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Informal Trade Along Nigeria-Benin Borderand Security Challenges In Nigeria

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Abstract
The study determined the factors influencing informal trade activities in Nigeria and Benin Republic; investigated the impact of security challenges occasioned by informal trade at the Nigeria-Benin Republic to Nigeria's economy. Finally, the study examined the impact of the security challenges induced by informal trade on Nigeria economy. These were with a view to establish the connection between informal trade and security challenges in Nigeria and Benin Republic. Primary data were obtained through the use of structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from 100 respondents. Namely, 50 Custom officers, 25 Immigration officers, and 25 Police officers at the Nigeria and Benin border. The in-depth interview were randomly used to collect data from 50 informal traders at the border. Personal observation by the researcher was also part of the primary data. The data collected were analysed using SPSS and Atlas.ti packages. The study revealed that the Law enforcement agents believed that informal trade will adversely affect the formal trade except government rise up to tackle this problems. The study also revealedthat the respondents specified that they are aware of illicit drug trafficking, vehicle theft, armed robbery along the border and immediate environments of the border, arms trafficking,humantrafficking , fuel/crude oil smuggling and vandalism.Both the traders and law enforcement agents agreed that Covid-19 came into Nigeria through some trader that went to trade in Benin. The study concluded that informal trade along Nigeria-Benin border is indeed one of the greatest means by which insecurity is experienced in Nigeria and Benin Republic and there is connection between informal trade and security challenges in the two countries.Some recommendations were therefore suggested.

Key words: Informal trade, Insecurity, Border. Smuggling, Drug and Human traffficking

I. Introduction

Shortly before independence, African states were unsystematically separated with affected borders by the colonial masters. There was the opposition of porous bordersfaced by many countries within the continentwhich allows different kinds of illegal trans-border trade and other activities to thrive. Theuniqueness of the West African situation in consideration of the savannah and desert nature of the landscape, indiscriminate road blocks were mountedfor extortion, harassment and all manners of infractions. This is the condition many traders were, in the Nigeria-Benin border (Stephen Golub et.al, 2019)

Nigeria shares borders with five African countries. These countries are; Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Four of these are Francophone countries and the fifthis an Anglophone country. The borders separating Nigeria and the neighboring countries are not distinctly outlined. (Constanze Blum 2014)Hence, a series of border controversies has been experienced by Nigeria with the other countries, and Nigeria has had border challenges with Chad, Benin and Niger Republic. There have been illegal movements of goods and persons across these common boundaries. There have also been armed banditryat the border towns and villages, religious crisis, ethnic strife and mass movement of chemicals and contrabands-constituting high security challenges for Nigeria in its relations with its neighbours.

The Informal trade existed at the time of the informal economy. It is the main source of job creation in Africa and provides between 20% and 75% of total employment in most countries, with the exception of South Africa, where the estimated figure is 12% of the active population(Annamarie Kiaga and Vicky Leung, 2020). The Informal trade or unrecorded trade deals with all trade activities between countries included in the national income as stated by the national income conventions but are currently not affected by official national income statistics.

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The development of the informal cross-border trade is due to a number of factors like; the tendency for traders to evade high export taxes and import duties, bureaucratic licensing, registration requirements, and market failures as a result of poor policies adopted by countries and poor road infrastructure(Kahiya, E., &Kadirov, D.,2020). The border connecting Benin and Nigeria becomes visible to have provided a particularly rich example of the challenges in this area that may be compliant to political economy analysis. Beyond the Benin-Nigeria border, threedistinct types of informal trade were identified. They are: the illicit trade in petrol from Nigeria to Benin, the illegal importation of Nigerian manufactured goods into Benin and the re-exportation of prohibited products to Nigeria from Benin. (Stephen S. Golub&AhmadouAlyMbaye 2019) Drug trafficking, human trafficking, armed robbery, are some of the most prevalent predicate crimes in the two countries. Therefore, Benin serves as 'conduit pipe' for many Nigerian criminal groups who use the country to perpetrate crimes such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, haven for stolen goods, cyber-crime, credit card fraud and different types of tax crimes. (David Zounmenou**,** 2021)

Interestingly, Nigeria-Benin border is filled with infamedmultiple illegal checkpoints mounted by security men and/or robbers. Both the Nigeria and Benin Republic's government had at different times complained on the increasing rate of crimes along the Lagos-Seme border. What obtained are the issues of extortion, harassment, rape and intimidation across the porous border between the two intimate and contiguous neighbours. The development has slowed down descent and formal trade and fanned the embers of insecurity and crime in the neighbourhood. (Oluwaleye2021). Against this background, this study intends to assess the security challenges occasioned by informal trade along Nigeria-Benin border.

Objectives

The objectives of this paper is to;

1. determine the factors influencing informal trade activities in Nigeria and Benin Republic.
2. investigate the security challenges occasioned by informal trade along Nigeria-Benin border; and
3. examine the impact of the security challenges induced by informal trade on Nigeria economy

II. Review Of Literature

The threat of cross-border banditry, violent automobile thefts and human trafficking among others have not only taken a toll on the zonal trade, thereby making it an unpleasant trauma, but have also thrown up the issue of its better policing as in recent years drawn public attention to the well-known problems of policing Nigeria international boundaries. The activities of these cross-border criminals operating from the Benin Republic axis which are import of these revelationshad negative effect on Nigeria's economyfinancially, regardless of the involvement of human capital wasted during their operational activities. Despite the collective efforts by the Nigerian security in combating the menace of cross-border banditry, it is frustrating and irritating in their resolve to check trans-border crimes as their counterpart in the Benin Republic (the gendarmes) are not willing to assist.

The Nigerian government shut down its border with Benin Republicin May 2003 which was one of the flash points of the heightened challenge. This shut down was necessary because there was the need to apprehend the robbers who have chosen Benin as safe haven for their spoils(Ellis 2016). In addition, the trafficking in person was most especially the girl child and women from Benin to different parts of Nigeria. These certain people are illegally moved and are used as domestic helps, housemaids and security guards. They are not only paid slaving wages but they also in turn constitute remarkable security threats to the people of and relations between the two countries. (Parutis 2014)

Paradoxically, the border posts authorised by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to limit smuggling, illegal trade and all forms of informal trade within the zone discussed, have regrettably turned to facilitate that which they were meant to check. Another major security challenge between the two countries, is the informal trading and importation of fairly used vehicles. This has risen from 50,000 in 1996 to 200,000 in 2000 and 250,000 in 2002/2003. After a dip in 2004; 05 to about 150,000, they rose again to 200,000 in 2006, reaching an all-time high of 300,000 in 2007. Used cars accounted for as much as 43% of all trade flows in 2001, from 37% in 1999. This is confirmed by the fact that in 2014, used cars represented an astounding 55% of revenues (fees and taxes) for the port of Cotonou (Moore et.al 2018). It became a problem because many of the smuggled fairly used vehicles brought to Nigeria from Cotonou (Benin Republic) are filled with different kinds of contraband goods and fire arms and ammunitions(Odey et. al. 2022)

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This trend is a mystery which is characterised as a strand of informal trade which becomes an inevitable commercial activity in the Nigeria-Benin border. The heightened mystery has led to many West African citizens deeply getting involved in trade. Indeed, the profitable nature of the trade has compelled some of them to drift from formal employment into it(Boafo, &Dornberger, 2022). The contradiction is that most policy makers compromise this form of trade and as such informal trade flows do not appear in official trade statistics leading to a situation whereby official trade flows are understated. Furthermore, informal trade is often stigmatised and suffers from stereotypes of smuggling and lack of interest occasioned by lack of data commonly due to the secretive nature of informal cross border trade. Therefore, informal trade is considered to not only economically unviable endeavour but also as socially undesirable engagement. (Floro, 2019) Some estimates have put informal trade at between 30 to 40% of intra trade, suggesting that African countries could be overlooking a significant proportion of their trade by ignoring informal cross border trade. (Adeyinka, AdetunjiMusilimu, 2014) Informal tradein some Southern and Western African countries, has contributed significantly towards employment creation and income generation, especially for people who are unable to find formal employment due to various social and economic reasons and those who havebeen retrenched from formal employment.

Due to the creation of employment, there has been a multiplier effect on the poor, helping to generate income, which enables the informal traders to access basic necessities including decent shelter, education and health care. In most parts of Africa, informal trade has contributed significantly towards employment creation and income generation especially for people who are unable to find formal employment and those who have been retrenched from formal employment. Informal trade also plays an important role in ensuring food security by moving agricultural produce and other foodstuffs from where they are in surplus to where there is a deficit. It also plays a complementary role to establish businesses by supplying goods in short supply as well as opening new markets or pioneering new product lines. (Luo& Wang, 2011)

Morever, informal trade is a key source of empowerment for African women who constitute the majority. Over 70% of informal cross border traders from literature are female, either widowed, divorced or who simply undertake this business to supplement their spouses' incomes. In addition, informal trade provides fertile ground for myriad of illicit economic and social activities such as human and drug trafficking, smuggling of gold and diamonds and other precious minerals as well as wanton of arms and ammunition. Apart from tax evasion that deprives the government of potential revenue, there are also the issues of illegal currency tradingand illicit contraband trading with appurtenances of health, sanitary, environmental and cumulative security implications which is the crux of what this study sets to examine especially as it concerns Nigeria and Benin Republic(Branscum2020). Informal trade is a thriving and one of the major means of sustenance of an appreciable segment of Nigerian and Benin Republic population. (Magrin& De Montclos 2018) However, the activities from this commercial corridor has thrown up myriad of security challenges ranging from proliferation of small arms, light weapons and contrabands to trafficking in persons and other trans-border infractions.

Borderlands are both melting pots and security hot spots. These borderlands are often left aside for development purpose by the postcolonial states. This, they are susceptible to crime and insecurity. Also, generic and low-cost phar-maceuticals are produced in Nigeria with minimal regulation, therefore, parallel imports from Nigeria are the source of cheap generic medicines in Benin for people who cannot afford to go to a licensed pharmacy. Some goods move in both directions at different times and places, including bulk food items and textiles, depending on market conditions and Nigeria's trade barriers. (Golub, 2015)

III. Methodology

The collation of data was from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gotten from the administration of structured questionnaire and conduct of in-depth interviews. There was the use ofpurposive sampling technique to collect data from 50 Custom officers, who are directly involved in export and import administration, 25 Immigration officers who are involved in the administration of inward and outward movement of peopleand 25 Police officers at both Nigeria and Benin Republic border (Seme and Idi Iroko), who are in charge of security at the border. Also, in-depth interview was systematically used to collect data from 50 informal traders in Seme and Idi Iroko. As part of the primary data,personal observation by the researcher will also be used. In addition, secondary data was obtained from library sources such as books, academic journals, newspapers, news magazines and government publications. Other sources of

secondary data are dissertations and Internet sources. Data obtained was analysed using SPSS descriptive method of analysis and Atlas.ti.23

IV. Result, Conclusion and Recommendations

Socio-demographic data of respondents

Table 1 *Gender of Respondents*

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	78	78
Female	22	22
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Analysis was carried out on the distribution of gender in the study area. The result of the analysis in Table 1 shows that the majority of them were males i.e. 78% and the remaining 22% of them were females. It is discovered that majority of the trade owners across the border are male, although the majority of the people that work for them are females

Table 2 *Religion of Respondents*

Religion	Frequency	%
Islam	17	17
Christian	81	81
Traditional	2	2
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Religion affiliation was also analysed; 17 % of the respondents were Muslims, 81% Christian while the rest 2% were traditional worshippers

Table 3 *Age of Respondents as at last birthday*

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	%
21 – 30	29	29
31 – 40	48	48
41 and above	23	23
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The study sought to know the age groups of the respondent. The distribution of their various age groups is shown in Table 3, 48% of the total number of respondents fell into the age group 31-40 while 29% of the respondents fell within the age group of 21-30. 23% of them fell into the age group 41and above. From the data analysed, it is discovered that the majority of the traders are in their prime age, the implication of this is that people in their prime age engaged themselves in this kind of venture, and they are exposed to a very great risk which may either make them or mar them. Some of them died in trying to escape from the law enforcement agent drives recklessly and eventually have accident.

Table 4 *Educational Qualification of Respondents*

Qualification	Frequency	%
Primary	9	9
Secondary	70	70
Tertiary	21	21
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

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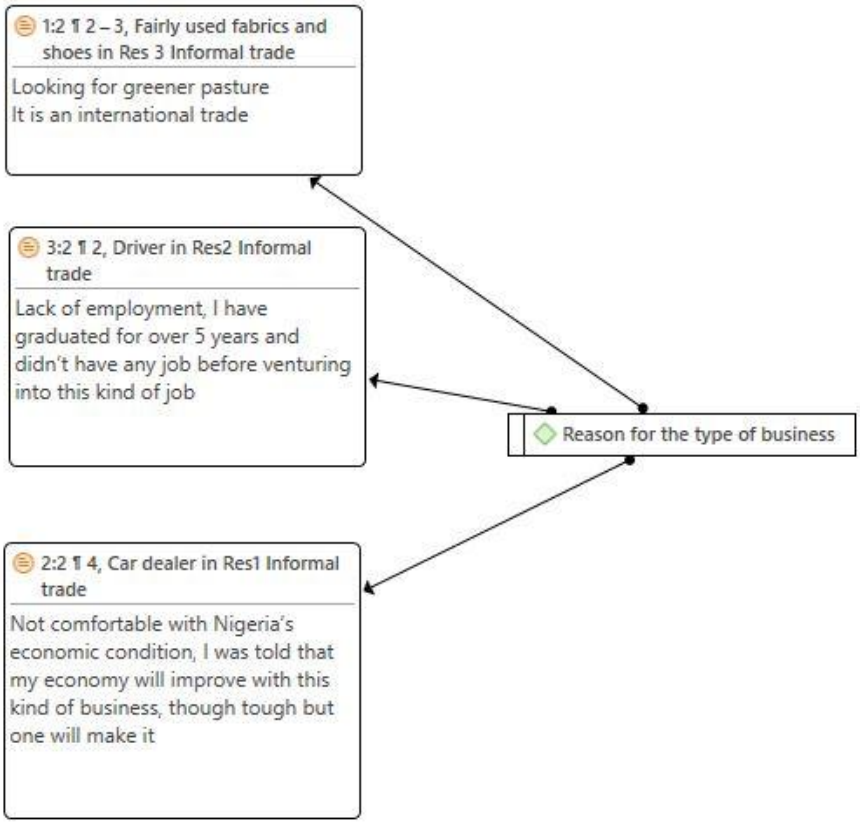
The study sought to know the educational status of the respondents. The result as seen in Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents (70%) are secondary school certificate holder while 21% of the total respondents hold tertiary institution certificate. Very few respondents (9%) are primary school certificate. The majority of the respondents are not well read and so it is assumed that they are not intellectually sound. They can easily be bought over by the people who wants to perpetuate all sorts of evil.

Table 5 *Marital status of Respondents*

Marital Status	Frequency	%
Single	18	36
Married	31	62
Divorced/Separated	1	2
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The study sought to know the marital status of the traders. 36% are single, 62% are married and 2% are divorced/ separated.



The study sought to know the reasons for engaging in this kind of trade knowing fully well it is very dangerous to lives of people that engaged in such kind of business. Majority of the respondents said that it lack of convention employments, some felt they are engaged in international trade and some in the illusion of making it fast. One of the respondents, a graduates has this to say;

'I have graduated for over 5years and didn't have any job before venturing into this kind of job'

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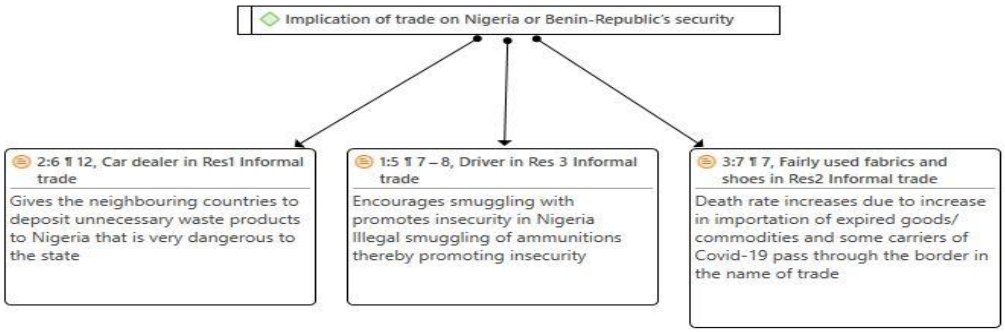

Both the Security agents and the traders agreed that insecurity at the border area is a matter of concern. They all agreed that arms and ammunition passed through the border and illegal route. So many ammunition are loaded under some goods like rice, other forms of grains and at times inside the fairly used cloth. During the era of the prevalent of covid-19, a lot of Nigerians were infected by this pandemic as a result of engagement in trading activities before the locked down of our land borders, sea ports and airports.

Along the Nigeria-Benin borders, the following were identified as prevailing crimes, illicit drug trafficking, vehicle theft/trafficking, textile smuggling, armed robbery, fuel smuggling, arms trafficking, cattle trafficking, food smuggling and human trafficking. Until May 2012, reported one of the custom officers the menace of illegal trafficking of foods and clothing was a major headache along the borders at Idiroko and Seme, turkey smuggling was the major challenge along the borders at Ilara. Both the customs and immigration officers had a tough time controlling illegal immigrants and smugglers since it is common knowledge that the smugglers are in possession of more sophisticated weapons than the border officers. It was reported that before May 2012 when the immigration officers had to down tool sending reports to Abuja, many of them had lost their lives trying to check these determined smugglers. Bonnets of buses and other parts of buses apart from the boot were used for bringing contrabands into the country (Nigeria) from Benin. At times, the smugglers and traffickers came in a long convoys of vehicles to intimidate the officers at the border whom they quite outnumber.

V. Conclusion

Given these conditions, there is a high level of insecurity, and travellers repeatedly said that they are afraid that their goods and physical safety were under threat. Indeed, insecurity of traveller, traders and the security agents have become a great challenge at and around most border in Nigeria. The following recommendations were then suggested.

VI. Recommendations

i) Infrastructural facilities be provided for officers at the border points to encourage and facilitate their works. Such facilities include, fire arms, tear gas, GRMs, scanners to reduce the inflow of arms and ammunitions.
ii) Operation vehicles for patrol should be provided so that the officers can move around freely to check illegal crossings.
iii) Comfortable office environment and some other incentives like housing, health and insurance facilities should be given to encourage them to perform their duties since some of them spend lengthy hours of day and sometimes sleep in the office.
iv) More security agents should be posted to the borders so as to reduce the level of intimidation posted by the large number of smugglers and traffickers they come in contact with.
v) Training through workshops and seminars and the introduction of new technologies of detecting criminals.
vi) The different agencies should be given a free hand to operate and their operations put under thorough supervision to check bribery, corruption and laziness and to ensure effectiveness.
vii) Many of the border dwellers are illiterates and need to be enlightened on border issues, so

enlightenment campaign should be organized from time to time.

viii) Job opportunities should be provided for the youths who are the major people involved in trans-border trade and good water should be provided at border towns and villages to discourage the dwellers from crossing the border to obtain such thereby sneaking in with some.

ix) Education should be made affordable and free to increase literacy level of border youths and discourage the idea of becoming camp boys.

x) Nigeria and Benin governments should come on a round table to exchange ideas and agree on issues bothering border security and management.

xi) Border status should be upgraded, making provisions for good fencing, a good border gateway and a signpost clearly the border of each of the countries.

xii) The ECOWAS treaty needs to be revisited to state the necessary steps to be taken before one can cross from any of the member nations to the other and to make sure that each of the countries benefit from the union.

xiii) There is a need to unify the security agencies such that a single agency will have to make decisions. This is with a view to stopping situations whereby plural agencies will be performing overlapping functions without unit of commands.

xiv) Security border operations of today should go beyond fencing, demarcating and mounting of checkpoints but rather the use of e-surveillance.

xv) A must-have skill for today's law enforcement agents in the Nigerian-Benin borderland should henceforth include fluency in French Language. This will enhance interactions, data sharing and cooperation between them and their Benin counterparts. This is in addition to enabling their effectiveness in relating with Beninoise traders and immigrants that could serve as a threat to Nigerian security.

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