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Research Article

IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND TRANS-BORDER CRIMES IN KAMBA-ILLELA-JIBIA CORRIDOR OF THE NIGERIA-NIGER BORDERLANDS

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between irregular migration and trans-border crimes in the Kamba-Illela-Jibiya (KIJ) corridor of the Nigeria-Niger borderlands. Investigation into trans-border crimes in these areas, such as drug and people trafficking, insurgency, sectarian militancy, and SALW smuggling, is crucial to understand the persistent threat they pose to security in West African nations, negatively impacting political stability and socioeconomic growth. Nigeria's northwest security is linked to its porous borders, leading to cattle rustling, banditry, and kidnapping for ransom. This has devastated rural communities and disrupted farming and economic activity. Instability in one nation can impact neighboring nations, endangering regional stability and security. Cross-border crimes involve various individuals and groups moving across borders for different reasons. A thorough investigation of the nature and pattern of cross-border movement of people and goods in the region is crucial to understand the dynamics of these crimes, which remain a significant security threat in West Africa.

Keywords: Migration, Trade, Transborder Crimes, Nigeria, Niger.

Introduction

Migration is a long-standing international phenomena that continues today. Prior to the formal delineation of Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884/85, migration in West Africa proceeded peacefully with no constraining effects of borders. This migration movement continued until the various West African republics achieved independence, at which point they began enacting legislative limits on immigration into their separate countries. Colonial borders had a long-term impact, changing age-old socioeconomic linkages in the region. The region's development issues were one of the motivators for modern West African states to enter into accords to foster economic cooperation in the post-colonial period.

With the development of various forms of intra-regional economic activities, a framework of economic development of the region was signed by fifteen countries of the region. The protocol paved the way for the founding of a supranational organization called the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. There are various forms of intra-regional economic activities aimed at the economic development of the region within the framework of the protocol signed by member countries of the organization.

However, the promotion of intra-regional trade, industrialization and economic growth which form the bedrock for regional integration had suffered some setbacks because of numerous challenges. One of the threatening factors in the region is insecurity. Social and economic difficulties in Nigeria have resulted in enormous unemployment among youths, which has persisted for over three decades and has reached crisis proportions since the late 1980s. As a result, there is a growing sense of disillusionment and despair among Nigeria's youth, prompting many of them to seek economic possibilities outside the country, with Europe and America being the most popular destinations.

Studies conducted in Nigeria's northwest have revealed strong links between the region's current security and its porous borders; as a result, the widespread incidents of cattle rustling gave rise to banditry and kidnapping for ransom, which have since wreaked havoc on rural communities and all but destroyed farming and other economic activity in the many areas where the insecurity is felt. One of the well-known nations dealing with insurgency, banditry, and militant activities, as well as other types of crimes committed primarily by young people, is Nigeria. As a result,

instability in one nation might have an impact on neighboring nations, endangering the stability and security of the region (McArthur Foundation 2024; OECD/SWAC 2020:15).

This study analyses the relationship between irregular migration and trans-border crimes along the Nigeria-Niger border, with particular focus on Kamba-lllela-Jibiya border areas. It looks at various factors responsible for the growth of criminal activities related to trafficking, illicit trade in drugs and small arms by attempting to address the following questions relating to the research:

1) How does the irregular migration fuel violence through trans-border crimes?

2) What are the negative consequences of mass migration especially by the youths because of perceived advantages or benefits to be derived at the country of destination?

3) To what extent are the existing strategies efficient in curbing the problems of illegal migration, human trafficking, illicit trade and other associated crimes across the borders?

The study then investigates how effective strategies could be applied to mitigate the challenges of insecurity and other related issues. The study seeks to analyse and explore the extent to which the impact of irregular migration and the spread of small arms and light weapons and other trans-border crimes affect the national security and socio-economic activities in the hinterland of Nigeria.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

There is a substantial body of literature from which we can draw interconnections between the Nigeria-Niger border on one hand and cross-border crimes on the other. This is so because the boundaries between different political systems are inherently disposed to crimes and criminality. As has been indicated in study after study, borders, and borderlands between sovereign states are notorious for their roles and functions as an asylum for criminals and dissidents operating on one side of given borders against governments on the other side (Asiwaju, 2022). To put the discussion in context, it is necessary to have a working definition of border and borderlands. While a border is an international boundary line separating two or more political entities known as the modern state, on the other hand, a boundary is a line that separates one object from another (Imobighe, 1992:14). In territorial terms, a boundary is a line dividing one territory from another (Fajemirokun, 1989:349). However, in the international context in which the concept is being considered in this study, a boundary is a line of demarcation that delimits the scope of two or more administrative jurisdictions. A boundary line could be imaginary or represented on the ground in the form of a pathway with markers placed at regular intervals (Imobighe, 1989: 26). Similarly, a borderland is an area of land close to the border between two countries, as in the case of Nigeria and Niger Republic. It could also be a geographical space or zone around a territorial border. From a socio-cultural perspective, however, borders could mean different from their presentation, as Marie, puts it succinctly, 'the reality of the border (is that) it is created by the meaning attached to it. A line in the sand is not always a limit, as well as a border is not always a line in the sand. A line is a geometry, a border is an interpretation (Marie, 2024:6).

Borderlands are areas close to an international boundary, usually disadvantaged in terms of their location as the farthest point and marginal to the core areas of the states. However, borders are often more than such a line; they are zones that expand beyond the boundary line. Borders, therefore, must be seen as processes that do not only serve the political goals and interests of state institutions but are also the products of interactions between states and peoples in border regions, including individual actors, whose experiences and activities are reflected in many respects (Hastings and Wilson, 1999:5).

The colonial partition of the late 19th and early 20th centuries separated the same communities from each other. Along with the social and political context of the people, the border population's psychology, culture, perception, conception, and language were also impacted by the division. The contacts between the peoples of Nigeria and Niger over an extended period have shown that they coexisted as members of the same socio-political and socio-economic community. Although divided by dissimilar colonial experiences and the challenges of modernity, the social network that has bound them together over time remains functional and relevant (Miles, 1993:55). It is therefore expected, going by this analogy, to assume that cross-border spill-overs which criminals in adjacent states often produce over its neighbors, as in Nigeria-Niger borderlands, are bound to be a nuisance for intercommunity relations in the borderlands. Hence the analysis of 'shared boundaries' as a critical factor in inter-state relations through alliance formation in a non-military approach is an important strategy for trans-border cooperation in support of the regional integration agenda (Asiwaju, 2022).

The most significant gap observable from most of the literature on African borderlands is the lack of focus on the "special characteristics of African borderlands" that makes it fluid and very difficult to manage, which ultimately makes it possible for crimes in one region to spill to another region quickly, as exemplified by the cross-border crimes in Nigeria-Niger borderlands. The social

network that has bound different communities together over time remains relevant, despite their dissimilar colonial experiences and the challenges of modernity. It is expected that crimes committed in adjacent states, such as in the Nigeria-Niger borderlands, will have spill-over effects on intercommunity relations and wider international implications.

One of the classical approaches to the study of cross-border migration categorizes all the factors for migration broadly into two categories: the push and pull factors. The "push factors" compel people to leave their places of origin, while the "pull factors" attract them to certain countries. "Push factors" include lack of economic opportunities, good living standards, and political freedom, among others. On the other hand, "pull factors" such as demand for labor, good economic opportunities, and political freedom contribute to mass migration, especially from Africa to other continents (Adepoju, 2000:15). The migration trend in West Africa has mostly followed this pattern, especially in the contemporary period. The existence of economic disparities between states is sufficient to generate an exodus of people. This type of migration is typical in West Africa, where migrants move towards economically buoyant or prosperous states in anticipation of a better life.

In the case of Nigeria, long-term migration has had a negative impact on the country's economy and society, as reported in various studies. The country has failed to utilize the potential of its young citizens, which could have been harnessed for social and economic development. The effects of this untapped potential on the domestic economy are immeasurable. Over the years, illegal migration has contributed to the rise of various types of crimes in settlements around the borderlands. Initial investigations suggest a connection between illegal migration and the smuggling of contraband, including illicit drugs, small arms, and light weapons (SALW). The effects of illegal migration have also led to terrorist activities, human trafficking, kidnappings, and general insecurity in the borderland areas (ICG 2020:2). The breakdown of authority at the local level, mainly due to informal nature of the trade around the peripheral areas has created an enabling environment for the emergence of a complex informal security sector. Consequently, competing rival armed and criminal gangs operate freely in the border communities and in some cases took sanctuary across borders. These forms of arm banditry seriously affect the livelihoods of the population living proximate to the borderlands. It equally limits the special function of borderland areas as point of contact and absorber of inter-state conflict and diplomacy.

Dynamics of Trans-Border Crimes along Nigeria-Niger border

The roots of cross-border crime in the Nigeria–Niger borderlands can be traced back to the historical dynamics shaping the region. The post-colonial era witnessed an increase in cross-border crime, with shifting political dynamics, conflict and economic downturns playing pivotal roles. As the geopolitical landscape evolved, so the Nigeria–Niger borderlands became a hotspot for various forms of smuggling and trafficking. More recently, the late 20th century saw the rise of organized criminal networks capitalizing on regional instabilities (Barkindo & Lipede, 2007; OCED/SWAC, 2020). The Boko Haram crisis and other conflicts have further fueled the dynamics of cross-border crime, adding additional layers of complexity to the challenges faced.

Various reports indicate that Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have sought to exploit the porous nature of the Nigeria–Niger borderlands in order to infiltrate the region, engaging in arms smuggling, recruitment and attacks on border communities (ICG, 2022; Nigeria Intelligence Repor Unit, 2023). Criminal networks operating in the area facilitate the trafficking of weapons, funds and contraband, providing financial resources and logistical support to terrorist organizations. Cross-border crime, including extortion and smuggling, also serves as a significant revenue source for terrorist groups (Oral Interview, December, 2023). Marginalized border communities, grappling with poverty and lack of access to basic services, are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist groups, further exacerbating security risks in the region.

The alienation of border communities, a consequence of Nigerian government border closures and other policies, has inadvertently driven some residents to support—if not actively participate in—the criminal activities taking place along the border. Inadequate security arrangements at the border have also enabled the proliferation of alien infiltration and unrestricted smuggling, even at security posts, a situation made worse by the lack of coordination or cooperation among border security outfits. Alongside this, numerous other factors—including corruption, political instability, political and civil unrest, economic marginalization, intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts, and the exploitation of religious identity for personal gain—have contributed to the persistence of trans-border crime in the region.

While it is tempting to blame 'cross-border socio-cultural and economic contacts' as the primary source of security issues, the reality is more nuanced. The collapse of local authority, often spurred by the informal nature of trade in peripheral areas, has led to the emergence of a shadowy informal security industry. This enables armed and criminal gangs to operate with impunity in border villages, sometimes even with the cooperation of local

residents (Samaila, 2024). The lives of those living near the border are undoubtedly impacted by trans-border crimes such as livestock rustling and armed banditry, which not only pose direct threats to safety and security, but restrict the vital role the borderlands could potentially play as hubs for interstate contact and conflict resolution.

The Kamba-Illela-Jibiya (KIJ) axis features a unique convergence of factors fueling cross-border crime. The vast, ungoverned spaces along the border provide safe havens for criminal gangs, whose operations across the divide are facilitated by linguistic and cultural similarities. The economic disparity between the two countries, with Niger facing greater poverty, acts as a push factor for criminal recruitment, made worse by the availability of weapons and proliferation of small arms. Armed banditry, often intertwined with cattle rustling, has become a major concern, displacing communities, disrupting agricultural activities, and leading to loss of lives and livelihoods. Moreover, human trafficking, particularly of women and children, has seen the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups exploited in the pursuit of forced labour, sexual exploitation and even organ harvesting. The smuggling of goods such as fuel and drugs adds to the complex web of illicit activities, undermining legitimate economies and fueling corruption (Samaila, 2024). The patterns of cross-border crimes often interconnect: for instance, arms smuggling may intersect with drug trafficking routes, facilitated by human trafficking networks. Migrants, including pastoralists, traders and labourers, use the axis for various purposes, such as accessing grazing lands, trade, seeking employment and maintaining social connections. Irregular migration and human trafficking also occur, however, underscoring the region's complex dynamics. Law enforcement authorities must understand these trends if they are to implement focused and efficient tactics.

Three Case studies

Kamba-Illela-Jibia (KIJ) border area constitute important area of socio-economic activities that connects Nigeria and Niger republic. The porous nature of the border, coupled with socio-economic disparities, has rendered the region susceptible to cross-border crime. Illicit activities include goods and drugs smuggling, human and arms trafficking, and cross-border banditry. Against this backdrop, this section explores the dynamics of trans-border crimes in this area looking at both nature, character and different strategies used. The report, therefore, presents three case study analysis of migration dynamics along Nigeria-Niger border. It is shown in the analysis that there has been changes in the pattern of cross-border migration in these three border corridors due to certain peculiarities attached to each of the three areas. From the data generated through interviews and questionnaires, migration along *Kamba-Gaya*

border settlements is mainly seasonal and signifies age range of 18-45 year as the dominant group who partake migration in contrast to Illela-Konni which indicates the age range of 30-70 years and mainly involves the long-stay migration to other countries usually through transit Niger. Furthermore, in contrast to other two border areas, Illela-Konni appeared to have more porous border routes that accelerate informal border crossings vis-a-vis cross-border crimes. Magama-Jibiya on the other hand, portrays mass movement of mainly migrant labour in search of greener pasture, frequently targeting countries outside the region. this border area appears to be the most recently expanding migrants' heaven and cross-border crimes. In addition to the general overview of migration trends, brief demography and socio-cultural settings of these border areas is provided below.

(i) Kamba-Gaya Border

The area comprises Dendi and Arewa local government areas bordering settlements in the Republic of Niger mostly in the area of Gaya. Some other settlements are under Kangiwa district which is also the headquarters of Arewa local Government. The region consists of different types of social and cultural groups such as Kabawa, Kengawa, Arawa, Dandawa, Zabarmawa, Fulani as well as other migrants from different parts of the neighbouring countries. Apart from the Hausa language which is commonly spoken by indigenous population and migrant settlers, the languages of Djerma, Dandanci and Fulfulde are also spoken in the area. The name Dandi came up as a result of the varied composition of people from different parts of the country including neighbouring countries like Benin and Niger.

The main occupations of the people of Dendi include: farming, fishing, trading, arts and crafts, small scale trading, wood carving among others. The area has a good rainy season and fertile land for cultivation of crops both root crops and grains. Groundnuts, watermelon, maize, guinea corn as well as millet arc produced in the area. There are economic trees like Giginya, acacia tree grown around Buma and Bansizumbu. They are used for electricity supply poles. Similarly, the area is surrounded by hills that are rich in mineral resources. There is also deposition of clay and Kaolin at Fanna, Shiko and Gezza. Large quantity of Silk is also deposited at Buma. Presently geographical surveys have established the presence of iron at Bani Zumbu, while Limestone is said to be available in almost all the districts of the local government area. The area had been known for the wide network of trading culture. Traders from all sides of the borders arranged caravans to ship variety of goods across the border. Different modes of road transport used to ship goods and people across the border included trucks, lorries, buses, cars and motorcycles. The choice of mode of road transport is determined by a number of factors such as the

quality and nature of goods, climatic conditions, prevailing moods of border administrators, and preferences and circumstances of the trader. The socio-cultural aspect of relation among the communities in the area is strengthened through intermarriages across the boundaries. The local people on the Nigerian side marry from the Republic of Niger and those from the Niger Republic marry from Nigeria. There have been strong attachments among the people especially in relation to intermarriages. One other thing which further explained the social relations was the traditional annual festival of *Kokawa* (traditional worship) which is an annual event taking place in Niger Republic.

Most of the activities around the border areas as discovered from the data collected during the fieldwork can be classified into legal and illegal activities. Legal activities include trading or commercial activities which do not involve prohibited items, inter marriages, traditional healthcare practices, schooling and farming activities ; while the illegal activities include but not limited to trafficking of persons and prohibited products, racketeering, smuggling, theft etc. There is much movement of people around the border by using animal transport (such as donkeys, cows and camels). Road transportation across both recognized and unrecongnized borders was common. Major means of road transport include motorcycles, four wheel vehicles, animal-drawn carts, and record minimun occurrence of accidents compare to water transportation which records higher rate of especially during the raining season mainly due to overloading and poor state of the canoes and boats. Transport owners operate under the supervision of transport unions except those using animals that do not have a registered union. This an important factor that contributes to the increased instances of illegal migration.

The main corridor of Dendi and Arewa border consists of Dendi/Kamba, Arewa and Bagudo (Nigeria), Mallanville (Benin), Gaya, Tanda, Tounouga, Yelou, Dioudiou, Sambera and Falmey (Niger Republic). Migration along the selected border communities follow similar trend with slight differences on the pattern and actors. The four communities studied are located along Kamba-Kangiwa of Kebbi State, Nigeria so as to understand the experience and rate at which informal routes are being used for migrations along such axis, how such migration done (legally or illegally), as well as trade and business activities carried out by such migrants and importantly the roles of security agencies in checkmating such activities along such borders. Assessing the respondents' views in the area, indicates that they have years of experience of migrations as they lived in the areas for long period ranging from 16 years to 55years. In most cases, crossing the border to another country becomes a problem as many find it difficult to abide by the stipulated rules and regulations. This implies that on one hand, the security operatives checkmate the migrants to ensure legal movement across the border. But on the other hand, those without legal documents for migrations end up giving bribe or token to same security personnel to guarantee their passage. In relation to such, it appears that most of the migrants that cross the border follow illegal routes since they don't have valid documents. The official border is patronized by few. The dangers or implications of such illegal routes and migrations is that it leads to increase in trans-border crimes. This is through trade in contraband goods, kidnapping and related crimes, and also illicit trade in arms and drugs.

Similarly, illegal migration has increased the chances of drug trafficking which is done through smuggling. Our data reveals that kidnapping is linked with the illegal migrations. This is plausible considering the existence of porous border exits which allow convenient for criminals to byepass border posts through illegal routes not all are not known to the security agencies. For instance, in contrast with the Tungar Rogo, our data for Dole Kaina reveals that migration experience of the respondents ranges between 13-30 years and most of the respondents report a great increase in the number of migrants into the area purposely for trading, smuggling and other menial businesses. The reason probably being that the communities are located along the riverine areas that attract the youths who take the opportunity to cross to the other side of the border for more and possibly better business potentials. Furthermore, the presence of an official border post at Dole-Kaina might have contributed to the presence of many potential migrants. Generally, the outcome of the responses of the border communities reveals an increase in illegal migration compared to the previous years. Since 2000, there were frequent movements of goods and persons crossing the border to other destinations mainly countries in west Africa.

Because illegal migration is considered a normal practice in such communities as travelling documents do not constitute a serious obstacle to movement across the border. Migrants travel either using the official border post by presenting documents or to offer bribe the border officials. Alternatively, migrants could use other routes not known to the security operatives to cross the border. This is applicable to almost all the border areas in the region. Most importantly, looking at the security challenges and the rates of crimes committed as note earlier, the free and easy exit the porous border presents these illegal migrants provides them the opportunity to engaged different kinds of cross-border criminal activities.

(ii)   Illela-Konni Border

The area covers border communities of Illela and Gada Local government areas cutting across formal and informal border routes connecting the two countries. Illela- Konni is the main official border, but there are countless unofficial borders mostly used by drug and human traffickers either from Nigeria to Niger Republic from Niger into Nigeria. A common saying in Araba villages one of the unofficial borders is that "security agents should either collect bribe or there are 99 unofficial routes from Araba to Konni" (Field Notes). This does not necessarily mean that there are 99 entry -points, but it simply shows that there are many of such points best known by the travellers and motorcyclists in the area. We observed regular movement of goods and persons across these numerous footpaths. Therefore, one could not rule out the possibility of the movement of contrabands into the country. Thus, Araba is the second largest town in Illela Local Government Area, after Kalmalo. The people living in this village mostly have some of their relatives in Konni and other parts of the Niger Republic. Therefore, there is strong cultural and historical ties between the two communities. The number of illegal borders in Araba increased significantly with the border closure in 2021, some of the informants stated that about 70 new routes were open as a result of Nigeria's border closure. Before the closure, the most commonly ferried routes were locally called *Araba-direct, Hanyar Gidan Duwan, Hanyar Chirasa, Babu dole, Bini ka ga tsiya* amongst others. Thus, the border closure led to the use of the following routes from Araba to Konni.

Most of these routes are known and used by motorcyclists who often ferry goods and persons. It is also very important to give prominence to two categories of respondents during the research, first the Motorcycle Association (Kungiyar Kabu-Kabu) and young boys who police the unofficial routes on behalf of the formal/official border officials, locally called (Karen Duwan). These boys know the route more than the designated officials. During our interactions, it was shown that each route has a local name and *Karen Duwan* attached to the route to supposedly provide intelligence to the official border security. The boys were employed and attached to each route based on trust and confidence imposed on them by the officers and men along the border. Also, everyone is posted to his comfort zone to ensure proper management of the routes. Therefore, it is important to include this category in the questionnaire design and data collection because they are central to the research topic. We were able to establish contacts with the communities living along these borders, this with the view of engaging them as community gate-keepers at the point of research. The essence is to make use of them as entry points into the respective communities identified/ selected for the research. The following table shows the unofficial routes connecting Nigerian border villages with Niger's through Gada-Illela border areas.

Illela-Gada routes to Niger Republic

S/N	Route	Official/unofficial	Location/distance from the Nigerian border
1	Marmaro-kurega-Tsaidawa-Galmi	Official	2km
2	Rafin-Duma, Gidan-Salau, -Dagarau-Galmi	Official	2km
3	Gidan Fako-Ila-Tabanni-Gwabruwa-Shigiyo-Gidan-Makera	Unofficial	3km
4	Ila-Bigal-Tashalawa-Tambari-Magarya	Unofficial	1km
5	Yar boraye-dukkuma-Eruffa	Unofficial	1km
6	Duka maje-Jan gargari-Goda Fako-Kabobi-sabon-gida	Unofficial	5km
7	Wauru-Kadadin Maidabo-Mozagi-Malbaza	Official	5km
8	Wauru-Sagera-Tuffal-Tsarnawa-Gidan Iddar	Unofficial	2km
9	Illela-wauru-Kadadi-Rafin duma-Gidan salau-Galmi	Official	3km
10	Dutsi-Gidan isyaka-Marmaro-Kurega-Tsedawa-Galmi	Unofficial	2km
11	Marmaro-Kurega-Balgaya-Galmi	Unofficial	4km
12	Gada-Kyadawa-Wauru-Kadadi-Mozagi-Malbaza-Dogarawa-Galmi.	Unofficial	10km

Source: Field Work Data, January-March, 2022

Formal and Informal Routes for cross-border movement of persons

S/N	Routes	Official/unofficial	Location/distance
1	Illela-Gunzumi-Shetau-Bazaga	Unofficial	5KM
2	Jema-Jema-Niger-Masalata-Konni	Unofficial	7KM
3	Kwaren Majiya-Illela-Konni	Official	2.5KM
4	Tumbulaku-Ambuta-Manja-Tangaza	Unofficial	3KM

Source: Field Work Data, January-March, 2022

(iii)　　**Magama-Jibiya Border**

Magama-Jibya town is located in Jibiya Local Government Area of Katsina State. The settlement is divided into two; the first unit is called Old Magama (Tsohuwar Magama) and the second part is called New Magama (Sabon Gari Magama). This division was made by District Head of Jibiya Sarkin Arewa Katsina Hakimin Jibiya Alhaji Muhammadu Rabe Rabiú. The traditional leadership of the New Magama was entrusted on his children (Oral Interview with Bala, 20/03/2022). The two settlements are separated by Katsina - Jibia - Gusau road. Magama Jibiya was originally known as Kaga-Babba before migration to the present Magama in 1958. The town was founded by Kaga-Salau who is the grandfather of Alhaji Bala Magaji. The migration to the new Magama close to Jibiya was due to the re-construction of Katsina - Jibia - Gusau road close to the border of Niger Republic.

Next to Magama-Jibiya is Daddara, a town established in 1950. Daddara is headed by Dan-Madamin Katsina, who served as the District Head (*Hakimi*) Daddara was appointed by the Emir of Katsina, Alhaji Usman Nagoggo. Next to the District Head of Daddara is Galadiman Gari Alhaji Sanusi Usman (Oral Interview with Usman, 19/03/2022). The town has a primary and a secondary school. The major inhabitants of Daddara town are Hausas, Gobirawa, Katsinawa and few Fulanis and are predominantly Muslims. The approximate population of Daddara is 12,300 people with 7,000 female and 5,300 males, the neigbouring communities of Daddara are Sabon Gari, Yan-Nono, Masaka, Jataka, Inuwa and Karobe. Their major economic activities include farming, trading, black smiting, gold mining and livestock production (Oral Interview, 20/03/2022). Daddara is one of the communities located along the border routes leading to different destinations in Niger Republic. Some of these destinations in Republic of Niger are; Mada-Runfa, Maradi, Kwandago Gold Mining Centre, Gidan Daka Gold Processing Village and the major border routes from Daddara to Niger Republic are; Hayin Lamba, Kandamau and Turbar daji.

Another border community that is prominent in irregular migration is Kukar-Babangida also known as Kukar-Daji, which is located along Jibia-Katsina road. The settlement derived its name from former president of Nigeria, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida during a tree planting campaign in 1984. The town was given additional hectares of land to expand and merge with adjourning settlements. The major inhabitants of the town are Hausa and Fulani people with a population of about 5,000 people comprising 2,670 females and 2,150 males who engage in farming, livestock production, petty trading and recently gold mining in Niger Republic. As a border town, the distance between Kukar Babangida or Kukar Daji and Niger Republic is half a kilometer through the illegal border routes of Dan-Ta-Mande to Mada Runfa and Maradi in Niger Republic, commercial trucks converging grains and manufactured goods use these routes at Kukar Babangida as a gateway to Niger Republic (Oral Interview, 20/03/2022). The authorities in Niger Republic only allow the importation of date and tiger nuts into Nigeria. Hundreds of vehicles have found their way into Niger republic conveying different sorts of merchandise through the routes at Kukar-Babangida even after the official closure of the Nigeria border.

Kukar-Babangida has also been a route for human trafficking, smuggling of contraband and fire arms into Nigeria. Local respondents from the village confirmed that several arrests of human traffickers, majority of whom were Nigerians from Nasarawa, Osun, Kwara, Anambra, Imo, Edo, Baylsea, Kaduna teen aged girls were arrested on their way to cross the border into Republic of Niger, Burkina Faso, Libya and finally to Europe. In 2021 About 37 Cameroonians nationals were also arrested in their attempt to cross the border through Nigeria-Niger Jibya to Europe. The arrests were made by Nigeria border Drill officials. Some of the challenges encountered by the Nigeria border patrol officials include; inadequate communication gadgets, transportation, scanning equipment and attacks by bandits and other criminal groups. In 2021, a truck loading 600 bags of rice was arrested by the officials of the border drills. More than 200 out of the bags were discovered to be bags of bullets. Kukar Babangida itself was attacked 11 times in 2021 by bandits mostly from Dumburum forest in Zurmi Local Government in Zamfara State.

Next in order of significance is the Firji settlement located closer to Nigeria than any settlement in the Republic of Niger. Firji was established in 1996 and became populated from 1999 to 2000 after the introduction and implementation of Sharia by the Katsina State Government. The population are predominantly commercial sex workers from Nigeria, Niger Republic, Cameroon, Mali, Benin and Chad Republics. From 2000 - 2015 there were more than 2,300 commercial sex workers (prostitutes) in Firji, but as at present (2022) the number has dropped to less than 1000 as a result of security and economic challenges. The town is serving as a hide out for criminals, persons declared wanted and agitators of hopeless freedom and free life. In Firji town, both CFA Francs and the Nigeria Naira are commonly used but Naira is more wide spread. The prices of hotel accommodation in Firji range from N3,500 to N5,000 per night. Majority of the people in the town are drug addicts that commonly use *Codeine, Rochi, Fari, Tsanwa, Janatan, Tramadol, CPS*, alcoholic drinks and varieties of carbonated and intoxicating liquid drinks (Oral Interview, 20/03/2022).

There are more than 1,000 gold miners in Firji town who hail from different West African countries, but majority of them are Nigerians. These miners move from Firji to Kwandago and Gidan Daka for gold works between 12:00 and 1:00 a.m. and return to Firji at midnight or early morning. Similarly, it was also discovered that 75% of the gold miners are from Gurusu (Gummi Local Government Area), Anka and Gusau in Zamfara State (Oral Interview, 19/03/2022). Similarly, artisanal gold mining has been declared illegal by the Government of Niger Republic consequence to the collapse of mining fields where more than 200 miners were buried death by sand in the ditches but Nigerians are still mining gold illegally and if caught by the Gendarmeries it is 75,000 naira fine, confiscation of all goods in possession by the illegal miner or jail without trial. Basically, the average ages of these miners range from 16-25 years while a gram of gold cost 25 - 30 thousand naira.

Human and drug Trafficking

Trafficking in human and drugs has become one of the major trans-border crimes along Nigeria-Niger border since 1990s. Human and Drug trafficking has, over the years, assumed transnational trade status, encompassing all the continents in the world. According to United Nations figures, human trafficking generates an estimated 9.5 billion USD in annual revenue in 2005 (NAPTP, 2010). In the Sahel West Africa, Human and Drug Trafficking has become the fastest growing criminal enterprise. However, the knowledge about the activities of the traffickers is fractured, fragmented and sometimes even contradictory. This is mainly because the methods and strategies used in the trafficking across borders is highly secretive and even the actors and routes involved in trafficking keeps changing. Data for this research was collected from the Office of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP), Sokoto Zonal Command, which is in charge of Illela and Kamba borders with Niger Republic. The data so far collected spanned 14 years between 2006 when the NAPTIP office in Sokoto was established to 2022 when the field work was conducted.

From the data collected it is evident that out of every 100 victims taken via the hazardous routes through Nigeria-Niger border along the Sahara Desert, only 20-30 of them reach their destination, and about 70% of them perish in the desert. Some of the victims spend up to five to six years on the road, although the trans-Saharan journey can be done in six months. Many of the victims do not reach their perceived 'Eldorado' as hundreds are attacked by bandits or are abandoned by agents on the way or drowned in the sea. Others have to get themselves involved in commercial sex activities to pay their way to Saudi Arabia, while many more return home. The consumer states export their human commodity brought from the vulnerable and feeder states to their agents and international crime syndicates through West African transit camps, to criminal groups and organizations in countries in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

In August, 31st, 2021, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) rescued 13 victims said to be Libya bound victims of human trafficking made up of 2 boys and 11 girls (NAPTIP, 2021). The agency reported that the combined operatives of NAPTIP, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Department of State Services (DSS) have arrested a high-profile trans – border trafficking suspect, Nurudeen Sani said to be based in Kano. The NAPTIP boss had said during a Press Conference to herald the 2021 World Day Agaisnt Human Trafficking that "while the Agency has continued to rescue, counsel, rehabilitate and empower victims of human trafficking in line with its mandates, traffickers and other sundry offenders are no more having it pleasant as the Agency has continued to smoke them out and prosecute them. The victims said to have been recruited from the South West Region of the Country were rescued at Basarawa Community along the Kano – Kastina Road by the combined Security Operatives. They were said to be heading to Libya through the Republic of Niger.

Trafficking Routes

Some of the members of the syndicates are in the source countries, some in the transit camps along the road routes while others still are in the destination countries ensuring the safe reception of their 'commodities' at sea or airports. They cross at different border crossings before using overland routes across the Sahara to North Africa. From Algeria or Morocco, they make hazardous journeys in small boats across the Mediterranean or Red Sea, through the Straits of Gibraltar to Spain or Portugal. Agades, which has had a monopoly over trade routes across the Sahara for over 300 (three hundred) years, is a popular transit town. The Tuareg are usually used as guides since they know the routes well and are highly protective of their victims. Consumer states control and coordinate some border axis towns. Katsina, for example, co-ordinates the Daura axis, Yobe coordinates Borno, and the Adamawa/Taraba axis from where victims leave for Cameroon to Europe by sea. Some of the trans-border overland routes used by the traffickers include:

i. Kano-Katsina-Jibia-Maradi-Agades-Tripoli or through Algiers-Europe, especially Italy or Spain

ii. Sokoto-Zamfara-Kaura Namoda-Bagodo-Benin-Togo

iii. Kano or Katsina-Daura (Babban Mutum border) -

Zinder (Damagaram)

iv. Katsina-Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso-Libya/Morocco-Spain/ Italy
v. Katsina-Niger-Bobodiolasso or Pontenga (Burkina Faso)-France
vi. Dutse-Mai Gatari-Zinder (Niger Republic)
vii. Maiduguri (Borno State), Baga-Njemena (Chad)-Sudan-Saudi Arabia
viii. Kangiwa-Ilela-Kwami-Doso-Burkino Faso-Ivory Coast use sea routes to Europe

Most of the countries along the routes used are transit countries, and there are also various prominent transit camps along the Niger-Nigeria border towns of Magama and Hirji. For some victims, these transit camps and routes end up being their destination countries as they are forced into prostitution in the camps. According to NAPTIPP sources in Sokoto, there are many Nigerian prostitutes in Niger who engage in prostitution on their way at the trafficking camps. Many of these camps are ancient routes and settlements used for the trans-Saharan trade in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Other border crossings and illegal routes used by traffickers in the area include: Birnin Kudu, Mai Gatari and Tsanyawa outposts in Jigawa State, Bumbun (Daura), Dankama and Birnin Kuva in Katsina State and Dole Kaina and the Bagudo borders of Kebbi State. To avoid detection and interception by border security operatives, many victims and their agents use horses, donkeys and motorcycles to cross over. Many of them cannot be monitored as there are many illegal untarred feeder roads to use in getting to Niger Republic. In Sokoto they followed the unofficial routes along Illel-Konni, Gada-Galmi numerous bush paths to cross-over (KII, 20/02/2022). In Illela traffickers and their victims followed through Araba, Gatti and Kalmalo border route. Other prominent areas in Gada, include Marmaro, Kadadi and Dutsen Gidan Isyaku. According oral data, these border settlements are notorious for providing safe haven for the perpetrators (KII, 20/02/2022).

Conclusion

The focus of this study is on the nature and pattern of irregular migration and cross-border crimes along the Kamba-Illela-Jibiya axis of the Nigeria-Niger border areas. Understanding the nature of the cross-border crimes and how each influence the other constitute the problematic of the research. Two local governments areas (each located along Nigeria's border with the Republic of Niger located in Katsina, Sokoto and Kebbi States) were selected during the data collection. The findings have addressed the research questions and has come up with additional relevant issues though not articulated initially, are however significant to further understanding of the dynamics of irregular migration and cross border crimes. The study has recounted the common historical background of border communities in both Nigeria and Niger Republic. The study has shown that the historical process has contributed to the development of a prolonged political unity, strong social and cultural ties, sustained economic interdependence which have survived to the present. The study reveals that border communities in both Niger and Niger Republic have been resilient despite the numerous historical challenges caused by colonial domination and other forms of neo-colonial policies which sought to undermine the common heritage and identity of local border communities. The provisions of the ECOWAS protocol which provide the framework for regional and economic cooperation and integration by encouraging and facilitating free movement of goods and persons, those provisions are always violated by irregular migrants, smugglers, bandits and insurgent groups mostly motivated by one or a combination of economic, political and ideological reasons. The research has found that there are a number of challenges which are both internal and external, and are among the constraints that prevent effective management of the borders between Nigeria and Niger Republic in the north west region. Therefore, the porous borders are vulnerable to uncontrolled crossing by illegal migrants, insurgents, bandits as well as the associated infiltration of weapons and drugs into the Nigerian territory. Finally, irregular migration and the growth of crimes around the borderlands are among the greatest threats to the national security of Nigeria by creating the conditions that make Nigeria vulnerable to infiltration by real and potentials criminal gangs that take advantage of the porous borders to perpetrate illegalities in border communities and the hinterland of Nigeria.

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