

# **Managing Tight Security and Smuggling Free Trade at Nigerian International Borders: Opinions of Community Residents and Law Enforcement Officers at Seme and Idiroko Borders in Nigeria**

**Matthias Olufemi Dada OJO<sup>1</sup> & Asamu, Festus Femi (PhD)<sup>2</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

*With fifteen law enforcement officers and thirty – six community residents, sampled from Seme and Idi – Iroko communities, this study investigated the opinions of the law enforcement officers and community residents on what should be done to ensure tight security and smuggling free trade around Nigerian borders. The study implemented survey design and qualitative methods (Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interviews) were carried out to gather data and information. Purposive sampling was used to select the study areas while convenience sampling and simple random sampling were used to select the community residents and law enforcement officers respectively. The study discovered that both law enforcement officers and community residents were of the opinion that there are things to be done by government, the customs officers and the entire public to ensure tight security and smuggling free trade in Nigeria as explained in this study. Therefore, solving the problems of border insecurity and smuggling around the Nigeria borders is a joint effort of the government, the law enforcement officers and the community people. The suggestions made by the research participants are recommended for implementation.*

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, Crawford University of the Apostolic Faith Mission

Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria., E-mail: [matthiasolufemiojopublications@gmail.com](mailto:matthiasolufemiojopublications@gmail.com); [femfemtv@gmail.com](mailto:femfemtv@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology, Landmark University, Omuaran, Kwara State, Nigeria

**Keyword:** Security; Smuggling; Border; Community Residents and Law Enforcement Officers

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The problem of insecurity and mass smuggling activities around the Nigeria borders cannot be underrated in the studies of economic and political implications of such to Nigeria as a nation. The problem of unemployment in Nigeria has led to youths engaging in activities which serve as survival strategies for them, but which go against the norms of Nigerian society. Hence, Youths are associated with social problems of violence (Yonas et al 2005); homelessness (Green et al 2003; Roinn and Heanai, 2001), gang (Ball and Curry, 1995; Home Government, 2011) and crime (Bessant, 1999; Pelser, 2008; Ashford, 2007; Adamson 2003. Hine and Williams 2007 and Holly Richter – White 2003). This study, therefore, lays emphasis on what can be done to ensure tight security at the Nigeria borders and what should be done to encourage smuggling free trade around borders; Nigerian youth involvement in smuggling activities around the Nigerian borders; which has led to insecurity and a lot of illegal business activities, in their efforts to survive the tensed economic situations in Nigeria.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study, survey design was adopted. It involved the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions about themselves or others. (Schutt, 2004). Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed to ensure proper validity and reliability.

### **THE STUDY AREAS**

This research work cut across two states in Nigeria. The study area was Badagry/Seme in Lagos State of Nigeria. The transportation corridor that was examined in this area was Badagry/Seme transportation corridor.

Secondly, Idiroko area of Ogun State of Nigeria was another study area. The chosen transportation corridor for this area was Owode- Idi-Iroko which links to Sango-Otta.

### **THE STUDY POPULATION**

### **The Community People**

The community people comprised the indigenes and non indigenes living in towns/villages along the Badagry-Seme and Owode-Idiroko borders and the adjacent towns /villages within the territories of Benin Republic. They were adults (male/female) from different ethnic groups who have resided in the community at least three years prior to the research.

### **The Law Enforcement Officers**

The Law Enforcement Agencies comprised the officials of the Nigeria Customs Services and the National Drugs and Law Enforcement Agency. These two Law Enforcement Agencies have their duty posts along Badagry-Seme border in Lagos and along Owode-Idiroko border in Ogun State.

## **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLING SIZE**

### **Seme and Idiroko Borders**

Seme and Idi-Iroko borders are the most popular borders in Nigeria where trans-border criminal activities are being carried out en-mass. Both were purposely selected because they served the interest of this research work. Purposive sampling used the judgment of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects sampling units based on his/her judgment of what units will facilitate an investigation (Neuman, 2003; Adler and Clark, 1999).

### **Border Dwellers (Community People)**

Thirty-six (36) people were sampled among the border dwellers, living in towns/villages along the borders in Badagry/Seme community areas and Owode/Idi-Iroko community areas and the adjacent towns/villages within the Benin Republic. A convenience sampling technique was used. A convenience sampling (sometimes called an available subject sample) is a group of elements (often people) that are readily accessible to and therefore convenient for the researcher (Adler and Clark)

### **Law Enforcement Officers**

Being available subjects, simple random sampling was used in the selection of the law enforcement officials that received and filled the questionnaires administered. Fifteen (15) officers were randomly selected from both of the Nigeria Customs Service and National Drug and Law Enforcement Agency at Badagry/Seme border in Lagos State and at Owode/ Idi-Iroko border in Ogun State. Fifteen officers were picked from the lists obtained through simple random sampling. No replacement was made (Adler and Clark, 1999).

### **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Primary data were collected and collated for this research work. The primary data were collected with the use of Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview.

#### **Focus Group Discussions**

Focus Group Discussions were also conducted to gather information and data for this study. Focus Group Discussions were guided discussions among potential respondents. They were unstructured group interviews in which the focus group leader actively encouraged discussions among participants on the topic of interest. The Focus groups were used to collect qualitative data, using open-ended questions posed by the researcher who acted as group leader (Schutt, 2004). Three (3) Focus Group Discussions were conducted in the process of gathering qualitative data for this work among the Nigeria customs officials. Two(2) were conducted at Seme/Badagry transportation corridor at two different sessions with six(6) officers in attendant at first sitting and five (5) officers in attendance at the second sitting. The third one was conducted at Owode-Idiroko with four (4) officers in attendance. The total number of the officers who participated in the three Focus Group Discussions was fifteen (15).

#### **Key Informant Interviews**

Key informants interviews were also used to gather information which proved very vital for the success of this research work. Key informant is a knowledgeable insider who knew the group's behaviours and was willing to share access and insights with researcher. Key informant provides answers to questions that arise in the course of the research (Scuhutt, 2004).Thirty-six (36) key informants were contacted along the two transportation corridors. Twenty key informants (21)

were contacted along Seme/Badagry transportation corridor and fifteen (15) key informants along Owode/Idiroko transportation corridor.

### **METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The qualitative data which emerged from Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews were analyzed through content analysis. Manual content analysis was employed.

### **SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSES FROM COMMUNITY RESIDENTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AS EXTRACTED FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS.**

This section treated the responses of the participants on the ways to ensure tight security and Smuggling –Free Trade at Nigerian Borders with specific emphasis on Seme and Idiroko borders, which served as the areas of study in this study. The responses were coded and grouped together and the results were highlighted.

### **WAYS TO ENSURE TIGHT SECURITY AT NIGERIAN BORDERS (COMMUNITY RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES)**

Bearing in mind that tight security would definitely reduce the rate of smuggling, the community residents were asked to suggest way through which adequate tight security can be implemented around the border communities. The following were the measures highlighted by the community residents:

1. Governments should properly equip the Customs Officers with adequate equipment and facilities.
2. Government should establish a collaborative task force to assist the Customs Officers around the borders.
3. Corrupt officers should be dismissed forthrightly.
4. Government should put a fortified toll gates around the border areas.
5. Aerial patrol of the border by joint task force.

6. Electrifying wall should be built around the border.
7. Government should increase the number of Customs Officers. More officers should be recruited and trained.
8. Joint efforts of both the Customs Officers and the community people should be encouraged by the government.
9. Government should enlist some of the qualified community youths, living around the border into customs service to fulfill a proverb that “it is a thief that knows the foot – prints of another thief on the rock”. Community youths know those who are smugglers in the community and how to deal with them.
10. Information communication technology like Closed – Circuit Television should be installed around the border communities for effective surveillance.
11. Finally, government should cater for her citizens to dissuade them from crime commitment.

#### **WAYS TO ENSURE TIGHT SECURITY AT NIGERIAN BORDERS (LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS` PERSPECTIVES)**

The study also felt it very important to question the law enforcement officers working around the border, on what should be done to ensure that adequate security is provided for them. The responses made by the officers who were sampled to take part in the study are summarily highlighted below:

1. Government was implored to provide accommodation facilities to the officers and their families. A situation where officers are subjected to “living in the houses built by smugglers” will definitely hinder officers in discharging their duties.
2. There should be joint patrol of the borders by the officers of both countries (Nigeria and Benin Republic).

3. More encouragement should be given to the cordial relationships between the agencies at the border. The Inter – agencies intelligent sharing should be encouraged and inter – agencies meetings should be held.
4. Restructuring of the border post facilities should be done in a way that the safety of the officers would be guaranteed.
5. Manpower should be beefed up. Enough personnel should be provided and such personnel must be trained for border operations both at home and abroad.
6. There should be steady supply of equipment, arms, ammunitions, patrol vehicles etc.
7. There should be basic insurance cover for officers who engaged in some hazardous operations.
8. Good qualitative leadership would go a long way to forestall insecurity among the officers.
9. Government should create buffer zones between the border towns and the borders.
10. The borders should be flooded with lights at nights to reduce insecurity.
11. Monthly appraisal of security operations and situation should be carries out.
12. Bribery and corruption should be discouraged among the officers.
13. Immunity should be granted to the officers in dealings with smugglers.
14. Community people and their leaders should be sensitized on the needs to ensure security around the border. Community awareness on this should be encouraged.
15. Soldiers who have their barracks near the borders should be mandated to give helping hands to Customs Officers to repel the attacks from smugglers.
16. Some known smuggling kingpins in the society should be arrested and prosecuted.
17. Government should try to control the porous borders by embarking on the policies and the projects that would reduce, to minimum, the porosity of the Nigerian borders with other countries i.e. Benin Republic.

### **WAYS TO ENSURE SMUGGLING –FREE TRADE AROUND NIGERIAN BORDERS (COMMUNITY RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES)**

The study also requested for the measures that government can take to minimize smuggling across the border. The responses of the community residents were examined and summarized as follows:

1. Anti – smuggling laws should be updated to reflect the modern time needs and such laws should be fully implemented. The prosecutions of smugglers were very rarely heard about in the public.
2. Government should improve the working conditions and the welfares of the Customs Officers for their optimum performance.
3. Government should ensure that the people recruited into customs service are people of upright characters. The bad eggs among the currently serving officers should be thrown out.
4. The government should reduce tariffs on some of the goods being imported into the country. Essential goods that are not produced in Nigeria should attract low tariffs.
5. The community residents were of the opinions that the creation of free trade zone or market along the borders to ensure smooth trading between the border communities and the cut on the tariffs would create legitimate trade around the borders.

Community residents were also asked to mention what government can do to encourage Custom Officers working around the border.

Below are the highlights of the important measures that can be taken to ensure this:

1. Appointment should be strictly based on merit.
2. Increment in their salary.
3. Insurance Scheme for the Customs Officers.

4. Adequate compensation for the victims or relatives of the victim officers who are involved in the combat with smugglers.
5. Training and re-training of the officers both at home country and abroad for effective and optimum performances.
6. Government should establish ways of checking corruption among the Customs Officers. Wealth acquired by the Custom Officers beyond their earnings should be looked into.

#### **WAYS TO ENSURE SMUGGLING –FREE TRADE AROUND NIGERIAN BORDERS (LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS` PERSPECTIVES)**

Further analyses on what can be done to solve the problem of smuggling among the youths reflected that some officers called for educational development of the border towns through scholarships and other schemes that would develop the educational life of the youths living in the border towns. Moreover, provision of infrastructural social facilities and overall development of the border areas would give the people there a sense of belonging. This would provide other alternatives means to livelihood. Banks should be able to give loans to the youths who are ready to engage in legitimate business or skills acquisition programmes, as a form of assistance, with low interest rate.

The other ways through which the problem of smuggling can be suppressed are highlighted below:

1. Government should see to the overall welfare of the Custom Officers.
2. New sophisticated weapons should be purchased for the officers to march the weapons being used by some smugglers. Logistic support should also be provided.
3. Government should embark on social programmes and policies that would discourage people from the consumption of foreign products.
4. Government should re-define the country's bilateral trade agreements with neighbouring countries.

5. Reduction of tariff or duty on some of the commodities often smuggled should be done to discourage smuggling.
6. Finally, government should ensure good trade facilitation strategies

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

We conclude that solving the problem of insecurity and smuggling around the Nigerian borders are the responsibilities of the Nigerian Government, the customs officers and the entire public. We are of the opinion that carrying out those responsibilities would go a very long way in eradicating insecurity and smuggling around the Nigerian International borders. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that all the suggestions offered by the research participants should be strictly implemented by the government, the customs service and the public. Doing this would make Nigeria borders safer and her trade legitimate.

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