder criminal syndicates. They need to strengthen bilateral trade and work to curtail the smuggling of goods banned by the Nigerian government from Benin Republic. Harmonization of policies on port clearance, standardization, and disclosure is necessary to aid revenue collection on goods coming from across the border. Improving bilateral cooperation and working on strengthening the ECOWAS platform on the fight against human trafficking and child labour is also essential. Nigeria and Benin Republic need to strengthen existing security arrangements on joint border patrols and develop new security frameworks to combat transborder crime. There is a greater need to deepen and strengthen all ECOWAS initiatives, policies, and programs directed at curtailing human trafficking, drug trafficking, smuggling, transborder armed robbery and car snatching, and other transborder crimes in West Africa.

Notes

It stretches from the Atlantic in Lagos state with Seme as the most important official crossing point. From Lagos it goes through Ogun state with Idiroko as an important official border post, then to Oyo state, Kwara state, Niger state ending at Kebbi state in North-West Nigeria.

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