

INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER REGIONS: A STUDY OF ILLELA-BIRNIN-N'KONNI BORDERLANDS OF NIGERIA AND NIGER REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Informal cross-border activities is often viewed as a threat to national security and economic development of states due to the difficulties involved in ensuring that people and goods moving across state borders are adequately examined and properly checked. It is an indisputable fact to say that such position cannot be divorced from the realm of reality. However, it must be admitted that in many African states, particularly in West Africa, informal cross-border activities have demonstrated lots of relevance not only in the intertwining of cultures and people of the region but also in improving the economy of the border regions. This paper examines the nature and dynamics of different kinds of economic activities carried out between Illela and Birnin-N'konni communities of Nigeria and Niger Republic. It also evaluates the effects of such activities on border communities and their states at large. The study concluded that despite the short-comings of informal cross-border activities in the area, it is still relevant in cementing and integration of cultures as well as the economic development of the border area, their states and the West African region at large.

Introduction

Globalization is indeed a powerful force that is ever increasing the interconnectedness of the global community. According to Brunney-Jally, (n.d) globalization, particularly cross-

border activities, are promoted by free trade, activities of International organization, desire of central states to promote certain interest, and activities of regional organization. Other factors may include shared culture, ideology, geography and history of two communities

living side by side as experienced in many North and West African states, particularly in the border areas where tribes of the same origin and history found themselves divided by colonial imaginary borders (Zartman, 1965).

One of the areas identified with high level of cross-border activities between border communities in West Africa is the Nigeria and Niger borderland. The two states share a border of about 1500 km (the longest border in Nigeria), vast, open and densely populated (National Boundary Commission, 2007). Furthermore, the two states are colonial creations; social, political and economic relations between their communities pre-dated colonial rule. For instance, what is today considered to be Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger is what Miles (1994) referred to as "Hausaland Divided". This is because the communities of the two states have for centuries shared similar socio-economic, cultural and geographical aspects and had been part of the kingdoms of Hausaland. Despite their division into two parts of two independent political entities, the states, particularly their border communities, continued to enjoy warm relationship (Collins, 1976, National Boundary Commission, 2007).

This is the case of Illela and Birnin-N'Konni borderland communities, located at the extreme north of Sokoto state, north-western part of Nigeria and the extreme south of Tahoua region of Niger Republic. The interaction between these communities is within the larger history of Hausaland. Movements across the borders of the two states have in recent years become a source of concern to the governments and researchers of both

sides. The reason informing this is that most of these activities are informal due to the relative free and regular activities across the border as well as the open, porous and motorable nature of the border area which permits for clandestine activities. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on free movement furthermore enhanced the level of such interaction. Apart from the increasing number of daily movements of people and goods across the border, illegal activities, such as, smuggling, trafficking, illegal migration, and other forms of criminal activities across the border have become a source of concern to both states.

It is in respect to the above statement that this study seeks to determine the nature and dynamics of different kinds of economic activities between the borderland of Nigeria and Niger Republic. The study seeks to address this by appraising the experience of Illela and Birnin-N'Konni borderlands and its implication on Nigeria and Niger Republic. Questions are therefore, raised; do economic activities have any impact on the socio-economic development or otherwise of the border regions of the two states? What are the nature and dynamics of these activities? Are there factors influencing movement between the borderlands and if yes, what are the implications of such community relations on Nigerian and Nigerien states?

Structurally, this study is divided into five parts. The first part provided for introduction of the topic under study. The second part deals with a brief history of the two communities. The third part stressed on the evolution of the boundary

and its implications on the two border communities. Part four reflected on the nature and dynamics of economic activities between the two communities. Finally, the study highlighted some of the implications of such activities on Nigeria and Niger republic.

Research Procedure

The study is basically a qualitative one. The universe from which the sample was drawn is defined as all those who engage in regular informal economic activities between Illela and Birni-N’Konni. In this respect, two categories of respondents were selected because they seem to be most represented in cross-border activities in the area. The first category includes farmers, traders, civil servants, commercial motor cyclist and car drivers. The second category includes the representative of the traditional ruler of Illela, the chairman of Illela local government and the secretary to Birnin-N’Konni administration, border security operatives (comprising the police, immigration and custom), etc. There are two sampling techniques adopted in this study. They include snowball and opportunistic samplings. The two sampling procedures were adopted in order to complement the possible deficiency that may arise from a single procedure. To ensure the successful execution of the research, interviews were conducted. In this sense, the format of interview used was unstructured, open-ended and face-to-face format. Each interviewee was examined in accordance with his own specialization and experience of the study area. It can therefore, be admitted that, different set of questions

were asked to different sets of respondents. The interviews were, moreover, complemented by personal observation of the study area in order to reduce ambiguities that may arise during the process of the investigation. A total number of 23 people were interviewed in Illela, Birnin-N’Konni and Sokoto metropolis.

Conceptual Clarification

Border

Wikipedia Encyclopaedia (n.d) defines border as a geographic boundary of a political entity or legal jurisdiction, such as government or sub-national administrative division. Border may, however, set up buffer zones and can be either fully or partially controlled and may be crossed legally or at designated border checkpoints. Guo (2004) furthermore stresses that border (or boundary) does not only exist between two states but also between other forms of political units that may be visible or invisible, either marked with stones or fortified. Guo classifies borders as either natural or artificial. It is said to be natural when natural objects (such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and seas, etc.) form barriers between states. Artificial borders are however, man-made, consisting of artificial barriers such as stones, walls or even lines. They may also be geometrical using the longitude and latitude lines across the globe. Moreover, borders may also be cultural when culture separating communities formed the basis for border creations or demarcation of nation states.

Borderland and Borderland Communities

Microsoft Word Encarta (2009), however, defines borderland as any area of land at territory's edge, meaning the area near the edge of the country or region, especially a remote area. A borderland community is therefore, defined as any local community located at the border area of a state or regions' territory.

Cross-Border Activities

A Cross-border activity is defined in this study as the movement of people across the border of two or more states with a view to enhancing their socio-economic activities. Cross-border activity may be formal or informal. It is formal when all legal processes of crossing a nation's border are met. They include among other things, the use of passport, pass, visa and other protocols agreed to by both states, etc. It is informal when due legal processes established by states are not followed.

A Brief History of Illela and Birnin-N'konni

The history of Illela and Birnin-N'Konni towns is a typical example of the level of devastation caused by colonial partition of Africa. Several communities of Africa who once lived and shared same socio-cultural, economic, and political life now found themselves existing side-by-side only as distinct societies of distinct political entities. Illela and Birnin-N'Konni communities, like many parts of Africa, are not exceptional. This section therefore, highlights a brief history of the two borderland communities.

A Brief History of Illela

Illela is historically an offshoot of "Birni-N'Konni" (the walled city of Konni). It is a city founded since in the pre-Jihad era around 1804 (Wikipedia.org, n.d). The Illela people were believed to have migrated from the east near Egypt and settle at Zamfara from where they moved to Alkalawa in Gobir (Samaila, 2009: 34-36). However, due to the activities of flood, and human raiders in the area as well as the frequent wars between Asben and Gobir, they were forced to leave their settlement to a place near Lake Kalmalo, six kilometres west of Illela town (Samaila, 2009: 34-36). The word Illela originates from the name Allela (Archibong, M. August 9, 2009). It is believed to have been founded by Allela after he was forced to exile from Birnin-N'Konni as a result of disobedience to the then ruler. It can, however, be argued that it was Konni who sent him out since according to Ubandawaki, (fieldnote 29, 2009), Konni, Allela and Kalmalo were blood relatives. Konni could, therefore, be the brother or uncle to Allela. Until the arrival of 19th century Islamic jihadists, the place called Illela today was part of Gobir Kingdom, which later became under Sokoto caliphate. Moreover, the 1889, 1890, and 1909 colonial treaties between Britain and France finally divided the two communities under the political control of the two colonial states. (Odihi, 1989).

Illela is headed by a traditional district head popularly referred to as "Ubandawakin Illela" who is answerable to "Sarkin Gobir of Gwadabawa." (Ubandawaki, 2009). He is however, assisted by palace officials in carrying out his duties. They include "Ajiya" (treasurer), "Sarkin Fawa" (head of

butchers), “Sarkin Baki” (chief visitor attendant), “Sarkin Makera” (chief black smith), “Sarkin Aski”(chief barber), “Sarkin Dogarai” (chief security of the palace), etc. The ubandawaki is furthermore assisted “Mai-Unguwa” (head of an area in a village or town). Since the creation of Illela local government from Gwadabawa local government of Sokoto state in 1989, Illela has continued to become one of the leading local governments in the state in economic development (Illela LEEDS, 2008-2010) due to the expansion of economic activities like hosting of international weekly markets, usually participated by many West African business communities; the growing number of banks, informal currency exchange and transfer outlets, all attest to the fact that economic activities are booming in the area. More so, the area also serves as a path through which, formal, informal and criminal activities are carried out to or from other West African states (field note, 2009-2010). Furthermore, economic activities served as bedrock for the interaction of cultures. For instance, it can easily be observed (feildnotes, 2009-2010) both on market and non-market days, the presence of different Nigerians and West African tribes like the Igbo, Yoruba, Togolese, Beninese, etc., conducting their economic activities in free air.

A Brief History of Konni

As earlier stated, Illela was an offshoot of Birni-N’Konni. The city was said to have been founded between 15th and 16th century and since then, the capital city has been moved to different places. The first city was Nadabar then Nadaba and finally to its present place between 1922-1923.

The city was a territory of the Gobir kingdom. It was surrounded by wall as a defence shield against external aggression and hence, the word “Birni” (walled city). It was the forces of Sokoto caliphate under the command of Umar bn fudi who defeated the city in 1804 made it a vassal of Sokoto caliphate (Jip, 1996; 65). Colonialism, moreover, took it away from Sokoto caliphate after its defeat. Birnin-N’Konni was however, noted to be a place for French massacre on May 8, 1899 under the French Voulet Chaname Mission (wikipedia Encyclopedia, n.d).

Birnin-N’Konni is one of the most important towns in Niger republic. The town serves as a market and transport hub for Niger Republic, linking the central capital Niamey and the nation’s main eastern cities of Maradi and Zinder. Its position, close to Illela market makes it a route for accessing viable scarce commodities from Nigeria. These commodities include; petrol, manufactured goods, agricultural goods and chemicals, etc., (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, n.d). Birnin-N’Konni has also has one of the most arable lands of Niger Republic. Majority of the people here are farmers even though trading activity is well pronounced in the area (Iliya, 1989).

Trading makes Birnin-N’Konni a viable place for economic activities in the region. Goods available in this town include; beans, sheep, goats camels and cows. Others include; foreign vegetable oil and foreign rice, etc. Birnin-N’Konni market functions every Wednesdays. (Musa, interview 2009). Commercial institutions such as banks play a very important role in harnessing economic activities in Birni-N’Konni. Banks like ECOBANK which

belongs to ECOWAS also operates in the town.

The Evolution of Nigeria-Niger Boundary and Its Implication on Illela and Birnin-N’konni Borderlands

The Pre-Colonial Era

Illela and Birnin-N’Konni international boundary like other boundaries of Africa is a product of colonial partition (Inuwa, 1989:53). In many parts of Africa, colonialism has left a legacy of partitions; dividing common people into two or more separate entities. Inuwa (1989) argues that the existence of colonial boundaries in Africa does not explain the absence of boundaries in pre-colonial societies. In traditional African societies, boundary is determined by the power and influence of a kingdom. Therefore, the stronger a kingdom is, the wider is its circle of influence likewise the weaker it is, the more it loses its territories to other growing powers (Miles, 1994).

Miles (1994) notes that the existence of powerful kingdoms in Hausaland and the tussle and raids that existed between them is a typical example of how power influences the boundary of a kingdom. Powerful Hausa states such as Gobir, Katsina, Maradi, Daura, Zazzau, Damagaram (Zinder), etc., have at several times engaged in battles of territorial expansion, protection or even recovery. This is noted in pre and post-Jihad periods. It can, therefore, be argued that, “a fixed political boundary is relatively new to the Hausaland” (Miles, 1994:65). Inuwa (1989) pointed out that despite the tussles between the Hausa states over territorial

expansion; there was little or no restriction to socio-economic activities between and among the communities of the entire region. Miles (1994) added that the Hausa people were less critical to political boundaries than the socio-cultural and economic affinities that binded them.

The Making of the Boundary: Colonial Era

The creation of Nigeria-Niger common boundary cannot be treated outside the larger history of colonialism. The intrusion of the colonial powers into Africa and their desire to achieve the greatest possible benefits of the land, labour, and capital of foreign land has indeed affected Africa negatively. The resultant effect of this, is the division and disruption of lands and tribes of Africa into different socio-economic and political formations. It also destroyed the continuity nature of several natural regions of Africa (Inuwa, 1989; 57).

The Anglo-French treaties of 1890, 1898, 1904, and 1906 that formed the bases for border creation were all treaties reached for the benefit of either France or Britain. During the end of 19th century, both powers have cast their eyes over Hausaland. To protect French intrusion, the British became pre-occupied with expanding its influence Northward from the coast while France was desperately in search of water route to connect both its eastern and western Africa holdings and a corridor to link Niamey to Zinder. To avoid conflict, both agreed that the division should be carried out based on historical, cultural conditions that divided the two traditional states of Sokoto Caliphate and Damagaram. This led to treaties (1890, 1898, 1904, and 1906) over a period of

fourteen years that eventually led to the creation of Nigeria-Niger boundary (Illela/Birnin-N’Konni included). The treaties were, however, based on historical and geographical exaggerations that were unfounded and are not known even to Hausa states (Miles, 1994; 67). Infact, the first demarcation of the area was carried out on paper, without any of the colonial officials ever visited the place (Inuwa, 1989: 61-62). The lack of empirical knowledge of the area was what later triggered subsequent readjustments of the boundary into what it is today (Inuwa, 1989: 61-62).

Miles (1994; 64-68) notes that most of the British treaties with the French are based on concessions from French in other parts of their colonial world. For instance, the British renunciations of a radius of 160 miles from Sokoto both south-ward and east ward in three successive geometric lines towards Lake Chad was based on the French renunciation of its fishing right of New foundland.

The Implication of Border Demarcation on Illela-Birnin-N’Konni Border Communities

The division of Illela and Birnin-N’Konni into two political communities of two political states is not without consequences. Despite the fact that the people of the two communities continue to relate peacefully, the border has, notwithstanding, created abnormalities. First, it has altered the mode of language expression between them. For instance, those in Birnin-N’Konni, like most Hausa people of Niger Republic, are influenced by French mode of expression and writing. Such difference has become

instrument in the hands of Nigerian and Nigerien immigration officials in differentiating the citizens of the two states (Feildnotes, 2009).

Collins (1984) also points out that the demarcation has affected the pattern of settlement in the area as it encourages migration of people from the Niger border to the border areas of Nigeria. The movement was triggered by many factors. The most important of which, is the strict and harsh taxation policies of French colonial authorities and the regular famine in Niger Republic. Even in recent times, Illela local government is expressing serious concern on the high level of migration from Birnin-N’Konni and environs into Illela (Illela Leeds: 2008:68).

Nature and Dynamics of Economic Activities between Illela and Birnin-N’konni Communities

Agricultural Activities

Agriculture is as old as human history itself. It was the dominant activity in early human history; it remains a dominant activity and a major employer in Nigeria and Niger Republic. Although trade seems to be the most obvious activities between the two communities (fieldnote, 2009-2010), agriculture employ the greater number of people in the area (Illela LEEDS 2008-2010 and Maikaset, 2009), thereby serving as a medium for social relations between the two communities and employment opportunities to the members of both communities.

Apart from the agricultural produce (like beans, millet, foreign rice, etc.), that has been a source of trade for the people, agriculture provides for cross-border

labour and animal rearing. Gayya farming is a prominent means of economic relations in the areas. During rainy season, friends or relatives (especially youths) from both side of the border seek the assistance of one another to cultivate their farmlands or those belonging to their parents. Such lands are relatively vast and difficult to be cultivated by few individuals over a short period. Gayya farming is also carried out to reduce the cost of labour and increase the level of productivity (Buba, 2009).

Interesting to note in the study area is the existence of what can be regarded as “cross-border farms”. In the border area, one can easily observe the existence of farms starting from one side of the border area and ending on another side. The farmers are quite aware of the fact that they are tilling beyond the borders of their territories; they however, do not attach much importance to its implications since authorities of both sides do not question their action. The traditional rulers and border security officials of the area are also aware of such practice (Ubandawaki, 2009 and fieldnote 2009).

Pastoral animal production or rearing is also prominent in the area. According to Nori, Taylor and Sensi (issue 148:3), pastoralism is a “complex livelihood system seeking to maintain an optimal balance between pastures, livelihood and people in uncertain and variable environment”. Pastoralism has a global dimension. From the dry lands of Africa to the cold plateaus of central Asia and frozen steppe of Northern Europe and Canada, different systems of pastoralism are being practiced by different pastoral communities in different

environment. The character of their practice can, however, be drawn from the nature of the environment they operate; areas with scarce resources and extreme climatic condition which all limit options for alternative land use and livelihood system (Nori, Taylor and Sensi, issue 148:3).

Globally, extensive pastoral production is practiced on 25 per cent of global land area; providing for 10 per cent of world meat production, supporting some 200 million pastoral households who raised nearly 1 billion head of camel, cattle and other smaller livestock, about a third of which are found in sub-Saharan Africa (Nori, Taylor and Sensi, issue 148).

Nigeria and Niger Republic, been two border states in sub-Saharan Africa, are not exceptional from such animal transhumance movement. However, such movement is more pronounced in Niger Republic. According to Iliya (2003:26), over 85 per cent of the population of camels, sheep, goats and cattle in Niger Republic are involved in pastoral production. The Fulani, Tuaregs and Shuwa Arabs are the dominant groups engaging in the business. Most of them also live along the border areas of Nigeria and Niger Republic. During dry season, the climatic condition of the area which is unfavourable force them to move south-ward in search of greener pasture. However, during the wet season, they move northward back to their communities since the scarce resources (water and pasture) is available (Iliya, 2003).

In Illela and Birnin-N’Konni study area, the Fulani pastoralists control most of the animal production in the area (Ubandawaki, 2009). The Fulani pastoralists can be divided

into two: the sedentary pastoralists and the extensive pastoralists. The sedentary pastoralists can be referred to as those Fulani that lived permanently in the area, they depend on the daily scavenge found around Birnin-N’Konni and Illela green areas for the survival of their animals. They move every morning southward to the greener areas around Illela to graze and water their animals and return to their base every evening. Some of them engage in other economic activities such as farming and trading. As for the extensive pastoralists, during dry season, they engage in southward movement from Birnin-N’Konni and surroundings down into the Nigerian territory to the southern part of the country. They however, return during the wet season (Ubandawaki, 2009). Both the sedentary and extensive pastoralists recognize no boundary in the process of cross-border movement and animal production.

The herding communities have different ways and means through which they interact with the general community. First, they interact through their association, Miyetti Allah. The association is formed to protect the interest of Fulani herdsmen wherever they are in Nigeria. Interaction is also carried out with border managers (traditional rulers, security officials, etc.) during conflict resolutions, especially with farmers. They also relate with middlemen to sell their animals and with butchers, especially in states of emergency, etc.

Trade Activities

Trade is the most obvious economic activities between Illela and Birnin-N’Konni borderlands. Both communities host weekly market days, which attract

people from different parts of West Africa. The Illela market functions every Sunday while that of Birnin-N’Konni every Wednesday. This does not mean that both markets functions only on these stipulated days, rather it explains the highest level of commercial activities in both sides. As for Illela market, the Chairman of Illela Local Government (cited in Muhammad, 2009) states that:

The market was established three centuries ago and attracts traders from all over Nigeria and even from outside..... market activities starts, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, then on Sunday we have major weekly business... traders come from Ghana, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso.

Both Illela and Birnin-N’Konni provide for each other goods and services that are very important to the survival and development of their communities and their states at large. For instance, Illela exports agricultural products, such as yam, maize, sorghum, sweet potato, cassava, garri, wheat, millet, fruits (mango, banana, Guava, pine apple, etc.), kola nuts, vegetables (tomato, okra, etc.), palm oil, etc., to Birnin-N’Konni. Parts of these goods are consumed in Konni, while others are re-exported to other parts of Niger Republic and beyond (Zinda, 2009). This is equally applied to manufactured goods (and their spare parts) like, automobiles, mattresses; electronics such as radio television, mobile phones, etc; machines such as motorcycles, water pumps, grinding machines, etc. Others include soft drinks, insecticides, plastic wares, building materials, roofing sheets, plywood, cement, sweets, biscuit, soap, dusa, perfumes, agro chemicals, cosmetics

and textile materials among others (Inuwa, 1989; fieldnotes, 2009).

Many of the food items and manufactured goods come into Illela market from many parts of Nigeria. They include among many other goods from Onitsha, Lagos, Ibadan Port Harcourt, Abeokuta, etc. There are also goods imported from other parts of West African states (like Benin, Mali, etc.) for re-export to other states beyond Nigeria. These goods include: live animals (like goats, cows, camels, horses, birds, etc.), manufactured goods (galila shadda, foreign rice, foreign evaporated milk, etc.), food items (dates, milk, chilled milk, beans, cowpeas, tiger nuts, etc.), etc. (new.uneca.org, n.d.; Ubandawaki, 2009; Zinda, interview 2009; Toyon, 2009). It is also observed, that a significant number private and commercial motorcyclists and from Birnin-N’Konni fuel their tanks in Illela filling stations and black market areas (Tonyon, 2009; fieldnotes, 2009). This is because the price of fuel is cheaper in Illela than in Birnin-N’Konni, despite the fact that Niger Republic is an oil producing state (Tonyon, 2009). Toyon (2009) added that, goods are, however, allowed by the Nigerian custom officials if they are not in commercial quantity. Illela also provides for Birnin-N’Konni services that may demand expertise far away in Tahoua. Such services include; repairs of cars, motorcycles, electronics, etc., (Sani, 2009). Proximity, therefore, contributes in no small measure towards binding the two communities together.

Despite Nigeria’s position as a beans producer in the region, a large chunk of beans sold in Illela market comes from Birnin-N’Konni (Alhassan, 2009). Konni

also provides for Illela and beyond with meat. Much of the sheep, goats, camels, and cows that come to Illela market are imported from Birnin-N’Konni and beyond (Alhassan, 2009). Standing by the border post, one can easily observe the movement of herds through the custom border post (feildnotes, 2009). These are in exclusion to those who use the illegal tracks that are directly linked into Illela. Other goods provided by Birnin-N’Konni include foreign used clothes, which come through Cotonou in Benin republic, foreign textile materials, etc. (Usman, 2004; Jip 1996).

Apart from the agricultural and manufactured goods, which Birnin-N’Konni provides for Illela and other parts of Nigeria, Birnin-N’Konni also provides Illela with portable drinking water. This due to the fact that underground water in Illela which most of the community members depend on, is potash and thereby unhealthy for human consumption. The people of Illela town, therefore, resort to importing drinking water from Birnin-N’Konni. The water is mostly transported in cars, trucks and tanks (as in the case of package and non-package water (Ibrahim, 2009). This has not only indicated the failure of the Nigerian state to secure its borders but its failure to protect its borderland communities despite the existence of Lake Kalmalo in northern part and a river in the southern part (field note, 2009-2010).

The shortage of electric power supply in Illela like in many other parts of Nigeria makes it dependent on Birnin-N’Konni for iced or block water. Today, there are people in Birnin-N’Konni whose livelihood depends on ice water production for Illela. Most of those who produce the “ice”

comes from Birnin-N’Konni while their major traders come from Illela. It is, however, ironical to hear that sometimes retailers of this good in Birnin-N’Konni find it more accessible in Illela than in Birnin-N’Konni itself. This is because most of the ice block marketers produce largely for Illela than for Birnin-N’Konni. This is because Illela is a bigger market for iced water than Birnin-N’Konni (Audu, interview 2009). The major transporters of this good are commercial motorists and motorcyclists who convey it from their places of production to their dealers. Ice block market is more attractive on Illela market days.

Informal Currency Exchange and Cross-Border Activities

The participation of different set of people from different parts of West Africa in Illela market, has inevitably gave rise to the activities of informal currency exchange. Such exchange business contributes in creating a more efficient framework for regional trade (Meagher, 2008; 169). The activities of *yan canji* (those who engage in informal currency exchange) have contributed in no small measure towards harnessing economic activities in the area.

Informal currency exchange provides services which cannot easily be carried out by banks since they do not engage in currency exchange with individual persons but rather with corporate bodies. Aliyu-Koko (2010) points out that, through informal cross-border currency exchange, traders from Nigeria, Niger and beyond have learnt to travel from or to Cotonou, Mali, Togo, etc., and even down to Sokoto without the risk of holding huge amount of money. This is successful due to the broad

network of *yan canji* in West Africa. *Yan canji*, as they are usually referred to in Hausa language, are categorized into two: the first category are those who provide instant services to traders who perhaps demand travelling with their money or those whose interest is to use them for immediate transaction, especially in the border area. This category operates at small scale level and hence referred to as *kanan yan chanji* (small scale currency exchangers who largely engage in direct and immediate currency exchange).

The second category of *yan canji* is usually referred to as *manyan yan canji* (big time currency exchangers). This category of *yan canji* deals with the exchange of huge amount of money and also provides financial security for travellers going to or coming from Cotonou, Togo, Mali, Nigeria, etc. In this respect, instead of exchanging currency for currency, they receive cash from traders travelling far away to other West Africa countries (like Mali, Togo Benin, Nigeria, etc.) and then provide them with a receipt or document indicating the amount received and the equivalent to be paid. Such amount collected is then paid by their branches or associates in other countries where the business is intended to take place. In this case, they charge the traders for the transaction. The advent of mobile phones has improved the nature of the transaction. Now, apart from the document tendered, the agent who collected the money communicates with his/her branch or counterpart in the country of collection, the identity of the receiver and the information concerning the transaction. Many traders in West Africa depend on this method for their

financial safety and security. However, other traders deposit their cash in ECOWAS Bank (ECOBANK) usually found across West African states. The bank, however, is subject to question by most traders. First, is its failure to withdraw huge amount of money during the weekends. Second, the process of withdrawing huge amount of money in the informal sector is easier and simpler than in the ECOBANK because the informal exchange is guarded by trust and not strict official rules and finally, informal currency exchangers are usually closer to markets than banks (Aliyu-Koko, 2010).

Currency exchange is only popular among traders coming or going out of the area. It is not popular between the people of Illela and Birnin-N’Konni. The indigenous population of this area use Nigerian and Nigerien currencies without discrimination. They pay and receive both currencies in the course of their business transaction (feildnotes, 2009). This is because members of both communities are always engaged with one another on daily basis, which updates them about the exchange rates. In addition, most of the manufactured goods sold in Birnin-N’Konni emanates from Illela. Therefore, the problem of price and currency conversion is not regarded as a problem by the two communities (Audu, interview 2009). Informal currency exchange is, therefore, a strong factor fuelling cross-border trade in the area. It can equally be argued that it has the capacity to gain more trust from traders due to its open, simple and flexible nature.

Smuggling

Smuggling is another activity that is pronounced in the border area. Smuggling

is regarded as an illegal activity all over the world. It destroys locally produced goods and encourages dependence of a state on foreign goods. It also promotes criminal activities across the borders of states. While the activity is viewed as destructive, it however, enriches those people involved in the business.

On getting to Illela town, it is easy to see smugglers’ cars packed by the side of the road filled with petrol jerry cans (fieldnotes, 2009). Due to the vast, porous and motorable nature of the border, smugglers take advantage of the bus routes to transport petroleum products, grains, yam, cassava, flower, sugar, biscuits, Nigerian textiles, timber, spare parts, etc., into Birnin-N’Konni and other parts of Niger. The smugglers also use bush routes from Birnin-N’Konni to smuggle foreign rice, beans, cigarettes, mosquito coils, foreign textiles materials, dates (dabino), etc. Others include used cars popularly referred to as “tourist”. Jip (1996, 110); Tonyon, (interview, 2009) admit that there are over sixty illegal bush routes (motorable and unmotorable) used in smuggling in the area. However, Mu’azu D.H (cited in Archibong, M. August 9, 2007) add that about forty of these routes are directly linked to Sokoto, which further connect the smugglers to other parts of Nigeria. Attempts to find out from the members of the public on how such activity are carried out are met with resistance. Most of those interviewed rejected the notion on the existence of any acts of smuggling in the area. Those that agreed on movement along the bus routes believed that they are simply short cuts that save time. It is observed that

such activities are not only carried out by individual smugglers alone, they are supported by the traditional rulers and border security personnel in the area. A traditional ruler of the area Ubandawaki (2009), has this to say;

Since the arrival of this new custom boss, no car or good is seized, the relationship between the community and the security officials is cordial.

Jip (1996: 112-113) affirms that smuggling activities in the area is complex and that it is difficult for ordinary individual to know who is responsible for the smuggling or where the goods are heading to. This is because the chain of connection between those in charge and their agents is complex. In addition, those involved have close connection with the political leaders and traditional rulers of the areas. There are different bush routes linking Illela and Birnin-N’Konni. The major ones include Araba route and Kalmalo route. Ibrahim A. (interview, 2009) adds that smugglers of petroleum products find their ways into Birnin N’Konni through Kalmalo while smugglers of rice, oil, and other food items make use of the route from Birnin-N’Konni through Araba village leading to Illela town. These are in exclusion to other major and minor motorable and unmotorable parts used daily for conveying goods. Camels, donkeys and motorcycles are used in unmotorable areas. This makes detecting every smuggling activity difficult. Customs and Nigeria – Niger joint patrol officials, are all aware of this.

Abdullahi (2009) reveals how he was intercepted in smugglers truck on his way from Birnin-N’Konni to Sokoto. He explains

that, having joined a truck carrying vegetable oil to drop him at Illela, on his arrival at Birnin-N’Konni customs post, the driver stopped and pays the duty for his goods. Surprisingly, before the Customs Officials of Birnin-N’Konni, the driver took an illegal bush path to Illela. This he did without any resistance from the security officials. As they head towards the Illela security post,, the smugglers’ agent escorting the goods informed them that the road was “cleared”. But they got closer, a security official (who cannot be identified) tried to stop them but he was told that his boss was “settled”. The truck arrived at Illela successfully. This suggests that the security operatives of both sides contribute and connive with smugglers for the success of smuggling in the area.

Moreover, smugglers on the Nigerian part take a bold step not to pay duties or connive with security agents in order to smuggle goods into the country. The smugglers are not ignorant of the terrain; they knew quite very well that the custom office in the border area is ill equipped. They, therefore, take such advantage using available information from their agents, to clandestinely cross the border (Toyon, interview 2009). Aliyu (interview, 2009) points out that such mis-behaviour is carried out mostly to Nigerian securities personnel, mostly by Nigerians. In Birnin-N’Konni borderland, he adds, the smugglers, whatever route they take, in or out of the borderland, legal or illegal, they turn back to the Niger custom officials to pay their duties. This is due to the fear of harsh penalty associated with the Niger border security officials. The Nigerian security personnel are regarded as far more

lenient and open than their counterparts in Niger Republic (Jip, 1996; 117-118 Anonymous, 2009). Smuggled goods in the area include; used cars (mostly coming from Cotonou), foreign rice, milk, vegetable oil, used clothes, cigarettes, dates, etc.

Apart from corruption on the part of the Nigerian border securities as stated above, blame can also be directed to the Nigerian government. As at May 29, 2009, there were only 22 customs staff for the whole border area, of which one-third are women. There was also one patrol vehicle for the whole border with virtually no communication equipment. It can, therefore, be deduced that, the shortage of work force and equipment has limited the activities of customs officials and increased the illegal activities across the border area. It also affects negatively the amount of revenue generated by the Nigerian state. This is, however, not the same in Niger. The customs and other security officials in Birnin-N'Konni do not recognize anything called smuggled, going into Nigeria as long as custom duty is collected for the goods (Jip, 1996). This does not allow for cooperation between the two states.

Smugglers in this area are also loved since the public and community leaders helped in covering their illegal activities (especially of Illela). Jip (1996) explains how a Nigerian immigration officer was badly beaten and another security officer killed on different occasions. The reason was that, the first chased smugglers into Illela town, while the second killed a smuggler near Araba village. Aliyu (2009) observes that, he once saw a custom vehicle along the bush route chasing smugglers from Illela heading to Birnin-

N'Konni. However, when the smugglers observed that the custom vehicle was moving towards them, they turned back and returned to take a hide in Illela town. The custom vehicle chased them but later retreated when the smugglers entered Illela town. The fact is that the smugglers have a very strong support of the two communities and to an extent hate the activities of the custom officials. The public, therefore, play a significant role in promoting illegal activities along the two borderlands by harbouring smugglers and preventing the security officials from carrying out their duties.

The Implications of Informal Cross-Border Economic Activities between Illela and Birnin-N'konni Borderlands on Nigeria and Niger Republic

Positive Implications

Informal cross-border activities between Illela and Konni borderlands have both positive and negative implications on their mother states. To begin with the positive, it allows for social and economic development of the border areas. Informal cross-border activities do not only improve the social interaction between the borderland communities, it supports the border economy of both states. Illela and Birnin-N'Konni are now regarded as the strong economic base of Sokoto and Tahoua states of Nigeria and Niger Republic respectively. Muhammad (May, 2009) reports that Illela local government as of 2009 generate about two hundred thousand naira (200,000) every week from weekly market activities.

Sokoto state government, in an attempt to improve the economy of the area, has set to establish a well-structured international market in Illela that will facilitate further economic activities on the Nigerian part (Illela LEEDS, 2008). In addition to this, cross-border activities in the area have also contributed to cultural exchange and interaction. On Illela market day, peoples from Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Mali, and Burkina Faso among others, attend to conduct their business activities. It therefore, creates an avenue for improving the already co-existing relationship between Nigeria and Niger. It also provides for a smooth path towards a peaceful regional integration of West African states in the face of ECOWAS.

Economic activities in the area also helps in alleviating poverty between members of the two communities due to the increasing level of economic activities in the area that provides employment opportunities through buying, selling of goods and provision of services. For instance, the increasing level of commercial activities in the area has attracted many commercial institutions like banks and other form of informal currency exchange network across West Africa, which not only provides security to the traders of the area but also ensure the smooth convertibility of other foreign currencies which are not easily obtained in commercial banks. The members of both communities are also increasingly becoming engaged in distance trading to Cotonou, Mali, Togo and other West African countries to purchase goods (such as kolanut, foreign rice, manufactured goods, etc.) which fetch them profit. The

consequence of these on both states is that, they reduce the burden of their governments in creating jobs. It also increases the revenue capacity of both governments.

It could also be argued that, informal cross-border activities between the two borderlands have in no small measure reduced rural-urban migration. Illela displays a typical example. The settlement of many Nigerians from northern and southern part and from other countries, to conduct their activities, is a typical example that informal cross-border activities have the capacity to reduce urban congestion and improve rural living.

Negative Implications

Apart from the positive implications mentioned above, informal cross-border activities between Illela and Birnin-N'Konni also have their own negative implications on both countries. First, cross-border activities between the two areas have contributed in no small measure in undermining of the Nigerian productive sectors, especially agriculture and industry. The inflows of subsidized foreign agricultural and industrial commodities (like foreign rice, evaporated milk, clothes, etc.,) through clandestine activities have contributed towards the underdevelopment of Nigerian agricultural and industrial sector. Nigerian state also loose so much of its revenue to such informal activities (Usman, 2004; Meagher, 2008) since import tax is usually evaded. It, therefore, contributed towards the growth of dependency and underdevelopment of the Nigerian state.

Usman (2004) adds that, it is countries like Niger and Benin Republics that benefit

most from such activities. This is because their economies are largely dependent on the import tax received from goods crossing their borders. The Nigerien authority, for instance, does not recognize anything called smuggling in so long as duty is paid for goods and such goods do not affect its own security (Jip, 1996). Infact, goods in commercial quantity from other parts of West Africa (such as foreign rice, vegetable oil, milk, etc.,) passing through Niger Republic to Nigeria are usually escorted and ensured they cross the Nigerian border before the Nigerien security officials turned back (Ubandawaki, 2009). This affirms stance of Meagher (2008) that informal cross-border activities in the area has failed to create an efficient framework for regional trade which would give the two states the ability to enjoy the trade of both their agricultural and industrial produce.

Nigeria has the largest economy, population and informal cross-border network in West Africa (Meagher, 2008). Despite that, instead of the country to be a key beneficiary to informal economic activities, such activities have rather contributed towards the devaluation of Nigerian currency and the risen cost of imported goods. The reason informing this is that, unlike other many other currencies like the US dollars, Euro, the British or Canadian pounds, Yen, etc., which are easily convertible in the international market, the Nigerian Naira depends largely on the US dollars and CFA Francs for its cross-border trade (Meagher, 2008). The high demand of these currencies to buy foreign goods has led to the drastic fall of Nigerian currency and the rise in US

dollars and CFA francs. Important to note is that, the value of these currencies across the borders depends largely on their level of demand by Nigerian traders. If the demand is low, the value of such currencies fall, vis-à-vis when demand is high (Meagher, 2008; Sani, 2010). In addition, the rise in the value of these currencies against the Nigerian naira automatically explains the rise in the value of imported goods into the country. Informal economic activities in the area therefore promotes Nigeria's over dependence on foreign currency which further questions the economic strength of Nigeria in the eyes of her neighbours and the region at large.

The informal activities across Illela-Birnin-N'Konni borderlands promotes corruption and rent seeking activities on the part of state officials (Meagher, 2008; 171) due to its underground practices. This study, as established in Jip, (1996); Arzika. M (2007) and Idris (2008) affirmed the existence of corrupt practices on the part of the Nigerian security officials along Nigeria-Niger border. Such character undermines the respect for rule of law in the area. It also "encourages policy distortion and the arbitrary use of state powers while weakening incentives for productive investment" (Meagher, 2008; 171).

Conclusion

This study determined the nature and dynamics of informal cross-border socio-economic activities between Illela and Birnin-N'Konni borderland communities of Nigeria and Niger Republic. In the

preceding parts of the study, vital issues relating to social and economic activities between the two communities have been highlighted. The most important issue that emerged out of this study is that, an economic activity is an important factor pushing informal cross-border activities in the area. Such activities provide employment opportunities to the teeming population of both communities, which further improve their social well-being. Although cross-border illegal activities in the area posed a threat to the national economy and security of both states, it is carried out at the neglect of the authorities of both sides and could be controlled if all necessary security mechanisms are put in place.

On the whole, it can be drawn that despite the above stated problems, informal cross-border economic activities between Illela-Birnin-N'Konni borderlands help in promoting social and economic interdependence between the people of Nigeria and Niger and the West African region which further support ECOWAS regional integration process. It also provide a shift in the popular notion that international relations is a relation between state governments, this study indicated that people of two states can serve as a strong and effective instrument in such relations. Finally, the study confirms that the relations between Nigeria and Niger Republic hold a brighter future.

Recommendations

To improve social and economic activities in the area, Nigeria and Niger republic should establish dry ports in their border areas. The governments should encourage companies, the business class, interesting individuals and organizations to invest in the area. Concentration should, however, be on the types of goods smuggled into the country in order to checkmate smuggling activities in the area. Likewise, the prices of goods in the port should be encouraged to be relatively lower. Such decision has the capacity to discourage smugglers since the super profit generated in smuggling is curtailed.

Since Illela market attracts people from West African region, the Nigerian chamber of commerce should look into the possibility of organising periodic trade fair in the area. Both governments should also look into the possibilities of establishing local industries. These will improve the economy of the area. The gesture will also provide job opportunities for the teeming youths of the area and beyond.

Nigerian government should mount surveillance cameras with internet protocols (I.P) at the border area. This will ensure effective monitoring of border activities at the state, zonal and national headquarters in Sokoto and Abuja. This will check the excesses of the security operatives in the process of carrying out their duties. Also important is the training and re-training of security agents on the modern techniques of border administration. Remuneration and promotion for hardworking officers will further enhance their performance.

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Appendix

Interview List

S/n	Name of interviewee	Approx. Age	Position Occupied	Place of interview	Date of interview
1.	Abdullahi Garba	38	Illela youth leader	Illela town	July 30, 2009
2.	Abubakar Ibrahim	30	Immigration staff	Sokoto	August.9,2009
3.	Bello Aliyu	27	Immigration staff	Sokoto	Sept. 17,2009
4.	Dauda Ladan Argungu	50	Asst. Controller of immigration in charge of Illela post	Illela border post	July 29,2009
5.	Garba Abdullahi Ubandawaki	75	Illela district head	Illela town	July 29, 2009
6.	Garba Buba Illela	43	Farmer	Illela town	July 30, 2009
7.	Garba Kabo	39	Ex-Illela youth leader	Illela town	July 30, 2009
8.	Harouna Mammne Bako	40	Director regional,Amfani Radio	Konni town	July 30, 2009
9.	Ishaya Musa	41	Police officer	Illela border post	July 29 and 30, 2009
10.	Junaidu Abdullahi	29	Civil servant	Sokoto	August2,2009
11.	Kasimu Audu	42	Vice-chairman kabu-kabu, Konni	Konni town	July 29, 2009
12.	Muhammad Sani	39	Driver	Konni town	July 29 2009
13.	Muhammadu Nuhu	43	Info. Officer, Illela L/govt.	Illela local government	July,29 and 30 2009
14.	Muhammd Usmanu	43	Driver	Sokoto	August. 9, 2009
15.	Musa Dan Maliki	40	Secretary, Illela petrol dealers' association.	Illela town	July 30, 2009

16.	Sani Hassan Mai Kasset	48	V/Chairman, Konni traders	Konni town	July 30, 2009
17.	Tankou Ahmadou Rufai	53	Secretary, Konni local government	Konni L/govt. secretariat	July 30, 2009
18.	Tonyon, D.M	50	Chief Superintendent of Customs in charge of the Post	Illela border post	July 29, 2009
19	Anonymous	27	Security official	Sokoto	Sept. 17, 2009
20	Shehu, A.	52	Trader	Old market Sokoto	November 20, 2009
21	Shehu, Mukhtar	46	Chief Medical Director, Daboe Clinic, Illela	Illela town	April 5, 2010
22	Sani, Lawali	27	Trader	Old market Sokoto	November 20, 2009
23	Yusuf Aliyu-Koko	38	Car dealer	Sokoto	March, 14 2010