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## Perspectives on Illegal Routes in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The Nigeria Immigration Service is a para military organization established to control the entry and exit of all persons in Nigeria and as such is meant to police the country's vast porous borders through its officers posted to such locations. The paper argued that the porous nature of Nigeria's borders has paved way for the proliferation of illegal routes to promote illicit activities including but not limited to smuggling of arms and ammunition, trans-national organized crimes along the borders which impedes economic development. Engaging Human Needs Theory, this paper examined the existence and dynamics of these routes in Oyo and Ogun States which make them extremely difficult to manage and eliminate and as well assesses the performance of the Service in security policing. This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research design, using simple percentage and content analysis for analysing. The paper concluded by emphasizing the importance of securing the borders which are defining features of a state. In this sense, government should adopt best modern practices in community border policing and transform from the rhetoric of policy formation and

paddling to policy implementation in order to achieve desired objectives of secured borders, safe society and increase in economic development.

**Key Words:** Nigeria Immigration Service, Illegal Routes, Security Policing, Border, State

### **Introduction**

There has always been a considerable migration of persons in the West Africa sub-region as a result of economic, social and political problems. Africans have through the ages moved across what is now known as international boundaries as cattle rearers, traders, invaders or refugees. This phenomenon has existed from time immemorial. The earliest proof and handiest trace of this is the trans-Saharan trade. During that period, most tribes, especially the larger tribes of the sub-Saharan region migrated towards the south in search of better ecological space and safe zones as well as in search of security, and new lands safe for settlement and fertile for farming. Then, the quest to exchange products of the diverse ecological zones resulted in the exchange of goods which transformed into the famous trans-Saharan trade routes. Later, this extended to inter-marriages, slave trade, and military alliances. In pre-colonial times, migration occurred largely in search of security, new land safe for settlement and fertile enough for farming.

However, with effect from the mid-sixteenth century, growing transformations in European trade and the launch of ports along the Coast of West Africa impacted the trans-Saharan trade negatively such that it became associated with the slave trade, thereby leading to the forced displacement of people in their millions, from Africa to Europe, North America, and the Caribbean until the early nineteenth century. To this end, a number of inconvenient economic policies such as forced recruitment and contract as well as forced labour legislation and agreements were utilized to trigger regional labour migration from places such as Mali, Togo and Upper Volta and even Gold Coast and Ivory Coast. Infrastructural developments in Accra, Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Abidjan, Lomé, Dakar and Cotonou equally influenced the movement of high-level farmers, skilled and unskilled workers, traders and students. Additionally, infrastructural activities, the introduction of taxes and organized labour recruitment also accounted for major factors that triggered migration through the trans-Saharan trade routes.

From the foregoing, it is clear that immigration existed before and during the colonial era but restrictions were not enforced because African empires or kingdoms overlapped each other due to the extended family system. Colonization, or the quest for colonies and the need for trading partners resulted in the scramble for Africa. Once colonization was achieved, the tide of movement in West Africa clearly changed along commoditized lines.

Around 1888, prominence was therefore given to immigration as a result of the partition of Africa in Berlin which took place in 1884/1885. During this partition, artificial lines were drawn through the middle of ethnic territory. With the creation of Nigeria in 1914, the British ruled through the Royal Niger Company and later used the West African Frontiers force to protect or guard her borders. This action led to the restriction of the free movement of people and goods across the borders. In addition, various regulations requiring certain formalities to be accomplished before the admittance of non-citizens were introduced. However, in spite of these control measures, illegal aliens still cross international boundaries through un-approved routes. Constanze [2014] described borderlands as both melting pots and security hot spots. He further asserted that, borderlands often neglected in the development strategies of postcolonial states, are an arena for cross-border crime and represent a dynamic place of historically fostered cultural and socio-economic exchange at the same time.

In 1952, the first batch of Principal Immigration Officers took up positions at the four airports, three seaports and six frontier posts. Progressively, the number of control posts increased from 13 to 147. At the dawn of Nigerian's independence, efforts being made to establish more control posts on some of the identified illegal routes, led to the establishment of the Nigeria Immigration Department by the Legislature of the Federal Parliament on 1st August, 1963. It was also removed from the Nigeria Police Force and transferred to the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Immigration Act was gazette in the Federal Government Gazette No. 40 Volume of 14th June, 1963. As a security organization, the Nigeria Immigration Service [NIS] is statutorily charged with the responsibility of controlling the entry and exit of non-Nigerians whose activities it also monitors. Its objectives, functions, and powers are derived from the following legal instruments: Immigration Act CAP 11 Laws of the Federation 2004 [IMM ACT 1963], 1999 Constitution, Passport Miscellaneous Act No. 15 of 1985 progressive circulars from government, and the ECOWAS Treaty of 1975 which includes, the control of entry, and exit of all persons entering and leaving Nigeria and monitoring non-Nigerians in the country, the implementation of Nigeria's extant visa regime with respect to deserving foreigners, execution of deportation and repatriation orders with respect to undesirable foreigners. However, the porous nature of Nigerian borders has paved way for illicit activities along our borders which poses a serious challenge to the Service most importantly in the area of border policing. As has been pointed out by Eselebor (2008), the dilemmas that Nigeria faces with insecurities call for critical investigation of border entry points whether they are performing their strategic functions.

Therefore, this study set out to identify the existence and nature of illegal routes as well as assessing the performance role of the Nigeria Immigration Service in security policing using Oyo and Ogun States as focal points.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to look into perspectives on illegal routes in Nigeria as it relates to the Nigeria Immigration Service. The specific objectives of this research are to:

- i. Identify the existence and nature of illegal routes.
- ii. Examine if the Nigeria Immigration Service is performing its role in security policing.

### **Research Questions**

These questions are raised to guide the researcher for this study. They are:

- i. What are the natures of illegal routes?
- ii. How has the Nigeria Immigration Service performed its role in security policing?

### **Scope of the Study**

This research is geographically limited to border communities in Saki/ Iseyin and Ilara/ Imeko areas of Oyo and Ogun States respectively.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One major factor which limited this study was the inability to assess some of the Immigration officers in the hinter checkpoints and border posts. This was primarily due to the vastness of the areas which feature thick and virgin forests as that serve as hide-outs for criminals who carry out nefarious activities along the routes. This security risk made it really difficult for the researcher to explore as much as he would have loved to. However, the researcher utilized a number of border posts with substantial officers needed for the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcome of this study will enlighten the government on the causes of the proliferation of illegal routes and ways of managing and curbing such.

The data collected will assist the government and relevant authorities most especially, the Nigeria immigration service, in assessing the real state of the borders in Oyo and Ogun States so as to intervene where and when necessary.

It will also add to the existing literatures on this subject matter.

### **Methodology**

This research is both quantitative and qualitative.

Purposive sampling methods were employed in the selection of participants for the study. This was based on the knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study. The researcher chose Saki/ Iseyin area of Oyo North area of Oyo State and Ilara/ Imeko area of Ogun West area of Ogun State because they are the major areas in the states that share borders with neighboring states and as a result of this, there is the presence of Immigration Border Guards and other security personnel in these areas to secure the borders and check the movement of migrants from neighboring states.

The sample size of this study consisted of 110 subjects who are Immigration officers manning the various border posts. As a result, 110 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the sampled population who are basically Immigration officers. All the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved but only 94 copies were found valid for the study. Interviews were conducted with some stakeholders such as a traditional ruler, men leader, women leader and a group of youths in both areas.

The main instruments used for this research were a self-structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews [IDI] and Focused Group Discussions [FGD]. All these were used for data collection. In analysing the data, quantitative data were analysed using simple percentages while the qualitative data were transcribed, interpreted and content analysed.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is anchored on the human needs theory. This theory was greatly popularized in the works of Abraham Maslow, John Burton, Marshal Rosenberg and Manfred Max-Neef. It is based on the supposition that man has basic needs and that the inability to meet these needs propels man to go to different lengths in a bid to survive. Coate and Rosati [1988] assert that human behaviour and social interaction is to a great extent determined and influenced by his needs. When the basic needs of a person or group are not met, there is bound to be conflict. In other words, it has been proven that, there is an innate tendency in man to cause conflict. It only requires an iota of dissatisfaction for it to be triggered off. In effect, a person is more likely to behave in a disordered manner when his basic needs are not met.

Therefore, the basis of the argument of human needs theorists is that at the point where man has no alternative means to meet his needs [needed for survival] he is bound to result into violence or illegality in various forms. This explains the reason why there are illegal routes. They are created basically for the purpose of survival on different scales. They are utilized swiftly on a low scale by members of the border communities who cross into neighbouring border communities solely to till their farmlands and on a large scale for the illegal movement of persons [human trafficking] and the movement of legal and contra-bound goods [smuggling] all in a bid to make ends meet.

A report by UN expert groups on arms embargoes in Somalia is a case for emphasis. The report indicated that in wartime, the members of armed groups sometimes transported weapons across borders to sell them in exchange for food or other commodities. Also, individuals who engage in arms trafficking often use the same routes and itineraries as those used to transport other illicit goods across borders. Chikwanha (2007) asserted that Benin Republic, a neighbouring country to Nigeria whose one third of its population are illiterate and live below the poverty line has an increased rate of crime. The country does not have a concise crime and unemployment figures because both are already seen as part of the norms of the society. The high level of poverty and generally poor economic conditions are likely to contribute to high level of crime in the country and this phenomenon reflects on its borders through the sophistication witnessed in the activities of criminals especially in car hijacking and organized crime.

## **Discussions of Findings**

### **The Nature of Illegal Routes Around the Border Communities in Oyo State**

The nature of activities carried out along these routes defines them as illegal or unapproved routes. The study's respondents were of the opinion that illegal routes exist around the communities as a result of the prevalence of cross border criminalities that they witness on a daily basis. The results show the peculiarity of these routes which naturally distinguishes them from government approved routes otherwise known as legal routes.

#### **i. Absence of State Security Agencies**

Respondents pointed out the fact that a major feature of illegal routes is the absence of state recognized security institutions such as, The Nigeria Immigration Service, The Nigeria Custom Service, Joint Border Patrol Guard and the likes. These are security agencies saddled with the responsibility of monitoring, controlling and securing the borders against all forms of illegality. According Seniora and Poitevin (2010), border guards or border police are officials in charge of carrying out control at border posts and surveillance along the border. This involves checking individuals crossing border to border posts and patrol work to prevent illegal border crossings. These routes are sited far away from patrol bases to avoid being noticed and nabbed by border guards. The Senior Immigration Officer at the base, alluded to this fact by saying "they operate far away from us to avoid being arrested by border guards during patrol".

#### **ii. Visible Rough Paths and Roads**

Respondents equally disclosed that one of the major and obvious features of such routes is usually the rough nature they exhibit. These routes are created on the land and such

paths and roads are usually rough which makes it so obvious that they are really illegal routes. When asked what these routes look like by the researcher, the senior Immigration officer responded that they are always easily noticeable when they come across such on patrols. They are often paths created along bushy areas smaller than a normal road which can accommodate both vehicles and pedestrians.

### **iii. Constant and Swift Trans-National Crimes**

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that constant and swift trans-national crime is an activity that connotes a feature of illegal routes. Based on its illegal nature, it is carried out swiftly i.e. without notice. In fact, they admitted that the communities as a result of these activities are worse for it because of the distortion of their natural environments and the fear of moving around as those involved in such acts are always equipped with sophisticated weapons and can go to an extent of killing to get what they want especially when there is a resistance put forth from either the community or security operatives.

### **iv. Absence of border posts**

Respondents agreed and alluded to the fact that the absence of border/ control posts is a feature of illegal routes. Border/ Control Posts are legally recognized entry and exit points of the country. Illegal routes are often situated far from the border/ control posts because of the nature and purpose of such routes. Due to the vast land mass in the area, these routes are created far away such that before they are discovered, they would have been well-patronized by criminals. This conforms to what the “Baale” said. He noted that such routes are created in hidden places far from the borders and control posts and as such, it is difficult for the security agencies to notice them.

### **v. Sporadic Gun Shots**

Respondents also affirmed that sporadic gunshots are a feature of illegal routes. When asked why they engage in such acts bearing in mind that their activities are carried out in a covert way, the villagers said that it doesn't happen all the time so that they don't get noticed but that it happens occasionally to scare the villagers as well as security operatives along the borders. The traditional rulers gave two reasons. They were of the opinion that they do that to destabilize the communities thereby creating pandemonium. They also do that when they perceive a threat or resistance especially from the local police known as “vigilante” as well as recognized border guards.

## **How Has the Nigeria Immigration Service Performed its Role in Security Policing?**

As it is widely known, the core duty and responsibility of the Nigeria Immigration Service is to control both immigration and emigration within a State. Therefore, the role performance of the service can solely be measured and ascertained by the activities

they engage in. The participants of the study who are majorly Immigration officers admitted that they have been able to perform their function within the ambit of facilities made available to them by the Service Headquarters. They agreed that consistent border patrolling is a role of the Nigeria Immigration Service in security policing which they strive to perform amid limited patrolling vehicles. Small Arms Survey (2009) averred that Border guards play an important role at border posts in carrying out checks on individuals (the person with their possessions, on foot or in a car, or an employee transporting goods for a company from one country to another). Control carried out on individuals involves checking the authenticity of a variety of documents (passports, etc.). However, they revealed that as much as they want to perform this crucial role, they are constrained to a large extent. In the interview session with the villagers, they disclosed that they see officers patrolling the villages and routes in their vehicles once in a while which is one of the reasons why illegal migration thrives.

Again, respondents pointed out that due to the vast land mass of the area, patrolling vehicles cannot cover all and so that makes constant aerial surveillance another crucial role of the Service in security policing. This is in line with Falls (2003) who asserted that the geography of border zones can make certain parts of a land border difficult to monitor as a result of the presence of desert, forest or mountainous zones (cited in Ayissi & Sall, 2003) hence, the need for aerial surveillance for effective monitoring of the area. However, Nigerian immigration officers have been constrained in performing the crucial role because this Service doesn't have surveillance aircraft to perform this role effectively and efficiently.

Moreover, it is the role of the Service to make adequate provision of necessary equipment like patrol vehicles, motorcycles, arms and ammunitions needed for effective security policing but unfortunately, the Service has not been able to do so. Respondents believe that without these gadgets, little or nothing can be done and achieved. However, the researcher was told at the Immigration Patrol base that the Service just took delivery of arms and ammunitions which will soon be dispatched to them from the headquarters. The immigration officers also asserted that they have been able to successfully collaborate with relevant stakeholders towards achieving safe borders. There are inter-agency collaborations between Immigration officers and other security agencies like Customs, SSS, NSCDC and the likes. They believe it is a herculean task that cannot be achieved alone thus, the need to collaborate with other security agencies to achieve the goal.

In addition, it was pointed out that, in performing their role in security policing, the Service cannot isolate the community. They believe that for much success to be recorded by the Service in security policing, they need to maintain cordial relationships with the border communities. As a result of this, they liaise and collaborate with

traditional leaders, men leaders and youth leaders. They also join forces with local security called the vigilantes. These collaborations with the communities are in appreciation of the fact that the locals are more familiar with the terrain they are. As such, help from the locales would aid the location of illegal routes and in the long run stop the proliferation of such routes.

Finally, the respondents admitted that it is part of the job's description to engage in covert operations to check the activities of illegal migrants. It was emphasized that this has been one of their tactics over time which has assisted in tracking down illegal migrants as well identifying the routes they came in through such covert operations also served to identify members of the community who connive with illegal migrants to facilitate their movement into the country.

### **Concluding Remarks and Recommendation**

The need for a proper and effective security/border policing cannot be over emphasized if illegal migration and external attacks along the Nigerian borders are to be checked and curbed effectively. The identification of the dynamics of illegal routes over time in Oyo State is a pointer to the above stated fact. As observed, these routes are usually situated in hidden locations along the borders obviously far from the reach of border guards. This is so because of the illegal nature of such routes and the purpose for its creation which ranges from illegal migration to cross border criminalities and so before they are detected by border guards they would have been properly utilized for the purpose for which they were being created. This poses a great challenge to the core functions of the Nigeria Immigration Service which is to control the entry, and exit of all persons entering and leaving Nigeria and the monitoring of non – Nigerians in the country.

However, assessing the performance of the role of the Service thus far vis-a-vis the proliferation of illegal routes connotes that although the officers on ground do their best towards combating this menace, the obvious fact still remains that a lot still needs to be done if the Service wishes to properly and effectively perform its role in security policing. The researcher is of the opinion that in order to enhance the role performance of the Nigeria Immigration Service in Oyo and Ogun States and in Nigeria at large with regard to identifying and curbing the proliferation of these routes, the Nigerian government needs to show a sincerity of purpose and commitment to their responsibility with regard to securing the borders. Since the borders of a State define its existence and sovereignty, the security of such borders should not be taken with levity.

Therefore, the federal government should be proactive in securing its borders. In addition, the government equally needs to move from policy making and paddling to policy implementation in its real sense. There are quite a number of reports made by

various committee set up by the government towards a secured border. It is high time the government implemented those reports that would enhance border security.

Finally, the federal government should provide adequate funds. Border policing is a herculean task which comes with huge capital requirements. The provision of adequate funds would enhance the logistics and procurement of equipment and facilities needed to effectively combat the menace of illegal routes. If all these recommendations are effected, border policing will be greatly improved in Nigeria.

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