

SMUGGLING NETWORKS IN NORTH-WESTERN BORDERLANDS OF NIGERIA: A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the organisational dynamics of smuggling networks along the North-Western Borderlands of Nigeria from the perspective of Social Network Analysis. To understand its theoretical base, the paper discussed some of the theory's fundamental concepts, assumptions, arguments and its applicability to the specific context of Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina and Lolo borders of Sokoto and Kebbi states. Through its theoretical and empirical tests, the paper identifies the network of operators and the dynamics of their operations. It found out that most of the large-scale smuggling activities across the border areas are carried out with the collaboration of customs officers operating at the borderlands. Hence, unless the government is able to curtail official corruption at the borderlands and discourage the actors from seeing smuggling as a means of survival, smuggling activities will continue to flourish across the nation's borders regardless of the government policy in place.

Keywords – Network, Smuggling, Traders, Brokers, Customs, informants

Introduction

The success of smuggling activities across the borders of Nigeria and elsewhere in the world has been attributed to the complex nature of its underground network (Walther, 2015) in many cases, operating independently of government control. It is a trading activity where both legal and illegal goods escape the state's regulatory framework designed and enforced by the state (Golub, 2012; Meagher, 2003). Legal goods are goods and services that are approved and taxed by the state while illegal goods are those goods that are considered by the state as harmful to public safety, national security, economic growth and development.

Due to the illegal nature of the trade, smuggling activities usually operate a network of actors within the shadows of states. These networks are now seen as the forces behind official corruption at the border, the collapse of the nation's productive sectors and the source of illegal drugs and weapons that endanger the general security of the state.

Studies have shown that Nigeria is the largest market for smuggling activities in West Africa (Ahmed & Chilaka, 2013; Meagher, 2003). This calls for the need to understand their network of operators facilitating the trade.

The Nigerian state is currently faced with numerous socio-economic and political challenges that have posed a series of challenges to its corporate existence and development. These challenges include the collapse of the industrial and agricultural sector, widespread ethno-religious and political violence (Oji, 2014), drug abuse especially among youths, widespread armed robbery, banditry, kidnappings, terrorism (Nweke, 2011), money laundering (Ering, 2011) and other forms of criminality, etc. All of these have been widely attributed to the widespread smuggling activities across the nation's porous international borders. Corruption and poor government policies permit the illegal free flow of almost all forms of goods (like cash, arms and ammunition, drugs, food and even people). These not only pose threat to the Nigerian economy by preventing local productive sectors from producing adequately and competing with foreign advanced technologies, it completely denies the state access to import revenues which otherwise may be used to support government policies and programmes. Furthermore, the illegal importation of goods like drugs, arms and ammunition as well as cash, used is used in terrorist financing which often led to the destruction of the lives of productive men and women, and as well, promotes armed conflicts and terrorism in the Nigerian state.

Studies have shown that the success of these informal trading activities across the nation's borders are not just the activities of individuals but a network of agents who play a specific but complementary role in the success of the trade (Brown, 1990; Folami & Naylor, 2017; Walther, 2012; Golub, 2012; Golub et al., 2019). It is against this background that this study adopted the Social Network Theory to explain the smuggling networks and their dynamics of operations across the borders of North-Western Nigeria. Specifically, the study focused on four borderlands: Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina; and Lolo. It is assumed that the understanding of the operational structure of the networks will provide researchers and policymakers with the best approach towards improving cross-border policies and strategies for checking the excesses of smuggling activities and above all, improve border security and enhance the economic growth and development of the Nigerian state.

Methodology of the Research

The research is a qualitative one based on field data collected in 2018 along Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina and Lolo borderlands of Sokoto and Kebbi states. The study captures the views, opinions and personal experiences of smuggling agents (traders, currency exchangers, brokers, informants, transporters and commutation) and customs officers operating along the borderland. The reason for their selection is because they do not only operate in the area but as well, have the day-to-day experiences of smuggling activities along the borderland areas.

Personal observation of the study area is also adequately captured to complement areas where respondents could not provide adequate responses. The instruments used in the collection of the study data include interviews (Key Informant Interviews), documentary sources (published and unpublished) and personal observation of the study area. The essence of adopting these instruments is to have an in-depth understanding of smuggling networks operating along the borderlands under study.

Furthermore, the study adopted two forms of sampling strategies in the collection of data: purposive and snowballing. Hence, targeted respondents that cannot be reached through the purposive are accessed through their trustees (friends and families).

Conceptual Clarification

Smuggling

Smuggling according to this work, it is a trading activity across international borders of states that fully or partially violated import or export rules and regulations adopted and enforced by states. This may include both goods passing through the state official border posts or the illegal routes and regardless of whether the goods are legal or illegal and whether it is carried out independently by non-state agents or in collaboration with state agents.

The Study Area

This study is carried out in four borderlands areas of North-western Nigeria. They include Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina and Lolo. Illela borderland is the headquarters of Illela local government. It is located at latitude 13°45'8.26"N and longitude 5°16'59.19"E, 86 kilometres north of Sokoto metropolis, Sokoto State. It also shares an international border with Niger republic in Birni N'Konni of Tahoua. Illela has both an international market and international highway linking Nigeria to various West African countries and therefore makes it a hub for international trade.

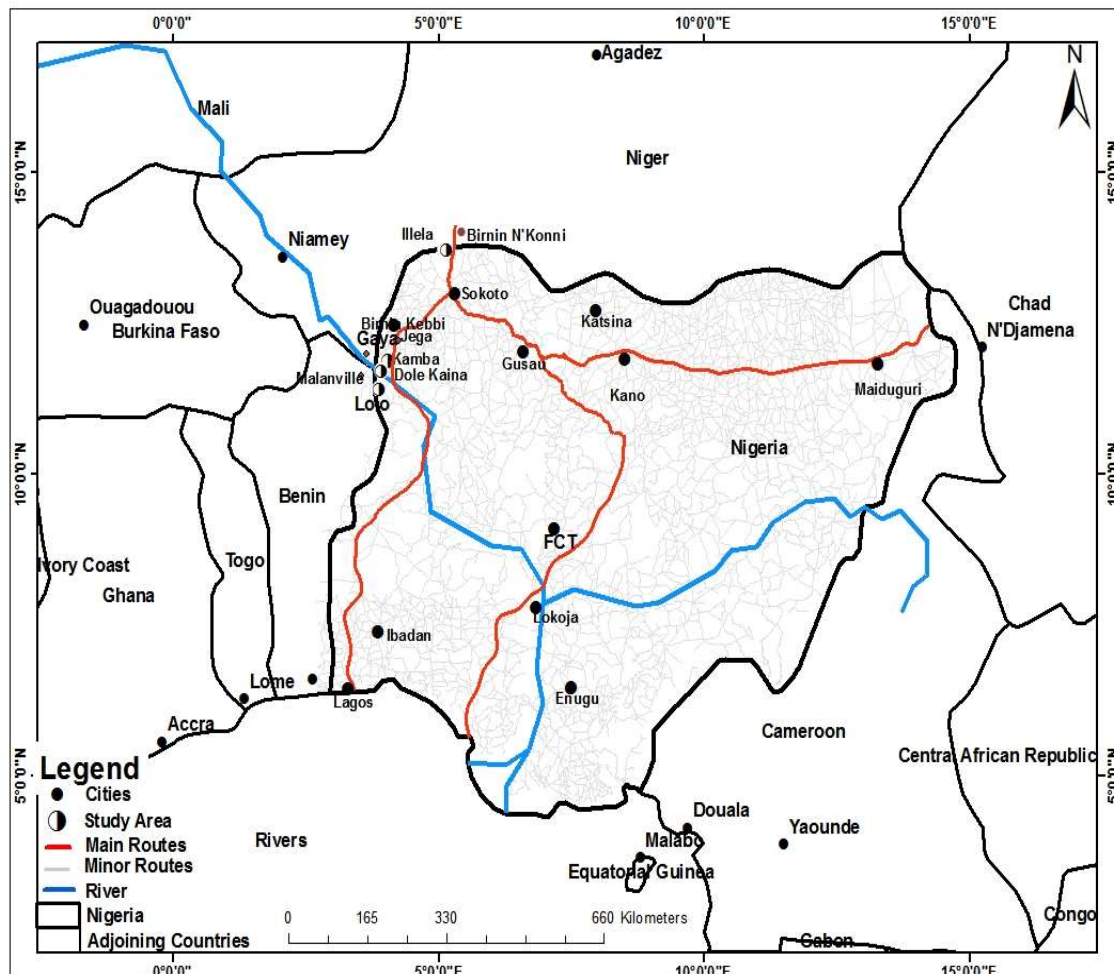


Figure 1-Map showing the study area

Source: The Author

Kamba borderland on the other hand is located on latitudes 11°52' - 14.27'N and longitude 3°37'-24.73'E (Google Earth, 2018). It is the headquarters of Dandi local government, south of Kebbi state. It shares a border with the Niger republic on the River Niger. It is also an economic hub and Nigeria's thriving gateway for international trade with West African countries. It is an active international trading hub since the pre-colonial era (Adamu, 1978). It also hosts a weekly international market that attracts traders from all over West Africa.

As for Dole-Kaina Borderland, it is located at the riverside of River Niger near the tripartite border separating Nigeria, Niger and Benin republic. It is located on latitude 11°42'-43.67'N and Longitude 3°37'-55.01'E (Google Earth, 2018, Map-1). It is a riverine town located along the tripartite border separating Nigeria, Niger and Benin Republic. It is one of the districts of Dandi local government, it is 20 kilometres south of Kamba.

As for Lolo borderland, it is located in Kebbi state and shares a border with the Benin republic. It is located at Latitude 11°40'8.57"N and Longitude 3°34'44.51"E (Google Earth, 2018) 4 kilometres South of Dole-Kaina town, a small town at the bank of river Niger. It also shares the tripartite border that separates Nigeria, Niger and Benin. It hosts a small international market that attracts citizens of the three countries and beyond. Its riverside location also promotes economic activities in the area. (fieldnote, 2018)

Due to the dangers associated with smuggling activities, the Nigerian state has mounted different security agents like the Customs Service to prevent the illegal influx of goods and people into the Nigerian state. Despite all this, smuggling networks still operate in the area. This calls for the need to understand the theoretical discussions of network analysis and its application in the borderlands under study.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS: AN OVERVIEW

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a multidisciplinary theory that is also referred to as social network theory or communication network analysis (Dunn, 1983). The theory was popularized with the works of Joseph Moreno in the 1930s which was followed by the work of Dorwin Cartwright and Frank Harary in the 1950s (Fredericks and Durland, 2005).

Social Network theory investigates the networks and exchanges between different actors that make up social structures. These structures are composed of different actors (individuals, group, organization or nation-state) in a relationship which not only connects them but as well, bind and directs them to a specific goal or set of goals (Liu et al., 2017). It also examines the extent to which exchange within a network influence the operations of a social structure. These exchanges could be tangibles such as goods, services and money or intangible such as information, social support or influence. Networks could be business networks, family networks, criminal networks, political networks or even social media networks (like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc). Unlike other social science theories, SNA seeks to analyse the origins, evolution and impact of structure on social outcomes. The networks are usually visualized in sociograms or graphs in which actors are represented by nodes and their relationships with other actors as lines (also called ties). Although the modern approach to the study of social network first gains acceptance in sociology, its usefulness has led to its application in development studies, economics, communication studies and even biology and information science.

According to Borgatti and Foster (2003), "a network is a set of actors connected by a set of ties". The actors (often called "nodes") can be persons, teams, organizations, concepts, etc. Borgatti and Halgin (2011:1169) define a network as a "set of actors or nodes along with a set of ties of a specified type (such as a friendship) that link them". The ties are usually interconnected through

shared endpoints. The endpoints form the connection between actors that are not directly tied. The pattern of ties in a network yields a particular structure, and actors occupy positions within the structure. It is important to note that no network is alike and that every network is defined by the actors and the ties between them. Therefore, a researcher may choose to analyse within the network of an organization or a group of organizations forming a network. Hence, it is the research question that should determine the nature of the network, the types of actors and their ties and the nature of the relationship between them (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).

Key Concepts in Social Network Analysis

Actors

Actors are social units of analysis in a network. They are also known as nodes, vertices or points. They are individuals, groups, organizations or states who interact with one another in a social structure. They play competitive roles by making use of resources, information and opportunities available through their social ties. They perform the primary responsibility of strategizing the operations of the network. They are also seen as social actors with the capability of bearing the risks and taking the strategic initiative to establish, integrate and sustain operations (Fredericks and Durland, 2005; Spoto and Martino, 2006). The theory is therefore concerned not only with evaluating the importance of actors but as well as identifying the function or position of an important actor in a social network.

Ties

Ties are also regarded as edges, arch, lines or links. They are social links or connections between the actors that form a network. They indicate the level of relationship between different actors in a network. Ties are developed based on conversation, affection, friendship, kinship, authority, economic exchange, information exchange and other factors that form the basis of the relationship between the actors. Such ties may also be strong, weak or even absent. Strong ties involve very close relationships such as kinship, close friends, families, business partners or officials working together in the same area of interest and communicating often. Actors within a clique who interact frequently and have extended history, intimacy and sharing are more likely to develop strong ties. In other words, they are actors within the social network who share a deep affinity (Jaafar et. al, 2009).

Weak ties, on the other hand, represent a relationship with actors with loose or weak affinities. They include acquaintances, or a stranger with a common cultural, financial, economic and political background. Weak ties are important because they are particularly helpful in the spread of information from one group to another or from a specific group to the entire market, weak ties play a significant role in complementing most of the tasks carried out by a network. They play a significant role in sourcing new information and strategies which otherwise those with strong ties could not envisage (Walther, 2015).

Ties play a significant role in connecting pairs of actors and can be directional or unidirectional. It is directional when each tie shows a link from one direction to another and unidirectional when it shows no link. The tie also defines the kind of relationship between actors in a network (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Walther, 2015).

Assumption of the theory

Gilde (2014:7) quoted that social network theory is made up of three basic assumptions:

- i. The behaviour of an actor within the network is influenced by the behaviour of other actors within the network. This means that actors do not act independently from one another, they are mutually dependent.
- ii. The ties between actors form the basis for the exchange of both goods and ideas. In other words, the ties channel the transmission of communication through the network.
- iii. These ties can create structures among the actors in the network that can influence their behaviour. This suggests that because of a certain position in a social network an actor is for example constrained in its desire to enter conflict or negotiate with unlikely partners such as former enemies or ideologically opposed actors.

Social Network Analysis is based on the argument that a social network is a network of a finite set of actors or nodes linked together through social ties. The ties between actors are usually visualized and measured with the use of a graph or sociogram. In this regard, the distance between the actors is viewed as a function of the level of relationship between actors. This is considered network centrality. The importance of network centrality is that it identifies the advantageous position every actor occupies within the network and their level of relevance in decision making. Hence the relevance of each actor can be deduced from their centrality ((Liu et al., 2017; Walther, 2015).

According to Borgatti and Foster (2003) and Walther (2015), there are three types of network centrality: degree, betweenness and closeness. Network centrality is an important structural attribute of any social network. This is because it is related to other important group properties and processes. It also can measure the effectiveness of the behaviour of actors as well as the behaviour of networks (Gilde, 2014).

The Degree of Centrality

The degree of centrality measures the number of ties linking one actor to other actors in a network. Actors with a higher degree of centrality are regarded as leaders and therefore command respect and control the opinion of those around them and as well receive and disseminate information better and quicker. Actors with fewer ties are regarded as less influential and sometimes (Barnes & Harary, 1983) dependents (Butts, 2008) Walther, 2015).

Betweenness of Centrality

The betweenness of centrality measures the frequency at which individual actors lie on the closest actors to connect to other actors within a network. It serves as a bridge that connects several actors who otherwise would be disconnected within the network cluster. In other words, they are the gatekeepers who serve as a bridge in the flow of information within the network cluster. Hence, if an actor of high betweenness is opposed to the flow of a particular idea, such information may not be able to reach the other side of the network.

Closeness centrality

Closeness centrality is a way of detecting actors that are close to other actors and have the potential to spread information rapidly within the network. In this regard, actors with higher closeness centrality are regarded as more efficient and effective in transmitting information or resources to all other actors within the network than those in the farness centrality. (Walther, 2015). In this study, traders and brokers, traders and informants, transporters and informants, brokers, traders, brokers and compromised security agents are identified as the actors with the highest degree of closeness and information transmission.

Eigenvector centrality

Finally, the Eigenvector centrality is the opposite of closeness centrality. It explains that the closeness and quick contact with actors is not the main criterion of importance but rather having access to the most central actors reveal truly the centrality of an actor (Perez and Garmon, 2016). Actors with high eigenvector are well connected to the parts of the network that have the greatest connectivity (Walther, 2015).

Based on the above characterization, it can be drawn that one of the most fundamental measures of a social network is the mutual interaction between social actors often referred to as *reciprocity*. Reciprocity is usually enforced either by a formal institution (like the court) or by mutual trust (as in the case of the informal sector). In this respect, actors must be related to developing strong ties and shared values. Hence actors that are surrounded by many other actors are often regarded as more central and powerful in the network than those actors with fewer ties.

In this regard, a network should not be compared to a group. This is because a group has boundaries and principles governing the whole of its members and defends such boundaries even through violent means. They may have a registered association for their members and a principle governing the behaviour of all members (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011). A social network, on the other hand, could even be a network of groups with each group performing a separate but specialized function for the success of the group and the network as a whole.

The Operational Dynamics of Smuggling Networks in the North-Western Borderlands of Nigeria

From the above discussion, it can be argued that Social Network Analysis (SNA) is one of the few frameworks of analysis that contextualize the relationship between individuals, groups or organizations within a broad complex structure and operate interdependently. In this study, both individuals and states (Nigeria and Benin Republic) constitute the network promoting smuggling activities across the borders of the North-Western Borderlands of Nigeria. Among the individual actors that constitute the network are the traders, currency exchangers brokers, transporters, informants and compromised security agents while entities include the Immediate neighbours of Nigeria and Benin and border communities. The following diagram provides the context of interaction among actors in the smuggling network across the borderlands of Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina and Lolo of Kebbi and Sokoto state.

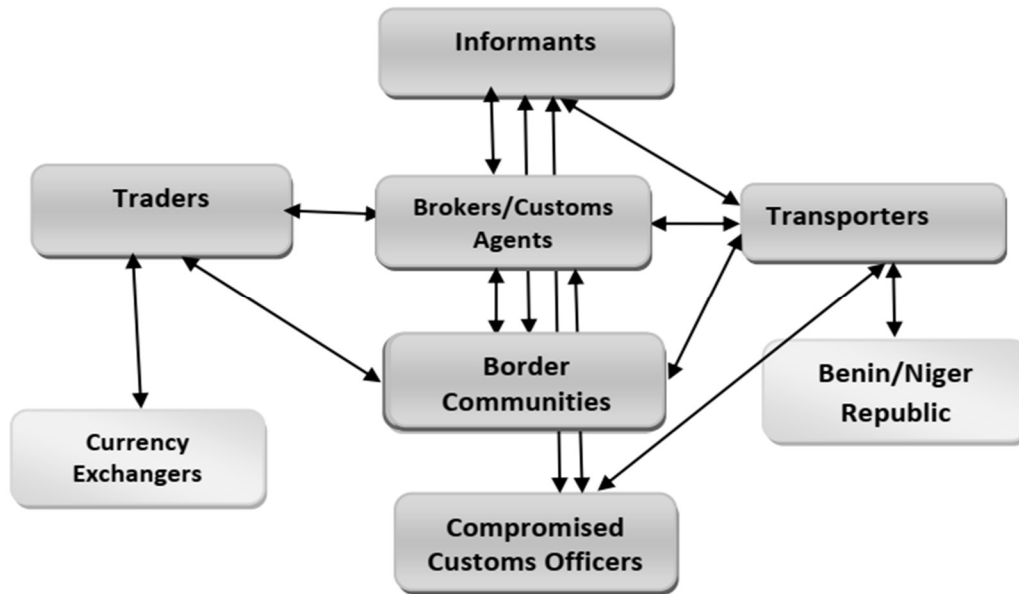


Figure 1: Illela, Kamba, Lolo and Dole-Kaina Smuggling Network

Source: The Author, 2022

Informal Currency Exchange and Transfer

Trading activities along the borderlands of Sokoto, Kebbi states and elsewhere in Nigeria begin with currency conversion and sometimes transfer. The traders are known to, first of all, convert the Nigerian naira to the currency of their trading destination (mostly the dollars or CFA francs). Although these are the most demanded currencies by traders known to the area under study, the currency exchangers play their role beyond such supply to include the Euros, British Pounds, Japanese Yen, Chinese Yuan, Ghana Cedi etc (S. Yar-Abba June, 2018). They also provide transfer services for customers who wish to transfer or receive cash or order goods from other destinations. All these are carried out through informal processes and off the government record, however, in an efficient manner. This category of exchangers are known as “yan-chanji” in the Hausa language. They have a broad network within Nigeria and across the West African sub-region (M. Musa, June 2018; fieldnote, 2018). These currency exchangers are found in Sokoto metropolis, Birnin Kebbi and the borderland areas of Illela and Kamba.

However, due to the shortage of foreign currency supply in the Nigerian market and the increasing withdrawal restrictions by the government, both local currency exchangers have found it very difficult to source adequate foreign currencies for traders. This further led to the emergence of a new group of Informal Currency Exchangers (ICEs) popularly known as “yan chanjin Dubai” (Dubai currency exchangers). This category of exchangers is known for its role in both currency exchange and transfer, especially between US dollars, the Dirham and the Nigerian naira (K. Aliyu-koko, June, 2018).

ICEs operating this system are known to illegally liaise with some compromised bankers to open hundreds of bank accounts for poor young men and women. The Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards produced are given to and withheld by these ICEs instead of their real owners. These accounts are then used to deposits the Nigerian naira and which are then withdrawn in Dollars or Dirham by ICE agents in foreign countries (mostly Dubai). The currencies are then withdrawn and sold to international traders, Nigerian local currency exchangers, travellers and other people in

demand, all at black market prices (K. Aliyu-Koko, June 2018; Musa, June, 2018). Although the Nigerian government has made effort to curtail such activities, the trade still flourishes due to the high demand for foreign currencies in Nigeria. Despite having weak ties, currency exchangers appear to be of eigenvector importance since, without the currency exchangers, the entire trade network is completely weak.

It can be argued that the system of informal currency exchange and transfer constitutes the heartbeat of smuggling since it is the point of start and means through which informal traders access their goods and relate with their counterparts in other parts of the world. It also indicates very close ties between traders and currency exchangers. (Punch, 2012; EFCC, 2019; Vanguard, 2019; GIABA, 2013; EFCC, 2016; EFCC, 2019). However, it is a weak tie owing to the fact that currency exchangers are not directly connected to any member of the network but the trader.

The Traders

With the foreign currencies available, informal traders from the region now travel to different destinations (Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the US and other African countries) to buy and import goods into the country. Goods imported through the North-Western borderlands of Sokoto and Kebbi state include Automobiles, processed food items, used products, cosmetics, beverages, drugs, textile materials, petroleum products, drugs, etc NCS Sokoto Command seizure record, 2013-2017; NDLEA, Sokoto, 2018; NDLEA, Kebbi, 2018; fieldnote, 2018). Others include cow skin, spices, unprocessed food items, mosquito coils, etc. Others are export goods shipped to Niger and Benin republic (like petroleum products, agro-chemicals, mattresses, building materials, onions, garlic, etc). other distance areas of trade are Algeria, Libya, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali. Export goods to these destinations include *Albasa* (onion), *Kowa*, *Dussa*, *tafarnuwa* (garlic), *Chitta* (ginger), *Zabibi*, *Masoro*, *Sobo*, sweet, kolanut etc. (Feildnote, 2018).

Due to the high cost of import taxes, delays at customs posts and corruption, traders sort to use different illegal strategies to import goods to cut costs and increase profit. This is achieved through different strategies such as deliberately avoiding customs officials from knowing the actual quality, quantity or even the origin of the goods. To achieve this, they seek the assistance of brokers (both registered and unregistered) to advise them on how to bypass legal protocols or strike illegal deals with compromised customs officers to cut down the import tax below the official amount or not pay at all. These are done through sets of methods which involves the trader, the broker, the transporters, informants and at times, sometimes with the support of compromised customs officers.

This is achieved through the adoption of falsification strategies like under-invoicing, misclassification and misdeclaration of goods. In under-invoicing, traders are known to use forgers in Cotonou (Benin Republic) or Gaya (Niger republic) to forge a new invoice that reduce the cost or even quality of the imported goods that will be presented to the customs at the border post for duty assessment (G. Sule, June, 2018).

In misclassification, it involves declaring goods under a lower duty category than the real duty category. At the borderlands, traders through their brokers and sometimes in collaboration with compromised customs officials, offload large consignments of goods in Niger or Benin borderlands and then ship them into Nigeria in smaller quantities using smaller vehicles. The compromised customs officers then misclassify these goods by changing their mode of payment from “duty” to “baggage” (Anonymous, June 2018). The customs justify such acts using article VII of the World Trade Organisation valuation method known as the “fall-back method”. The principle stated that:

If the customs value of the imported goods cannot be determined under the provisions of Articles 1 to 6, inclusive, the customs value shall be determined using reasonable means consistent with the principles and general provisions of this Agreement and of Article VII of the General Agreement and on the basis of data available in the country of importation.

In this regard, these officers falsely assume that since the customs station cannot ascertain the value of the goods imported due to the absence of any instrument of measurement to do so, the adoption of the fall-back method became necessary. The adoption of the fall-back method usually leads to gross misclassification and sometimes, misdeclarations (Anonymous, June 23, 2018).

In misdeclaration, traders and sometimes in collaboration with brokers and compromised customs officers do provide false or inaccurate declarations in order to cut down import tax or not to pay at all. Misdescription may take place in the quality, quantity, weight, description and measurement of goods. Another common form of misdeclaration is the false declaration of the country of origin with a view to cutting down the freight cost or exploiting non-tax or low tax arrangements. For instance, goods coming from China may be declared as goods coming from India or even nearby countries, Goods coming from Non-ECOWAS countries (like North Africa) are declared as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African Countries) goods. Goods identified in this category include dates, cow skin, soap, etc. Finally, goods are misdeclared by way of concealment. The concealment of goods is mostly associated with dangerous goods like hard drugs, arms and ammunition, etc. However, even contrabands like processed food items (like rice, cooking oil, sugar, processed food items, etc) are concealed and imported (fieldnote, 2018).

The resultant effect of all these falsifications strategies is the undervaluation of the goods and finally, the underpayment of import tax on goods by the traders. Therefore, traders are the backbone of smuggling activities since, without them, the trading system is bound to collapse. They are therefore of high degree centrality, especially the eigenvector centrality.

Brokers/Customs Agents

It is observed that most of the activities of traders in the borderlands are largely determined and conducted by brokers by brokers. They are known to facilitate the clearance and transportation of their goods. In the official customs arrangement, brokers are individuals or organisations licensed to help importers or exporters to ensure complete compliance with customs rules and regulations guiding imports and exports. They ensure that imported goods meet all legal requirements, help the trader to organise and submit necessary import documents, and ensure that goods are correctly classified with appropriate harmonised codes and duties for the goods are appropriately paid at the lowest possible taxes. All this are done with a fee paid to the broker by the trader (NCS, 2022).

Two types of brokers are observed in the study area; licensed brokers also referred to as “licensed agents” and unlicensed or unregistered brokers. Licensed brokers are registered to the NCS, Corporate Affairs Commission and other legal organisations as stated in Nigeria Customs Service guidelines (NCS, 2022). As for the unlicensed ones, they are locals, mostly from the borderland communities. They are well familiar with the customs operating at the borderlands and sometimes serve as customs informants for zero-sum smugglers. These brokers serve as intermediaries during the process of illegal bargains between smugglers and customs. They collaborate with some compromised officers to misclassify or even misdeclare goods. Through

them compromised customs officers allow for the importation of illegal and sometimes dangerous goods (like rice, frozen chickens, cooking oil, used clothes, processed foods, etc) into Nigeria or allow for the export of petroleum products, fertilizer, etc. Both registered and unregistered brokers are generally referred to as “yan fito” in Hausa (Al-Khamis-Kamba, 2018).

The intermediary role played by brokers extend beyond the customs and traders: they also have a close tie with transporters, border communities and informants. Depending on the type of illegality to be conducted, these brokers provide the strategy, the best transporters and sometimes informants and border communities suitable to accommodate a particular strategy (Al-Khamis-Kamba, 2018). Hence, they play the role of closeness and betweenness centrality in the smuggling network of the borderland.

Transporters

Worldwide, transporters are central to the conduct of international trade. In the study area, transporters the betweenness centrality. This is because they are connected to most of the smuggling agents in the area (see figure 1). In the study area, most of the transporters engaging in smuggling are between 24 and 35 years of age and are locals of the border communities. They are also masters of the illegal routes. This makes them popular among traders, brokers, members of the border communities and in some rare cases, customs officers (Fieldnote, 2018).

Different transporters play different roles in the smuggling industry. There are large- and small-scale transporters. There are also short-distance and long-distance transporters. There are also transporters that specialised in the use of customs posts (through concealment) while others are specialists in the use the illegal routes. There are transporters that smuggle goods for traders with the assistance of compromised customs agents and there are also those who defy s security agents (fieldnote, 2018). Large scale transporters are known for their use of customs posts due to the high risks of using the illegal routes. They largely depend on falsification and concealment strategies to smuggle goods. Small-scale transporters are largely known for their use of illegal routes using cars and motorcycles. Others take the risk of using the illegal routes without any informal bargain. This is known as the zero-sum strategy. Among the locals of the borderland, this strategy is popular with the term “tarqaqe”. This set of transporters depends largely on the support of their informants and sometimes border communities to succeed. Goods transported using this method include petroleum products, used clothes, cooking oil, parboiled rice and even arms ammunition and drugs. (Feildnote, 2018; G. Sule, June 22 2018; M. M. Mustapha, June 22, 2018; S. Sani, June 28, 2018).

Informants

It is observed in our previous discussion that traders, brokers, transporters and even compromised security agents operating along the illegal routes do employ the services of informants in order to succeed. Two sets of informants are identified in the study area; the paid informants and the freelance informants. Traders, brokers, transporters and compromised security agents do recruit informants in order to provide them with information about customs operations in advance. Traders are known to recruit informants even among security agents (including customs officers) at the border areas in other to have an up to date information about customs' next line of action (A. Hali, June, 21, 2018).

Traders, brokers and transporters using the illegal routes, placed their informants at various points of the borderland areas including illegal routes, on the road, at customs stations or roadblocks, etc. to provide them with information about customs operations in the borderland areas. In fact, these smuggling agents do sometimes get their information about customs policy

or operations from customs who have once worked in the borderland (and probably a member of the network) and still benefit significantly from the smuggling network within the region. They also get information about customs policy from members of the border communities who engage in bi-weekly security meetings with other security agencies or even from other border security agents such as the police, immigration, NDLEA, etc. who live within the border community (Ahmad-Illela, June 10, 2018).

As for the freelance operators, they are mostly members of the border communities who share sympathy with these smuggling agents and therefore provide them with security operations they observe in the area. Others do so because smugglers passing through their villages gift money to poor villagers. This usually leads the village to protest the arrest of smugglers or even provide customs officers with wrong information about smugglers on the run (Fieldnote, 2018).

Compromised officers are also known for recruiting informants who are stationed on illegal routes to collect money from small scale smugglers using the routes. Although these informants (often regarded as “camp boys”) are originally recruited in camps to provide information and assist the customs intercept for illegal operators around the illegal routes, they have been converted into illegal tax collectors. They mount toll gates and operate like kings on these illegal routes. Hence, smugglers' informants constitute a greater threat to border security and the security of the Nigerian state (fieldnote, 2018).

Border Communities

Border communities are known as the immediate harbours of smuggling agents and goods coming from smuggling. It was said that a good number of these traders, brokers, transporters and informants originated from borderland communities. In fact, the majority of the borderland communities benefit directly or indirectly from smuggling activities across the border, hence, any decision or action against smuggling activities is viewed by the border communities as a decision against the whole community. This is why it is much easier for the members of these communities to serve as freelance informants for smugglers. This also explains why it is easier for these borderland communities to embark on protests whenever illegal goods are confiscated by the customs.

It is observed that all borderland communities under study are connected by webs of illegal routes running from foreign countries into Nigeria. It is estimated that there are over 200 illegal smuggling routes each in Illela nad Kamba and dozens of others in the small towns of Dole-Kaina and Illela. Within these communities also exist dozens of warehouses that harbour smuggling goods, some of which are stored in personal houses. There are also dozens of illegal petroleum stations each in Illela and Kamba harbouring over 40 petroleum stations each, most of whom are used for the smuggling of petroleum products to immediate foreign countries (Niger and the Benin Republic). The benefits of smuggling in these communities could be seen from the level of development achieved in these borderland towns. Despite being far away from city centres, borderland communities like Illela, Kamba, Lolo and Dole-Kaina have demonstrated some level of development beyond local governments and local governments close to the city centres. The existence of banks, filling stations, large markets, shops, etc. that could not be found in most local governments outside the borderlands attest to this (fieldnote, 2018). Hence, for the borderland communities, any attempt to end smuggling, is an attempt to kill the entire community.

Compromised Customs officers

The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) is the primary security organisation saddled with the responsibility of anti-smuggling activities. Despite the efforts of the NCS to fulfil its mandate by

securing the borders and arresting smuggling culprits, some officers from within the organisation pose a serious threat to the mandate. They have sought to pursue their private objectives by developing personal relationships with traders, brokers, informants and even the border communities even when customs officers and accommodation are detached from the border communities. These officers also work hard to influence other senior officers posted to the border areas into the larger network. Smuggling traders and brokers, through their mother associations, do on a timely basis, pay visits to the senior officers with a view to “familiarise” themselves with the incoming leadership. Since some of these traders and brokers are respected traditional and political leaders of the communities, they also engage in bi-weekly security meetings with all heads of security agencies at the border thereby developing familiarity with these smuggling agents.

It is with respect to such fear that the NCS develop different operation units (Stations, Enforcements, valuations and escort, Zone B, and Strike Force (formerly CG Taskforce) with each headed by an Assistant Comptroller of Customs and stationed differently to avoid corruption. (Fieldnote, 2018). However, despite these arrangements, corruption flourishes among the officers in the borderlands. Bribes are paid in the open from small scale traders using the highways, on the illegal routes, at the customs stations and through unregistered and some registered brokers. Many of the strategies used by these officers are discussed above.

Nigeria's Immediate Neighbours

Just like border communities harbour smugglers and smuggling activities for their economic interest, the Nigerian immediate neighbours of Benin and Niger republic equally play a role in providing a soft and safe passage of smuggling activities across their borders with Nigeria. Nigeria is the largest smuggling market in West Africa (Meagher, 2003). No countries enjoy such a market in the region as Benin and Niger republic. Due to its close proximity with Nigeria (sharing borders), Benin has turned itself into a port and warehouse of contrabands for Nigerian goods while the Niger republic allows for movement of these goods from Benin, Togo and other West and North African countries into Nigeria under the pretext of “transit economy” and regardless to whether these goods are harmful to the Nigerian state or not.

It is projected that not less than 1.45 trillion naira of goods is smuggled into Nigeria through the Benin republic annually. Also, about 10,000 to 15,000 Benin citizens benefit from such trade (Kabir, August 7, 2020). It is estimated that between 2011 and 2014, the Benin republic imported goods (cars, rice, cotton cloth, new and used clothes, poultry, sugar, and cigarettes) worth the tune of 5 billion dollars, most of these goods find their way into Nigeria through smuggling (Economic Confidential, March 30, 2018).

Benin achieves these in several ways. With the Nigerian government putting restrictions on some goods and a complete ban on others (such as processed foods, used clothes, etc.), Benin use such an opportunity to allow for the massive importation of the goods that are contrabands in Nigeria (Golub and Mbaye, 2019). These goods eventually find their way into Nigeria and pose a serious security threat to its socio-economic development while on the other hand, increasing the national income of Benin and providing more employment opportunities for its citizens.

Due to the benefits, it enjoyed from these trading systems, the Benin authority operates a lower tax regime in such a way that whenever the Nigerian state reduces its tax on a particular good or bans the importation of the certain product, the Benin authorities deliberately reduce its import tax to entice Nigerian smugglers to buy and smuggle the goods into Nigeria. This made many traders prefer the Cotonou port to the Lagos port. This made traders see double opportunities;

efficient port and low tax heaven (AFDB/OECD, 2006; Eagle online, May 31, 2018). Although this may be regarded as competitive strategies, however, for a government that allows illegal and dangerous goods to move into its neighbour's territory with no restriction, such a state is but a dangerous neighbour. Benin and Niger republics are known for showing little concern over what goes into Nigeria as long as the goods are cleared at their own ends. This contributes to the success of smuggling across the Nigerian borderlands.

It is in respect to the above discussion that the Nigerian state has several times closed its border with Benin and Niger republic to curtail the excesses of smuggling across its borders.

Conclusion

The study employs the Social Network Analysis to examine the operational network of smuggling along the North-Western borderlands of Nigeria. Specifically, the study is conducted along Illela, Kamba, Dole-Kaina and Lolo of Sokoto and Kebbi states. It identifies the different actors within the network and the function performs by each in the overall success of the activity. The study identifies the traders, the currency exchangers, the brokers, the transporters, the informants, the border communities, compromised security agents and the Nigeria's immediate neighbours of Benin and Niger republic as the main actors facilitating smuggling activities across the Nigerian borders.

The study identifies the traders, currency exchangers and compromised customs officers as actors with the highest level of eigenvector centrality because only through them are all smuggling activities possible. Brokers are identified as the actors with the highest level of betweenness because they are connected to virtually every actor within the network. Border communities, transporters and informants have the highest level of closeness due to their closeness with virtually all actors and their ability to transmit information quickly. The Nigeria's immediate borders of Benin and Niger republic are identified with weak centrality largely because with or without them smuggling is still flourish along the borders of the states.

Based on the foregoing, the study concluded that the widespread smuggling activities in the area is likely to continue to be on the rise and is less likely to drop anytime soon. This is because most of the smuggling actors are inhabitants of the borderlands and live very close to the borderline and therefore understand the border geography. The border is also their source of livelihood and importantly, they have built personal relationships with border security agents. This allows for easy collaboration between border security agents and some of these actors. The resultant effect is more smuggling.

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