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ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTS AND SECURITY ISSUES AMONG INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER FISH TRADERS IN OKPARA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the conflicts and security issues facing informal cross-border fish traders in Okpara, Nigeria (Benin-Nigeria Border). Primary source of data was utilized. One Hundred and Twenty questionnaires were randomly distributed to the Fish Traders at the border market (Okpara, Oyo State) of Nigeria and responses were analysed using descriptive statistics (Percentages, Frequency, Mean, Standard Deviation and Variance). The results show that major cause of conflicts is the of problems superiority (i.e which tribe should be regarded as the owner of the market and sometimes which tribes or nations can influence the decision in price fixing and other aspect of the marketing) with 45%. Majority, constituted of about 69% reports conflict to the authority such as community Heads, Union leaders and so on and they settle any dispute. The results show that security of the nation is threatened by allowing informal trade because many criminal and terrorist acts use the medium to commit their crime (60%). More so, the number of participants keeps increasing on a yearly basis. Armed robbery cases is common in the market with about 58% and majority of the victims were female with about 78%, though men also reported cases of rape. The traders believe that illegal immigrant could enhance the influx of light weapons and ammunition (52.91%) and their common means of overcoming challenges of security agents is bribery (46.23%). The conflicts do not hinder the system's activities but the security issues. Border infrastructure issues should be addressed in order to enhance the movement and security of traders and their goods. Corruption and insecurity at the border fuels ICBFT. Corrupt law-enforcement agencies often take advantage of the local traders' lack of knowledge on customs procedures to take bribes. Effective policing at border points and market ports could reduce the incidence of crimes against traders and contribute to revenue generation.

Key words: Informal, Fish Traders, Security, Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Fish trade activity involves selling and buying of fish and fish products and it has remained a major source of income to riverine dwellers and interest group (Daniel, *et al.*, 2010). Fish trade is no longer a local business as it entails transaction across regions and nations. Balami, (2011) defined cross-border trade as the transaction of goods across the borders of two or more countries which shares common borders without the consent of the assigned agencies or authorized dues are not paid before transaction across the borders. There is no established means of transportation and these may range from

haulage by beasts of burden, porters, canoes, to hired motorized transport such as buses and motorcycles.

Cross Border Traders in Nigeria are a resilient group consisting of mostly women (Adeshina, *et al.*, 2013). They are very strong and determined in spite of the challenges they face on a daily basis. Majority of the Cross Border Traders in the sub-region are women facing triple burden of childcare, household maintenance and income generating activities. In addition to the triple burden that most women bear, studies have shown that the number of female headed households in Nigeria are on the increase; coupled with the ever rising population of widows and single female parents (ie. never married, separated, divorced) (Eniola, *et al.*, 2008).

Most baseline surveys indicate that the majority of informal cross border traders are women. According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW), women constitute about 70 percent of the informal cross border traders (Daniel, *et al.*, 2010). In the Western and Central parts of Africa, women constitute nearly 60 percent of informal traders. Traders engage in ICBT as a source of income and economic activity. Most traders have no formal education and raise capital from their own resources or through loans from friends and relatives (Daniel, *et al.*, 2010). Broadly speaking, players in ICBT fall under the three following categories (Daniel, *et al.*, 2010).

Category A	Category B	Category C
Informal (unregistered) traders or firm operating entirely outside the formal economy	Formal (registered) traders or firm fully evading trade-related regulations and duties (e.g avoiding official border crossing posts)	Formal (registered) traders or firm partially evading trade-related regulations and duties by resorting to illegal practices (e.g under-invoicing)

Figure 1: Types of Informal Cross-Border Traders

Source: Jean-Guy and Ajumbo, (2012).

Women are being forced to take up the breadwinner roles and find pathways to economic sustainability due to the prevailing environment and changing gender roles. Women Cross Border Traders have found their own pathways to livelihoods, poverty alleviation, food security and employment generation. They are contributing significantly to regional trade and integration as well as the GDP of the nation. Yet the Women Cross Border Traders are being stigmatised, physically/sexually abused, and discriminated against and either robbed or have their goods seized on a daily basis (Roos, *et al.*, 2007). The aim of this research is to evaluate the conflicts and security challenges facing ICBFT in Okpara market and investigate issues to be addressed by policy makers. This study covers the informal cross-border fish traders in Okpara market and the conflicts and security challenges facing the group.

Informal cross-border fish trade is one of the main methods of overcoming barriers to formal trade but the lives of traders is at risk. Abba (2013) reported that illegal entry routes have contributed to the current security challenges facing the country (Nigeria). Nigeria has 84 legal/official international borders while over 1497 informal routes have been identified by Nigerian Immigration Services ranging from foot-path to motorable routes which serve as transportation routes for cross-border traders especially agricultural products like fish.

Hypothesis

H_0 = Conflicts and security issues have no significant effect on ICBFT's activities.

Methodology

The Town of Okpara is located in Saki-West Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria. It is one of Oyo State's agrarian towns which contributes significantly to the food supply of the state and nation at large. Okpara is located on Latitude 7° 25' North and Longitude 3° 5' east approximately 110 kilometres north-west of Ibadan (OYSG, 1978). The area is dominated by Yoruba followed by Hausa and Yoruba from Benin Republic. The town is bordered by Republic of Benin therefore promoting international trade, relationship and socio-cultural believe. The major occupation of the inhabitants is farming and fisheries activities, some are traders with few government workers. The strategic location of the town facilitates the sporadic business across the border.

This study adopted quantitative method in achieving its objectives i.e obtaining data/information from the respondents which was subjected to statistical analysis. The fisher folks, major actors both Nigerian and Beninese in Okpara Market made up the population from which the representative sample was selected. The market has a total of three hundred and seventeen (317) registered members. A total numbers of one hundred and twenty (120) representative respondents were purposively selected to investigate the conflict among the traders while 5 of the respondents (security officers) were selected to investigate security issues at the border. The instruments used for data collection was structured questionnaire.

The data obtained were subjected to simple descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean and variance to draw inferences.

Results and discussion

Conflict issues

The disagreement and conflict level between the fish traders and customers in the market was presented as follows:

Table 1 shows that superiority is the major cause of conflict (i.e which tribe should be regarded as the owner of the market and sometimes which tribes or nations can influence the decision in price fixing and other aspects of the marketing), while 45% of the respondents did not respond the questions. However, 69% of the respondents affirmed that they report conflicts to the authorities such as community heads and union leaders, who settle any dispute. It could further be assumed that there is relative peace in the Market. Majority of the cross-border fish traders believe that law enforcement agents and involvement of the union leaders will be ideal in settling and preventing conflicts. Also, 35% of the respondents believe that government should provide security to protect lives and property and this is in agreement with Balami, (2011) who reported that traditional/community heads play vital roles in dispute resolution in an African setting. The youth in both communities say that they have on-going good relations with their

neighbours on land but not in the lake. The main grievances at Okpara are that their Beninese counterparts steal away some of their materials/goods. During oral discussion with one of the Association's Officers who identified himself as Abu lamented that sometimes ago majority of the thieves caught in the market were Beninese who come to the market on weekly basis.

Table 1: Conflict issues

	Responses	Percent	Mean±S.E	Variance
Do you have problems or conflicts with your customers/actors/fisherfolks?	Superiority	54.2	2.00±0.00	0.00
if yes, what kind of conflict/problems	System	45.8		
Missing		100.0		
Total	Run away	9.2	2.13±0.05	0.295
	Report to the authority/union leaders/community heads	69.2		
What do you do when there is conflict/misunderstanding in the market?	Join the fight	21.7		
	Total	100.0		
	Individual	30.8	1.93±0.07	0.541
How are you practically handling these problems	Community leaders	45.8		
	Security interventions	23.3		
	Total	100.0		
What else could be done to reduce conflict between actors from different areas?	Segregation	3.3	2.43±0.06	0.314
	Enforcement	50.8		
	Association	45.8		
	Total	100.0		
	Others	7.5	2.52±0.07	0.539
How can your government contribute to reduce conflict	Advocate for peace	10.8		
	Provision of security	35.0		
	Total	53.3		
Missing	System	46.7		
Total		100.0		

Source: Field Survey, (2013).

Security issues

Table 2 shows that security of the nation is threatened by allowing informal trade because many criminals and terrorists use the medium to commit their crime. Example is the case of discovery of Arsenal in Lagos by security agents which upon investigation, it was revealed that they are illegal immigrants. Also, during the crisis of Boko-Haram in Maiduguri in 2009 some of the insurgent arrested were foreigners from neighbouring countries who are illegal immigrants. The result shows that security personnel (60%) in the Okpara market agreed that security of the nation is threatened by informal cross

border trade. More so, the number of participants keeps increasing on a yearly basis and it is supported by the findings where 80% of the respondents agreed that more people are coming into the business. This is also further conformed with the results of Sowman and Cardoso, (2010) and Jean-Guy and Ajumbo (2012) but in disagreement with the report of Roos, *et al.*, (2003) who reported that as a result of multinational joint task force at the border, many traders find it difficult to operate and are forced out of the business. Table 3 reveals that cases of armed robbery is common in the market as most of the traders pass through informal borders with about 58% of the respondents while over 3% reported there is no case. Information on raping in plying informal borders was investigated and it was agreed that it occurred with majority of the victims being females (79%), though men also reported cases of rape. The traders agreed that illegal immigrants could bring light weapons and ammunition (52.91%) into the country. Common means of overcoming challenges of security agents is bribery (46.23%) while over 32% travel at night and 2% fight them to prevent been caught by the agents. Acquitter systems was observed but could not be categorically classified as informal trade because it is believed to have passed through formal process, so, it could be regarded as an act of corruption.

Table 2: Security issuesk

	Responses	Percent	Mean±S.E	Variance
Implication on the country	At alarming	40.00	1.60±0.23	0.30
	Threaten	60.00		
	Moderate	0.00		
	Don't know	0.00		
	Total	100.00		
Record keeping	Informal routes	100.00	1.00±0.00	0.00
	Poor administration and motivations	0.00		
	Lack of knowledge and sincerity	0.00		
	All of the above	0.00		
	Total	100.00		
Rate of operation	Increasing	80.00	1.40±0.40	0.80
	Declining	0.00		
	The same	20.00		
	Don't know	0.00		
	Total	100.00		
Opinion	Should be stopped	20.00	2.20±0.37	0.70
	Should continue	40.00		
	Should be formalized	40.00		
	Don't know	0.00		
	Total	100.00		
Prospects	Hopeful	60.00	1.60±0.40	0.80
	Not encouraging	20.00		
	Encouraging	20.00		
	Don't know	0.00		
	Total	100.00		

Source: Field Survey, (2013).

Table 3: Challenges at the border market

	Responses	Percent
Cases of armed robbers	Often	58.00
	Sometimes	38.25
	Not at all	03.75
	Don't know	0.00
	Total	100.00
Raping	Agreed	100.00
	Disagreed	0.00
	No response	0.00
	Total	100.00
Victim of rape	Women only	78.57
	Men only	0.00
	Both men and women	21.43
	Total	100.00
Influx of ammunition	Agreed	52.91
	Disagreed	12.00
	Don't know	35.09
	Total	100.00
Means of settling security agents	Bribery	46.23
	Sacrificing the goods	18.83
	Fighting them	02.05
	Traveling at night	32.89
	Total	100.00

Source: Field Survey, (2013).

Conclusion

Superiority is the major cause of conflicts in the market but they settle what ever differences among themselves. This is because of informal nature of their activities. They do not want to report to security agencies and prefer to settle it among the leaders and heads.

There is no clear thought on whether to formalize the informal cross-border fish trade or to continue as it is, as respondents in Okpara market share the same views (40%). Although the demand for fish required in the country is far higher than the supply, the level of participation cannot be over emphasized, and as such, it will be important if it is formalized, to fully explore and exploit its benefits. It was concluded that conflicts and security challenges hindering ICBFT's activities in Okpara.

Recommendations

From the results of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) Encourage formation of organization/association to improve dispute resolution.
- (ii) Border infrastructure issues should be addressed in order to enhance the movement and security of traders and their goods.
- (iii) Corrupt law-enforcement agencies often take advantage of the local traders' lack of knowledge on customs' procedures to take bribes.
- (iv) Provide effective policing at border points and market ports.
- (v) Conducting border community sensitization campaigns and empowering local traders and formalize their activities.

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