# Trans-Border Crime and Security in Nigeria: A Study of Ajassor (Mfum) Border (1999-2020)

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*Abstract -* **This study attempts a discourse of the impact that trans-border crime could possibly have on the state of security in Mfum border area of Nigeria. A lot of the activities taking place in the Mfum border area are unlawful and as such pose serious threat to national security as well as exposing the weak state of the Nigerian security apparatus and agencies. This study gives a background of transnational organized crimes, it also identifies the state of security in Mfum border area, and it further examines trans-border crime and security in the area. Some causes and effects of trans-border crime in Mfum border are carefully analysed. The paper recommends amongst others, that government should increase the manpower of the security officials in the Mfum border area as well as ensure the prioritisation of modern technology in combating crimes across the border area.**

*Index Terms -* **Trans-Border, Crime, Security, Migration, Trafficking, Terrorism.**

## INTRODUCTION

The Mfum border is a historical coastal town in Ajassor community, Etung Local Government Area in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Ajassor is an outstanding community with Ntufam Anthony Etta as the current Clan Head (CH), who superintends over all the villages under it, including the Mfum border settlement, with the assistance of village heads. The Mfum border is located at the boundary line between Nigeria and Cameroon and the border is as old as the two countries themselves.

It is a truism that nations of the world are in one way or the other entangled in the web of issues around trans-border crime, what makes the difference is simply the effect it has on countries globally. Ezeanyika and Uba (2012) listed several infractions orchestrated in the West African borders, some of which are the trafficking of drugs, children as well as

fraudulent activities. They highlighted the origin of organized crime in contemporary form, indicating that it started in the 1970s in juxtaposition with the flourishing oil economy the time. However, several cases could be tracked back for many years earlier, like the ancient traditions of long-existed trade that is akin to West Africa or in the activities of the criminal gangs of the European who pioneered intercontinental crime from bases in West Africa in colonial times (Ezeanyika and Ubah, 2012). In recent decades and especially in the period under review of this paper (1999-2020), internationalization has emerged as one of the defining issues of globally. Internationalisation is of growing significance worldwide, with economic, political, and social changes driving an increasingly global knowledge economy, but full of crimes and restiveness. Our borders have become crowded with illegal operations and activities to the extent that curbing and managing the spreading insecurity is now a near impossibility (Ndum and Udoye, 2020).

This study is a critical discourse of the implications of trans-border crime on security in Mfum border area of Nigeria. The geographical location of Nigeria and Cameroon aids trans-border crime. It is seen that the Berlin Conference demarcation of African divided both countries along linguistic line. It is noted that, the cultural homogeneity of the border zone is crucial for the extraordinary cross-border dynamics. Interestingly, the duration of coverage captures the emergence of the enthronement of Nigeria's nascent democracy, which today has entered its 21st year of non-military interruption and intervention.

## BACKGROUND OF TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIMES

Contextually, Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) refers to transnational unlawful act committed by three

or more persons for the satisfaction of their intentions (UNODC, 2010).US department of Justice (2008) posits that, "international organized crime refers to those self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate internationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of corruption and/or violence". The United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime seeks to provide a unified definition that is likely to serve as the benchmark for identifying transnational criminal organizations when it posits that: "Organized criminal group shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. "Serious crime" shall mean conduct constituting an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty. "Structured group" shall mean a group that is not randomly formed for the immediate commission of an offence and that does not need to have formally defined roles for its members, continuity of its membership or a developed structure"

An offence is transnational in nature if. (a) It is committed in more than one state; (b) It is committed in one state but a substantial part of its preparation, planning, direction or control takes place in another state; (c) It is committed in one state but involves an organized criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one state; or (d) It is committed in one state but has substantial effects in another state (Shelley, Picarelli, Corpora, 2003). Transnational organised criminals refers to those self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through pattern of corruption and/or violence, or while protecting their illegal activities through a transnational organizational structure and the exploitation of transnational commerce or communication mechanisms and there is no single structure under which transnational organized criminals operate. They vary from hierarchies to clans, networks, and cells, and may

evolve to other structures (National Security Strategy, 2011).

Transnational organized crime is a complex security threat that demands a multi-layered approach and response. Organized crime groups rarely have strong ties to the state outside of the use of corruption to protect themselves and examples range from Nigerian fraud rings to Albanian people smugglers to Indonesian pirate groups (Picarelli, 2010).

There have been diverse arguments among scholars as to the similarities and differences that exist between international crime and transnational crimes. Both concepts have been seen to mean the same but as argued by Albanese (2012), "unlike traditional crimes that occur within single country, transnational crimes are distinguished by their multinational nature and cross border impact". Furthermore, it was pointed out that, international often arises as a result of political just cause or religious motives. The crimes are often committed to disorganize standing protocols and not often profit gain based. *Louise Shelly in her work, border issues:* transnational crime and terrorism explains that, countries are not always capable to fully protect their borders. The problems of insufficient financial resources, inadequate training, low pay and corruption, mean that effective border security is a reality only in very few regions of the world. Even the affluent states of Australia and Japan, whose island status isolates them from some problems of cross-border crime and terrorism, are not immune from them. The work further expresses how lengthy borders are difficult to guard thereby exposing the borders. And to this effect for example, Chinese nationals are smuggled into the United States through unregulated territory of Indian reserves on the US– Canada border, and Latin Americans enter the United States through a national park on the southern US border that has a limited border guard presence. The same crossing points can be used by both transnational criminals and terrorists (Louise, n.d).

Picarelli (2010) further expressed that, criminal groups have adopted a networked form of organization that is less hierarchical and better positioned to operate across political borders. To him, the trade in illicit drugs is most frequently cited as the largest sector of the illicit political economy. His work further noted that, UN's 2006 survey of the global drug trade noted that there were 200 million users of illicit drugs on an annual basis and these drugs are cannabis and
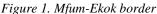
synthetic drugs (Picarelli, 2010). The trade is been lined between production region (Nigeria, Colombia, South Africa) to the US, Mexico, Canada and finally a brisk trade in cannabis resin (hashish) originates in Pakistan and Lebanon and supplied to the Middle East and South Asia.

Abia and Ekong (2013) also established a framework for the different types of crimes being perpetuated across the borders. These they noted include smuggling, drug trafficking, counterfeiting, automobile theft, human trafficking, arms trafficking, money laundering, advanced free fraud, cross border robbery and recently, financial and hype-tech cyber-crime. The international arena is not neglected in this discuss of transborder crime. The international community created the INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization) to combat border crimes as there is no world police (Abia, 2013). Interpol is equally necessary in that the arrest of cross border criminals in their country of refuge is usually followed with a request for either deportation or extradition through a collaborative mechanism handled by the Bureau for Deportation and Extradition (BDE).

In 2006, in Nigeria, some Nigerian drug dealers were deported from Thailand to serve their prison terms in the country similarly, in 2011, James Ibori, a two term Governor of Delta State of Nigeria was also extradited to Britain where he was charged with money laundering. Emphasis on the distribution and movement of SALW (Small and Light Weapons) across both countries' borders is worthwhile. Research show that these light weapons are easily hidden from the law enforcing agencies and smuggled easily without been detected. To the authors for example, out of the 640 million small arms circulating globally, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa, alone. The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes and armed robbery have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians, an average of 1000 people per year since 1999 (Onyekwelu, 2014). This showed the negative effect the porosity of the border is inflicting on the relationship that exists between both countries. Akinyemi (2013) presents globalization as one of the reasons for trans-border crime. To him, it has become easy for transitional crimes to be conducted such as the moving of money, people, and goods across the world because of

advancement in telecommunications, transportation, and technology in general. The world has turned into a 'global village' with its own peculiarities as well as problems. Globalization has allowed criminals to move across the borders unhindered and even continue with illicit business with impunity as this affects the socioeconomic development and security of lives and property (Adeolu and Fayomi, 2012; Akinyemi, 2013). However it should be noted that according to the view of this paper, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of People, Goods and Services which was established by the ECOWAS Member States in 1979 allows the movement of criminals to move across the border and also engage in cross border activities under the pretext of this protocol, posing a serious threat to the internal security of lives and property in the country, as the infractions at the border calls for enforcement of reforms of the border control system" (Akinyemi, 2013).

Figure 1 below is a representation of the bridge connecting Mfum border in Nigeria and Ekok settlement in Cameroon.

*Figure 1. Mfum-Ekok border*



*State of Security in the area*

According to Okorn and Ndum (2020), like other regions of the world, state security will have to be integrated into legislations dealing with international migrations and external relations, despite these commitments increased cross-border crimes have forced Nigeria to intensify her security network along the borders with her neighbours, posing serious migration and security threat.

Lahav (2013) posits that, "security in its various forms has assumed different meaning across culture and time. Nations allocate huge sum of money to security because it is of great importance. Security could either be external or internal. The Nigerian Armed Forces are charged with the responsibility to protect against

external aggression. Furthermore, various threats to both internal and external security abound, of which trans-border banditry is central. It has to do with bandits from neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad, Benin and in the context of this study, Cameroon. The porosity of the Mfum border area enables the bandits to have free access into the country as well as smuggling of small arms and dangerous weapons (Mbachu, 2012).

According to Jadesola (2015), the Nigeria and Cameroon borders dispute and its implication on national security easily come to mind here. Nigeria and Cameroon as modern African states evolved through British and French colonial enterprise, a situation which left many ethnic groups and their territories partitioned to both sides of colonies. Boundary disputes between the two countries after the attainment of their independence began from the economic and agricultural angles in terms of location of water and farmlands while discovery of oil in Bakassi region triggered the final phase.

Indeed, the existence of porous borders and cross-border and frontier activities in Nigeria has aided crimes and security challenges across Nigerian borders for long without any specific solutions.

The activities of smuggling and tax evasion in cross-border movements across Mfum (Nigeria-Ekok (Cameroon) border provides the transitional features of border economic activities, interaction patterns in the border regions and flouting of international laws and convention on border crossing to the detriment of the national interest and invariably the national security in that area. It also indicated that porous features of the border region and the prevailing economic policies of the neighbouring states are tantamount to influence illegal cross-border transactions in goods, currency, and other threatening circumstance.

The Mfum border with its many illegal routes and waterways is 'used to smuggle people, guns, rice, tokunboh (used) cars, fake pharmaceuticals, and other contraband goods'. The implication is that Nigeria is not safe due to cross-border population and its attendant economic activities, cross-border crossing and immigration, ineffective border control and the porosity of Nigerian borders which is a challenge to Nigeria national security and boundary questions.

## MFUM, TRANS-BORDER CRIME AND SECURITY

A survey of the Ajassor (Mfum) border aligns with the projection that Nigeria has been the new hub for all forms of trans-border crimes ranging from women and child trafficking, internet fraud (419), smuggling, among others. These activities tend to affect the security measures already in place manned by the various security agencies. The porous nature of the Mfum border for instance has been an easy route for criminals to easily ply their trade with less difficulty. Some factors like political instability, economic woes among others encourage individuals to swallow certain quantities of drugs like Cocaine. The quest for survival has led many, especially youths into smuggling various goods from and into Cameroon; they avoid paying custom duties thereby reducing revenue generation by the government. In the course of this study, it was also revealed that, corruption has been at the forefront of the issues leading to increased crime and security gap in the Mfum border whereby resources are not evenly distributed; in most cases the smugglers bribe and pay illegal fee to the security operatives in order to gain access into Cameroon or Nigeria as the case may be.

Trans-border crime in the Mfum border displays itself in many ways: smuggling of petroleum product and other goods and services, prostitution, proliferation of small and light arms, drugs, piracy, human trafficking and advanced fee fraud (419) among others. Worst of all these smugglers divert the goods and services through illegal routes and mostly bush and forest tracks.

For instance, report by Linda Ikeji, 06/04/2020 indicated that the Nigeria Immigration Service in Cross River State arrested nine Cameroonians and four Nigerians for illegal entry into the country through the waterways and for contravening the Federal Government's "stay home order" to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. The Comptroller of immigration in the state, Okey Ezugwu, who confirmed the incident, said that his men made the arrest on Thursday, during a routine border patrol at Mfum Border in Etung and Ikang Border Post in Bakassi Local Government Areas. Eight of the Cameroonians were arrested at the Mfum Border in Etung, while one was arrested at Ikang Border alongside four Nigerians. Ezugwu said NIS had to

embark on "show of force" within Calabar metropolis to ensure that no foreigner or any Nigerian is allowed to enter or leave the country at the moment.

"Before this kind of movement can take place, there must have been connivance, especially with the local communities," he said. He urged border communities to assist NIS police the borders, adding that whatever affects one Nigerian at this period affects the whole country. Ezugwu said he will take up the matter with the traditional ruler and clan head of Ajassor in Mfum Border to ensure that such a route is not used again for illegal immigration.

Specifically, the Mfum trans-border crime takes the following forms:

*a) Smuggling*

Smuggling is a major crime that takes place at the Mfum border. To some youths in this area, it is considered a noble and lucrative activity. To many this venture has been able to sustain them and their families, given them the needed resources acquire land and build houses as well as getting cars for private and commercial use. Most of the security agents interviewed stated that, Nigerian land borders are prone to crime of different shades. They spark the themes of frontier of lawlessness, insurgence, illegal trade and rebellion against government policies and security agents. How surprising with the various security operatives around the border area with several check points mounted by the Nigerian Customs, Immigration, NDLEA and the Police, etc. the rate of border crime has not reduced.

Smuggling has been a major challenge facing security operatives across the Mfum and other border areas in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole. West Africa is under attack from international criminal networks that are using the sub-region as a key global hub for the distribution, wholesale, and increasing production of illicit drugs (Brown, 2013). The porosity of the border area tends to make it difficult for the security operatives to control the movement of people and goods. The land borders are not well manned, and it was discovered that, illegal routes are connecting Cameroon with Nigeria which the government is not aware of. The border area has been closed on different occasions by the Nigerian government to curb the activities of smuggling at the border area, especially now, with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

*b) Drug Trafficking*

It is disheartening to note that he introduction of drugs trafficking in West Africa has been traced to Nigeria. Being the most populous black nation with high population, criminals who are not Nigerians often disguise as one. The first arrest was made in 1983 and during Gen. Buhari's regime, he introduced death penalty for drug traffickers (UNODC, 2015). This caused panic among the couriers leading to the push towards Ghana. The border area between Nigeria and Cameroon served as the alternative route for the traffickers into Cameroon before it is later airlifted to other destinations. This event led to the establishment of NDLEA to combat illicit drugs but in recent times, the agency has been tarnished as a result of various corrupt practices and sabotaging by its officials. In recent times, it has been reported that the activities of Nigerian 'drug pushers' have extended beyond Europe to include some African countries. In Chad and Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, arrests were made of some Nigerians alleged to be dealing with drugs (Adetula, 2015). The implication thereof is that some of these drug traffickers often employ other people to carry out their activities thereby making it difficult for security agencies to detect their movement. These mule or couriers often move undetected and they can be children, pregnant women, clerics, important personality in the society, among others. The drug courier is also on several occasions not aware of being in possession of the drugs. They are often told to deliver a parcel to somebody on the other side of the country. Others are made to swear oaths making it difficult to divulge information when caught (UNODC, 2015). In an environment where there is high poverty rate, illiteracy, poor governance, corruption, ethnic violence among others, drug trafficking and drug addiction is growing every day. Illicit drugs are common among the youth of the 21st century who are often between the age bracket 18-40years old, as the case in Mfum border.

*c) Advanced Fee Fraud (419)/Money Laundering*

Owing its popularity to the worsening economic crisis that reached the beginning of a climax in the 1980s, '419' takes its name from Nigeria's criminal code on fraud. It is difficult to ascribe a specific stereotype mode of operation to the dozens of small groups and independent operators involved in the 'business' that has expanded into internet scam, as their activities do not only take a variety of guises ranging from

"seemingly legitimate business solicitations" to "illicit proposition for collusion in money-laundering." (Garuba, 2010). Criminals often take advantage of the advanced internet and telephone/fax facilities as a cheaper means of communication to rob targeted and unsuspecting victims of their assets and resources (Addo, 2006). It will be argued that the increased level of globalization is aiding increase in internet fraud. At a tender age of 9/10years, children are introduced to internet facilities to improve their interaction and do tasks easily but the adverse effect is that, through the internet, they are often exposed to the urge to perpetrate criminal activities. Advanced fee fraud in Nigeria often begins with an unsolicited letter from an official in Nigeria seeking the recipient's cooperation in transferring huge amount of money out of the sender's country (Durkin, 2009). These senders often lay emphasis on his inability to get those funds directly to his account unless transferred outside the country.

Based on findings on the Mfum border, individuals have been caught with stacks of money in their vehicles and are always ready to bribe their way into Cameroon, vice versa. One of the respondents stated that, the money is usually stacked alongside clothes and other valuables making it undetected by as a result of intelligence often given ahead, majority of the offenders are been apprehended. Money laundering is the practice of engaging in "financial transactions to conceal the identity, source, or destination of illegally gained money.

## SOME CAUSES OF TRANS-BORDER CRIME IN MFUM BORDER

### a) Poverty

Findings revealed that, the living condition of people in the Mfum border area is not conducive as there is no equilibrium in the revenue sharing leading to an increase in poverty rate. The rich are getting richer and the poor are always at the receiving end. Nigeria poverty rate is very high that even the minimum wage rate of civil servants is not enough for them to cater for their families. The implication therefore is that people often engage themselves in various activities in order to meet ends means. One of the smugglers revealed to the researchers that he smuggles rice in his car on daily bases in order to augment his financial responsibilities with daily lifestyle. He further said he often makes use of his office as an immigration officer to smuggle rice undetected in the trunk of his car and this has been providing additional money to meet daily means. This is the experience of a civil servant who still earns monthly salary which is different from the common man who has no job. The aftermath of this is that they often engage themselves in various activities just to earn a living.

### b) Porosity of the borders

While Nigeria's border problem is related to colonial history, its porosity has been exacerbated by the failure of succeeding governments to properly administer these borders. The high level of insecurity on African borders is largely due to the way they are administered and managed, and less to do with how colonialists drew them. Despite this spirit of enterprising and promising neighbourliness, the borders linking the two countries are the most problematic because of the activities of internationally reputed criminals engaging in smuggling and trafficking of virtually everything from human trafficking, ammunition, arms, and drugs manufactured goods, agricultural produce, prostitution, and child labour to religious fanaticism, terrorist attacks and insurgency . The demarcation of the border between Mfum and Ekok is through the use of iron bars while approaching the bridge.

After interrogation by the security agents, the bar is being lifted and vehicles can pass. This is just for vehicles and the security for humans crossing is unbearable. Individuals move freely from one part of the country into the other without being asked questions or been checked and it's through this movements that crimes are perpetrated. Respondent revealed that, Drugs for instance are concealable and easy to transport from one place to another as against human trafficking or arms smuggling. The designated border is the Mfum and Ekok through the bridge but there are about several illegal border areas that these criminals use in perpetrating their crimes.

### c) Bribery and Corruption

According to Ndum, Theophilus and Demort (2020) the Nigerian experience with corruption has left the nation in a dilemma. Majority of the correspondents were of the view that, corruption has been behind the brain of underdevelopment in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It has spread all around and many parasternal are under its influence. Corruption is an endemic problem that affects the prosperity and well-being of nations and a major contributor to poverty. Findings

show that, the security agencies for instance have the highest share of corrupt personnel in the country. For instance, one of the respondents noted that, there is a hierarchy in money sharing formula. The revenue gotten from the roadblocks in Mfum border area is being taken to the command which is transferred to Calabar command and from there to the headquarters in Abuja. This event is common across all the security agencies. Smugglers and criminals therefore pacify the security agents with bribe in order to gain entry to through the border.

## EFFECT OF TRANS-BORDER CRIME

### a) Threat to lives and property

Border crime has been one of the issues affecting the security of the country. The various crimes have posed serious challenge to lives and properties. Findings revels that, lives are been lost on regular bases especially in communities surrounding the border area when there is any gun fight between the security agencies and the criminals. Numerous times, there have been community clashes leading to the death of security agents and also smugglers in the area. This often escalates into expanded conflict as findings shows that, there have been faceoff between security agents and the communities who always try to protect their people.

### b) More crime

Findings reveal that increase in smuggling of weapons is one of the causes of conflict in the country. There are enough weapons to be shared around and people therefore tend to make use of it for their personal gain. Criminal activities tend to increase daily as a result of border crimes according to a respondent. There have been cases of criminals from Cameroon terrorizing citizens in Nigeria and because of the porosity of the border area, it's easier for the criminals to escape. Research shows that, members of the communities especially in Mfum often lead those criminals along illegal routes that are unknown to the security agencies.

### c) Dwindling Economic situation

Smuggling for instance has adverse effect on the economy of the country. For instance, 90% of the revenue meant to be collated by Nigeria Customs is been lost through smuggling. The remaining 10% is not evenly declared to the government as a result of the corrupt nature of the agencies involved. Furthermore, with the increase in and money laundry, the economic situation of the country is been affected. Resources that should be used for development of the country is been transferred to other places. Findings shows that, bags loaded with money are usually smuggled across the Mfum borders on daily bases.

### d) Increase in substandard products that are risky to human health

The increase in substandard health products has adverse effect on the citizens. Drugs for instance that are not meant for consumption or have expired are being smuggled into the country and distributed to unsusceptible buyers. These drugs are dangerous to human health and when not properly in its normal condition, it leads to loss of lives or causes advanced health complications in the body system.

## CONCLUSION

This study has been able to examine the gamut of issues surrounding the Mfum border and the state of the security agents. It is glaring to indicate that trans-border crime is one issue that can lead to turbulence in the international community if not tackled. The increased activities of smugglers across the border area coupled with arms trafficking pose a challenge to security in the Mfum border area of Etung local government area of Cross River state, Nigeria.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the issues raised in this study, the following policy options are worthwhile.

1. The introduction of modern technology should be the priority of the government in combating crimes across the border area. Due to the vast area of borders, developed countries often engage in the use of improved technology like cameras, robots, scanners among others. Sniffing dogs are trained especially by drug related agencies to easily help detect illegal materials. This is farfetched in the Mfum area.

2. Government should increase the manpower of the security officials in the Mfum border area. Lack of adequate manpower has been one of the factors affecting the security agencies from combating

crime. For instance, drug trafficking has taken a new turn as traffickers tend to make use of the water ways to transport drugs and the security agency is not in total possession of marine to help apprehend the criminals.

3. Training and re-training workshops should be conducted periodically by the various security agencies. These would enable the agencies sharpen up their ideas as well as understand ethical concerns of their profession. This would help curb corrupt practices and strengthen effectiveness.

4. The welfare situation of security agents should be taken seriously as this would lead to job satisfaction and thereby motivate them to put more in the realization of stipulated goal.

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