Trans-Border Crime and its Implications on Nigeria’s National Security and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the relatively secured nations in West African sub-region. In recent times, the threats of trans-border crimes, manifesting in the form of drug and human trafficking (using the sub region as a transit point), money laundering, small arms and light weapons smuggling, illegal oil bunkering, serial bombing, hostage taking, armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, trans-national organised criminality and jihadist activities especially the Boko Haram insurgency, etc have been particularly cited. The paper examines the implications of trans-border criminal activities on Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development. The paper in addition to other issues, takes a look at the concept of trans-border crime, national security and sustainable development. This paper relies on secondary sources of data. The paper thus, concludes that Nigeria can achieve sustainable development only through effective border security management and policing. It was recommended among others that: there is need for paradigm shift from manual to e-border control system in order to
tackle terrorism and other trans-border criminal activities in Nigeria; security personnel should be trained and re-trained on the modern trends in migration and border management; federal government should include Security Management courses in school curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Trans-Border Crime, National Security and Sustainable Development

Introduction
Nigeria as the giant of Africa and West Africa’s regional super power, continues to face serious national security challenges due to cross-border or trans-border criminal activities. Nigeria could be said to be much more vulnerable to the security threats than any country in West African Sub-Region. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria’s internal security has been threatened by cross-border crimes such as trafficking in arms, persons, drugs; armed banditry, gun-running, vehicle theft, smuggling, touting and duping, illegal or silent migration (i.e. unnoticed or undocumented movements across borders), illegal lumbering, bunkering of petroleum products, and of course the transhumance activities of cattle rearers who move their herds across national borders regardless of any regulations. Others are terrorism, expatriates hostage taking, expatriate quota abuse, violation of immigration laws, document frauds, and financial crimes (Babatunde, 2009).

Nigeria is a diverse and a vast country covering 923,768 square kilometres with more than 36,450 kilometres of land and maritime borders, and shares land borders with four countries namely, Benin Republic in the West, Chad and Niger in the North, and Cameroon in the East. It shares international water Lake Chad in the North with Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and a maritime border coastline in the Gulf of Guinea or Atlantic Ocean. Along the Western border, Nigeria has 770 kilometres of shared land border with the Republic of Benin, in the North, around 1,500 kilometres with Niger and 90 kilometres with Chad and in the West, 1,700kilometres with Cameroon. Along the Southern coastline it also
shares 853 kilometres of maritime border with the Atlantic Ocean known as the Gulf of Guinea. All totaling outstretch of about 4910 km of borders (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009; Nte, 2011; Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014).

Despite the effort of cross-border security agencies like the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), etc, Nigeria borders have been described as porous allowing all sorts of cross-border or trans-border criminal activities such as human trafficking, smuggling, drug trafficking, arm robbery, money laundry and illicit arms trafficking resulting to proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons. For example, out of the 640 million small arms circulating globally, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa, alone (Abdulkareem, 2012 and Adetula, 2015).

The security situation in Nigeria expectedly has attracted much attention in view of its status and the role of the country as a regional power. Security of Nigeria is threaten by trans-national organised criminality and jihadist activities especially the Boko Haram insurgency. Other threats include the illegal spread of small arms and light weapons, illegal drug trade, human trafficking and maritime piracy, etc. Against this foregoing background, the main aim of this paper is to examine trans-border crime and its impact on Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development, with a view of providing suggestions on how trans-border crimes could be addressed.

**Conceptual clarification**

For better appreciation of the issues raised in this paper, it is imperative that the following concepts are initially clarified:

**a) Trans-Border Crime**

According to Ering (2011), the task of defining or describing “trans-border crime” would not be an easy one, because many elements have been recognized as constituting it. However, “trans-border crime” represents a number of illegal and notorious activities carried out by individuals and groups across national and international borders, either, for financial or economic benefits and also socio-political and religious considerations. It is a set of criminal acts whose perpetrators and repercussions go beyond territorial borders (Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014). These acts would include human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons,
terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, illicit trafficking in diamonds, corruption, and business fraud, to mention but a few.

Trans-border crime or trans-national crime is defined as acts which violate the laws of more than one country (Passas, 2003). The later definition which suits the purpose of this paper simply stated that:

Trans-border crimes are the crimes that have actual or potential effect across national borders and the crimes that are intra-state but offend fundamental values of the international community. The term is commonly used in the law enforcement and academic communities. (United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organised Crime, 2000:2).

Trans-border crimes pose threats to the security and stability of West African nations. The nature of cross-border crimes in West Africa Sub-region has changed rapidly over recent years through the use of technology, the loosing of travel restrictions and through criminal diversification which has drastically increased the threat to international peace and security (Wakili, 2014; Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014). This is not unconnected with the fact that the West Africa is also seeing an increase in terrorism especially in the Sahel region. Cases include deadly terrorist attacks in Mali and here in Nigeria, where the Boko Haram insurgency through which a lot of deaths have been recorded.

b) National Security

The concept of national security would be best understood by first presenting the concept of security. In the view of Adeola and Oluyemi (2012) security refers to “the situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions (p.3)”. It is the existence of conditions within which people in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any threat to their lives or properties. It embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and the resources of individuals, groups, business and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrences (Dambazau, 2007). According to Igbuzor (2011) Security demand safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption.

Ani (2010) argues that the term ‘national security’ came into use in the twentieth century, particularly after the World War II. Edem (2010) conceptualized national security as the ability of the Nigerian State to successfully pursue her
national interest, being able to protect the values of the state and being able to maintain the same. According to Dambazau (2007) security of the state in the traditional sense meant the protection of the state, its boundaries, people, institutions, and values, from external attack. National security is therefore a collection of plans, actions and institutions built by a state in order to protect themselves from both internal and external attack. It is the act of promoting the core values of a state that would enhance the protection of lives and properties of the citizenry (Okene, 2010).

National security is seen in terms of a nation’s military capabilities or the struggle to overcome internal and external aggression. A nation is secured once it is free from military threats or political coercion (Onimisi, 2014). According to Adebakin and Raimi (2012) national security covers critical dimensions, viz: Economic security, Political security, Food security, Health security, Environmental security, Personal security and Community security. However, nation like Nigeria has its own peculiar security threat determined by the aforementioned dimensions. Thus, this article is concern with the threats to Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development as caused by the trans-border criminal activities.

From the forgoing definitions, we can deduce that the main essence of national security is the protection of the national interest /value of a state and upholding what the state believes to be valuable to it and its people. Some issues of national value can be found in the norm of a country i.e. its Constitution, from actions of government or other state policies that are manifest from its relationship and interaction with other states.

c) Sustainable Development

Ogege (2013) highlights that credit for originating the "sustainable development" concept is generally given to the 1987 report of World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), popularly referred to as the Brundtland Commission. Thus, the Commission conceptualized sustainable development as “the kind of development that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p.6)”.

Sustainable development is a two-way relationship between development and environment. Another conceptualized consideration that has contextual relevance to this paper is the one of Igbuzor (2011) which added “human” to sustainable development. According to him, sustainable human development is
centred on the variables and elements of human development. Sustainable human development is nothing but a dynamic framework that meaningfully provides people with job options, eliminates poverty and ensures equitable distribution of wealth in a society. The reasoning in sustainable development is to ensure that our environment is safe for human habitation and to check the adverse effect of emerging environmental problems (Adebakin and Raimi, 2012). In order to achieve the concept of sustainable development, the Nigerian National Policy on the Environment prescribes the following measure among others; ‘secure a quality of environment adequate for good health and well-being’. Thus, it is the relationship between trans-border crimes and sustainable development that constitute the main thrust of this paper.

**Tran-Border Crimes in West African Sub-region and its Implications on Nigeria’s National Security and Sustainable Development**
Available data on cross-border crimes in West African Sub-region indicate that there are many implications of trans-border crimes on Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development. Some of which are discussed below:

**Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)**
The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often one of the major security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to Nigeria’s national security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy (Nte, 2011 and Adetula, 2008). As reported by Stohl and Tuttle (2009); Nte (2011) and Abdulkareem (2012), the majority of these Small Arms and Light Weapons, about 59% are in the hands of civilians, 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8 % by police and 0.2% by armed groups. They further stated that between 1999 and 2003, there were over 30 communal clashes, sectarian violence and ethno-religious conflicts with each claiming hundreds of lives and properties, and internal displacement of women and children in Nigeria.
The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes and armed robbery have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians, an average of 1000 people per year since 1999. The majority of casualties about 66% in Kano riot of 2004
were SALW victims sustaining permanent disabilities. Injuries due to SALW have increased as much as ten-fold in urban Nigeria because most homicides are committed using SALW (John, Mohammed, Pinto and Nkanta, 2007; Nte, 2011). The problems of armed violence and proliferation of SALW are worsened by the inability of the police to reduce violent crime, ensure law and order and provide adequate security to the populace. None of the security agent currently possesses the training, resources or personnel to perform their duties effectively due to lengthy and porous nature of Nigerian borders (Alli, 2012). Nte (2011) posits that there is a direct link between the acquisition of weapons like SALW and escalation of conflicts into a full-blown war. On his part, Musah (1999) as cited in Hamidu and Nuhu (2015) states:

The truth is that as long as the Nigerian borders remain porous and inefficiently manned by reasonable security personnel, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), pipelines will remain open and the prospect for efficient border patrol and management, and promotion of human rights will be greatly undermined. Cross border crimes around Nigeria had been in existence since the ‘60s. Initially it has been manifested in the form of individual or group traders and business men and women smuggling goods across the borders, as well as transnational syndicates who engage in the trafficking of drugs, SALW, human beings, among other things as means of livelihood. (p.4)

Corroborating with the above statement, the then Nigerian information minister and supervising minister of defence, Mr. Labaran Maku decried the porosity of the nation’s borders with her neighbours and concord that the inflows of light arms, weapons miscreants through the porous Nigeria/Cameroun border is alarming (Taiwo, 2013).

**Terrorism, Insurgency and Violent Extremism Activities**

Nationals, mainly from countries in the Sahel and Western Sahara, have been linked with religious uprising in Nigeria. The exportation of religious extremism into Nigeria adds another dimension to the challenge of insecurity in the country. Imported religious values and orientations have, at different times, challenged the secular status of the Nigerian state. In Nigeria, the notion that
immigrants contribute to religious conflicts has gained ground especially in official circles. They received significant public attention in the 1980s with incidents of Maitatsine religious disturbance in Kano, Maiduguri and Kaduna (Ering, 2011; Alli, 2012; Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014).

Nigeria’s Response to Transnational Organised Crime and Jihadist Activities in West Africa date with incredible intensity. It is possible that the involvement of immigrants in internal conflicts in Nigeria may have been exaggerated. However, the findings of the various tribunals set up by the government to investigate the remote causes of such uprisings indicated that there were traces of external influence and the involvement of immigrants from neighbouring countries. Similarly, it was recently reported in the media that some members of the Boko Haram sect and other jihadist groups in the Sahel and North Africa received both Islamic and military training from Mauritania, including how to make bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Ogege, 2013; Wakili, 2014 and Adetula, 2015).

The activities of the Boko Haram popularly known as Jama’atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad) have continued to attract global concern and responses. Of course these moves provoked serious concerns and reactions from the Nigerian government and other governments across West and Central Africa that felt threatened by the strikes posed by Boko Haram insurgency which by 2013 has resulted in more than 13,000 deaths (Adetula, 2015). The activities of Boko Haram obviously constitute serious threat to human security, economic development, national security and political stability in Nigeria. The impact of the insurgency is being felt in all aspects of Nigeria’s existence including its defence, security and sustainable development.

As aptly captured from Adetelu (2015), the Boko Haram insurgency has grown from a ‘local’ affair into a complex transnational terrorist group whose destabilizing operations have spread beyond Nigeria to some countries in West and Central Africa. Today, Boko Haram is one of the three most dreaded terrorist organisations in the world. Notwithstanding, Nigeria’s Response to Transnational Organised Crime and Jihadist Activities in West Africa the extent of the links between Boko Haram and other international terrorist groups is not quite clear. Hamidu and Nuhu (2015), observed that the militant movement Boko Haram, which has its roots in Nigeria, poses a potential danger to Nigeria’s neighbours should it influence spread across the Nigerian borders.
The risks presented by this militant group are amplified primarily through the prevalence of porous borders in the West African Sub Region. Countries like Niger, Chad and Cameroun Republics are currently experiencing terrorist activities largely because they share common border with Nigeria; the group’s activities in neighbouring countries such as training recruits, planning and execution of planned strategies are escalating due to porosity of the borders and they are also using the neighbouring states as safe havens.

**Human and Drug Trafficking**

Available data on cross-border crimes in West Africa such as human trafficking, drug trafficking show that transnational social networks can have serious negative effects on national security. The phenomenon of human trafficking, particularly in West Africa, has in recent years assumed alarming proportions and hence receives unprecedented global attention. Although there is a lack of accurate data, it is reported that in West and Central Africa about 200,000 children are trafficked annually, while in West Africa alone, an estimated 35,000 women and children are trafficked every year for commercial sexual exploitation (Mashi, 2008). Nigeria, the largest and most populous country (182 million) in Sub-Saharan African occupies a central position as a country of origin, transit and destination for the crime of human trafficking (Olagbe and Ikpeme, 2015).

Clarifying the issue of trafficking further, (Hamidu and Nuhu, 2015) stated that, in a country where legitimate economic opportunities were far less lucrative, criminal activities such as drug trafficking, child and women trafficking, female prostitution and child slavery, fraudulent business transactions (otherwise known as ‘419’) presented enormous temptation. There has been an upsurge in the number of Nigerians emigrating abroad since the beginning of the 1980’s. Today there is a high concentration of Nigerian nationals in other countries including those of West Africa. Immigration fraud, business fraud and illegal drug trade are common criminal activities by some Nigerian nationals in other countries. In recent times, it has been reported that the activities of Nigerian ‘drug pushers’ have extended beyond Europe to include some African countries. In Chad and Equatorial Guinea, arrests were made of some Nigerians alleged to be dealing in drugs. Child trafficking in Benin and Nigeria is one dominant form of increasingly sophisticated regional trend in cross-border crime. Traffickers operate an international network that covers most of West and Central Africa.
and several European cities. Children 'seized' or 'captured' from source countries notably Benin and Togo are brought to Nigeria under inhuman conditions. Traffickers are also active in Burkina Faso and Mali, Nigeria's Response to Transnational Organised Crime and Jihadist Activities in West Africa where children are recruited and taken to Cote d’Ivoire to work in cocoa farms. In Nigeria 'slave children' from source countries are used as child labourers on construction sites to dig granite, crush gravel or work in cocoa farms in different parts of southwestern Nigeria (Mashi, 2008; Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014). There is another dimension of the trafficking in persons, which is equally disturbing. This refers to the activities of human traffickers in West Africa that specialize in obtaining women and sending them to Europe to work as prostitutes through some West and North African countries. Nigeria harbours a concentration of well established networks of middle men and racketeers who forge passports and visas and transport or assist the human traffickers and their victims in their journey to Europe through some West and North African countries. Human trafficking, cross-border banditry and other cross-border crimes seem to be on the increase all over West Africa and pose a serious threat to Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development.

**Globalization Issues**

The current wave of globalization has generated other forms of violence that are not strictly in the form of conventional warfare but are not any less destructive and destabilizing. Globalization generally has turned transnational criminals into visionaries. Transnational criminal organizations now operate with the aid of complex and sophisticated organizational structures taking advantage of modern information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their efficiency, thereby making them more competitive. Although Africa is still lagging behind other regions in the area of ICT, it has however recorded high increase in transnational criminal activities which include trafficking in persons (slaves, child labor, and prostitutes), narcotics, and small arms (Ering, 2011; Adebakin and Raimi, 2012).

Globalization, has security implications to Nigeria most dangerously, a variety of threats have become global in scope and more serious in their effects as a result of the spread of knowledge, the dispersion of advanced technologies and movement of people (Esiemokhai, 2010). These developments, combined with expanding global economic interactions, contribute to some of these problems
and resentments that lie at the root of these security threats in Nigeria. Onimisi (2014) further noted that globalization and increased technology has led to the decline of our national security. For instance, the Nigeria-Benin border which is located in the south-western Nigeria is particularly notorious for all sorts of illegal trans-border activities. The emerging scenarios of globalization have resulted to trans-national threats which are irrespective of national border and which comprise of a list of different risk factors that seem unending spanning from different trans-national crimes like terrorism, human and drug trafficking, money laundering etc, to widespread environmental degradation, diseases, climate change and even political policies which might threaten our nation’s sovereignty (Nte, 2011).

Davis (2003) noted that the increase in arms proliferation, cyber crime, ethnic violence, transnational crimes during trafficking are occurred by globalization. Simplifies the security implication of globalism, Onimisi (2014) opined that globalization as an economic activity now dominates international relations, replacing war as the driving force behind both the state and world politics. In either view, the key point of globalization is that much of this activity and its consequences transcend the territorial framing of the state.

**Oil Theft, Piracy and Maritime Insecurity**

Oil theft with the complicity of transnational actors threatens Nigeria's national security and economic interests. The volume of theft of Nigerian oil, both on land and on the sea, is estimated to be 100,000 barrels per day during the first quarter of 2013 (Katsouris, 2013 cited in Adetula, 2015:11). Closely related to the problem of oil theft is the challenge of maritime piracy and insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Piracy activities in the Gulf of Guinea centre mostly on theft of crude oil, which is produced mainly in the Niger Delta. Oil smuggling is quite rampant in the Niger Delta which is the main source for the fast growing black market for fuel in West Africa (UNODC, 2013). Also, there has been instances of attacks and robbery of fishing trawlers. In West Africa, “parallel” economic activities notably in the form of sale of mineral resources, petroleum products, and re-exported products continue to grow and expand. Most of the attacks take place within Nigerian waters, with Benin and Togo also severely affected and other attacks throughout the region (Adetula, 2015). International Marine Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre lists 30 reported Nigeria’s Response to Transnational Organised Crime and Jihadist Activities in West Africa incidents
during 2013 related to Nigeria (up until 22 October). This challenge expectedly is attracting international concerns. The European Union currently gets 13% of its oil and 6% of its gas through resources from the Gulf of Guinea. The Gulf is also an important transit area for shipping, as well as an important fishing ground (Sunday and Okechukwu, 2014).

**Electoral Malpractices**

Elections and electoral activities could easily be jeopardised in Nigeria by Nigerian citizens and nationals of neighbouring nations and vice versa, in view of the border proximities and its poor management. Non-Nigerians could and do take advantage of the vast and complex borders, marital affinity and other commercial attractions to visit Nigeria, get registered and cast their votes during elections. Some of such alien do or could be claiming dual citizenship, while that might not be the actual case. Unscrupulous politicians could or do recruit and use such categories of people to undermine credible elections in the nation. Genuine Nigerians could as well engaged in electoral malpractices or disrupt elections and cross over to any of the neighbouring nations unhindered.

Abubakar (2013) opined that in Nigeria today, politics is militarized and violence is used as an electoral tool, leading to the inculcation of a culture of violence in the society. Armed groups are not a new phenomenon; however, today’s armed groups are better armed, better trained and increasingly sophisticated in their actions. Armed violence is about access to resources, whether through committing crimes, playing on communal tensions, stealing or winning elections. Similarly, there is the fear of outbreak of incessant political violence and clashes between and among different political parties and aspirants’ supporters due to the kinds of armed thugs used by politician today as result of the proliferation of arms in the country. Some pundits are of the view that some politicians and top government officials are aiding the proliferation and importation of arms and ammunition for political reasons (Park, 2006). Unfortunately also, many Nigerians are de-enfranchised due to the complex nature of the Nigerian borders with her neighbours because of the logistics and risk involved. Fake electoral materials could as well be produced elsewhere and smuggled into the nation due to the porosity of the border regime (Hamidu and Nuhu, 2015).

Having critically examined the implications or effects of trans-border criminal activities in West-African Sub-region on Nigeria’s national security and
sustainable development, the questions border and international security experts are asking are, where are the customs; immigration and other security operatives recruited, trained and deployed to man these border posts? Are the syndicates’ ‘spirits’ that the security personnel cannot see and apprehend them? Are the Nigerian authorities ignorant of the challenges pose by porous boundary security and management in the land?

**Conclusion**
Trans-border crime is a serious danger to national security, threat to peace, social harmony, political stability, good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria. On these grounds, all the dimensions and sources of this crime must be forcefully combated. This can only be achieved through appropriate security, legal, political, economic, social and cultural strategies. Thus, in the light of the foregoing, it concludes that the spate of trans-border criminal activities in West African Sub-region undermines Nigeria’s national security and sustainable development.

**Recommendations**
From the foregoing analysis, it is evident that with her enormous resources, sustainable development in Nigeria remains elusive due to the menace of trans-border criminal activities and general insecurity. Against this backdrop, the paper puts forward the following recommendations:

i. For effective border security in Nigeria, training and retraining of security personnel should be intensified to acquaint them with modern trends in migration and border management.

ii. There is need for paradigm shift from manual to digital (e-border) control mechanism in order to tackle terrorism and other trans-border criminal activities in Nigeria.

iii. Federal government should include Security Management in school curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria. This will enable the Nigerian youths to appreciate the importance of security in a secular state like Nigeria.

iv. There is need for mass public enlightenment on the dangers of trans-border crimes, irregular migration and improper conduct of emigrants.
v. Regional and sub-regional organizations like ECOWAS should enforce existing international laws, treaties and conventions against defaulters whenever they arrested to serve as deterrence to others.

vi. Government should provide modern facilities such as CCTV cameras and sensors in all of its borders that can effectively detect movement of criminal activities such as terrorism and illegal importations of arms in the country.

vii. Finally, there is need for the Nigeria government to develop certain aspects of life such as infrastructure, economic, social, environmental and human needs in order for security in Nigeria as well as her borders to be adequately secured.

References


