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ECOWAS Protocol on Migration, Porous Borders and Dynamics of Armed Banditry in Nigeria

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Abstract

The dialectics that have led to an explosion of free movement of persons within ECOWAS borders largely constitute a new dimension of security threats in the region. The security threats emanating from incessant human migration within the region have predictably distorted the security architecture of Nigeria, thereby posing colossal pressures on the Nigerian armed forces, as well as leading to the loss of human lives, properties, and financial resources. The study investigated how ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and porous borders in the West African region orchestrate armed banditry in Nigeria. The work was anchored on the Qualitative-Descriptive method of analysis, and ‘inelastic political will’ was adopted as an analytical construct that explains the inability of ECOWAS member governments as well as the Nigerian government to employ sustainable strategies in tackling the ever-changing security threat dimensions within the region. It was revealed that chaotic and explosive cross-border migration of persons in West Africa has a relationship with the new dimension of armed banditry in Nigeria. The study recommended that the ECOWAS framework that promotes the free movement of people be reviewed and amended to address current security crises in the region. Also, there is a need for the Nigerian government to reinforce viable and strong diplomatic ties with the neighboring countries such as Benin, Chat, Niger, and Cameroon regarding border infrastructure development and security enhancement mechanisms to cover ungoverned spaces in the Chad Basin Region.

Keywords: Porous Borders, ECOWAS Protocol, Human Movement, Armed Banditry, Transnational Crime

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Introduction

The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment encourages ECOWAS member states to remove obstacles to free movement of persons, services, and capital (ECOWAS, 1979). The establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 by the newly independent states within the sub-region was made manifest by virtually autocratic governments, Nigeria inclusive. The emergence of these new states in the African region gave rise to what seemed to be new socio-political and economic challenges that confronted the continent. For years, dealing with historical contradictions in African nations has more or less remained problematic. Empirical studies have shown that there have been acute internal human security crises bedevilling national economies especially in the post-cold War African states and beyond. Obikaeze and Ifeanyichukwu (2016), argue that the pervasiveness of terrorism, intra-state conflicts, and transnational crime in Africa has continued to pose a colossal threat to regional peace and security in Africa in the post-Cold War world order.

In strict terms, the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the West African sub-region has often attracted public discourse, especially in the 21st century where domestic problems trigger cross-border human migration. As push-pull theory argues that possible negative phenomenal situations are likely to drive people out from their original inhabitations to more human security friendly environment(s). For instance, governance deficits in virtually all the ECOWAS member states have remained one of the explanatory factors sabotaging the architectural structure of effective and efficient management of available scarce resources. Hence, unemployment, poverty, and hunger; pervasive internal conflicts; the emergence of violent non-state actors; insecurity of lives; as well as the struggle for survival have affected peace and security. For instance, political tension, terrorism, and wars have forced people to move within countries or abroad in search of basic safety and security (Adepoju, 2008). Sadly, creating an escape route to the challenges remains far-fetched, the unofficial movement of people continues to grow astronomically within ECOWAS.

Population explosion in Africa and West Africa in particular left much to be desired. Africa is projected to have the largest population growth of any geographical region by 2050, which, perhaps has far-reaching consequences for the international migration regime, and major implications for the continent's economic development (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2018). Specifically, internal human migration in ECOWAS has posed further human security challenges in the entire region. Sadly, the inadequate border security system in West Africa has led to immense unofficial movement of persons within and outside the region. For instance, in 2015, 52% (18 million) of the 34 million African-born migrants lived within Africa (United Nations, 2015). In 2016, Gonzalez-Garcia et al. (2016) stated that Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Nigeria are the leading destination countries hosting 2.3, 2, and 0.9 million African migrants respectively. Today, it is a fact that the human migration trend remains in the upward curve due to internal contradictions in ECOWAS member states.

Confronted with security threats and instability in West Africa, it seems that inadequate political attention has been given by ECOWAS member states to effectively and sustainably review the community's migration Protocol and institutionalise policy frameworks that are geared towards providing lasting solutions to transnational organised crime in the region. Aside from this, it appears that the behavioural governance patterns in Nigeria have demonstrated 'inelastic political will' in its policy and legislative framework towards protecting the porous Nigerian borders and its citizenry. Nigeria has one of the most porous borders in the world with 4,047 km (Hoffmann et al., 2015).

There have been several studies on the dimensions of transnational crimes and dynamics of armed insecurity in Nigeria, which argue that human migration has contributed different forms of criminal activities in Nigeria (Obikaeze, Inah & Efanodor-Obeten, 2021), the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Tar, 2021), increasing rates of ungoverned spaces (Lenshie, 2018), weak governance system and fragility of the Nigerian state (Okoli and Lenshie, 2018), conspiracy of the political elites in Nigeria (Kifordu, 2010; Mbah et al., 2017). Although, these pieces of extant literature focus on the border security and security situations in Nigeria, they overlook how ECOWAS has failed to galvanize collective efforts to tackle transboundary insecurity in the regions, which has possibly impinged on the ability of Nigerian government to surmount cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria. Thus, this study is set out to close this gap. The cross-border security-related challenges of the Protocol such as illegal trans-border arms trading and banditry tend to undermine the national security of ECOWAS member states. (Idris, 2022). This study, in this regard, is generally aimed at interrogating how cross-border movement of people in ECOWAS has posed a security threat to Nigeria. Specifically, this study is set out to examine the nexus between unregulated human migration orchestrated by porous borders and the rising armed banditry in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Organized Transnational Crimes

Organised crime has been identified as a major threat to West African economies and politics as well as global peace (Koroma, Diallo, Gueye and Ikoh, 2013). Transnational organised crime has continued to remain an issue of global concern, and a major security threat in West Africa. There are many forms of transnational organized crime perpetrated in Africa - from human, drug, and wildlife trafficking to natural resource theft and poaching; piracy; and smuggling of licit and counterfeit goods (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020). Although, there is no generally accepted definition of organized crime, but several illegal activities conducted by organized groups or networks of people over time and for-profit are considered to be organised crimes (Shaw, 2017). The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Convention), defines transnational organized crime as 'a structured group of three or more persons, existing for some time and acting in concert committing to one or more serious crimes or offenses ... to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or another material benefit' (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-UNODC, 2014). The term 'structured group' currently seems

to be overtaken by the new dimension of transnational organised crimes. Briscoe, Perdomo, and Uribe (2014) argue that the new structures of these groups tend to be diffuse, informal, and horizontal, so the notion of networks (rather than structured groups) is increasingly gaining traction. By and large, group networks (structured or unstructured) have an international operation, and organized crime is considered 'transnational' (Dordevic, 2009). Simply put, organized crime becomes transnational when networked activities are cut across official territorial boundaries.

Regardless of the perspective organised transnational crime is understood, the bottom line is that the problems it has caused West Africa, Nigeria inclusive, are manifold, as Bevan, et al. (2013) argue that some, like fraudulent medicines, may pose a greater threat to public safety than illicit drugs; others, like firearms trafficking, make violent uprisings possible; and others, like petro-piracy, could blossom to become much greater problems than the situation currently reflects. Nonetheless, transnational organised crimes like armed robbery, cattle rustling, and kidnapping appear to be overlooked.

Theoretical Perspective

The study adopts theory of collective action. The foundation work of collective action theory is in Mancur Olson's book entitled: *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Olson, 1965). The theory argues that any group of individuals attempting to provide a public good has troubles to do so efficiently. Individuals have incentives to "free-ride" on the efforts of others in certain groups. This understanding of collective action is rationalist, focusing on material incentives, strategic interactions, cost-benefit calculations, logic of consequences, relative gains, and individualist rationality, in the provision of public goods. The notion of collective action permeates the neo-liberal institutional (or contractual) approach to international and regional organisations. A key element of Olson's theory is the problem of exploitation of the strong by the weak or free riding. Nobody is interested in bearing the expenses for development and success of the group; instead everyone is trying to profit from the public good. The problem of collective action can only be resolved by a hegemon, because only a hegemon can provide all states with public goods while accepting sacrifices, thereby willingly nurturing free riders (Acharya, 2012).

There is lack of a hegemon in the case of ECOWAS. Collective action in managing unregulated migration crisis in the region is lacking. Many members refrain from taking full responsibility in sharing the burden confronting the region. Free movement of persons in the ECOWAS has remained a significant migration framework, but taking responsibility by member states to curb the negative effects of migration in West Africa is yet to be realized. Collective action to confront unregulated migration, and its consequences is not in the horizon. Thus, effective management of transboundary criminal activities has remained a mirage. Waltz in Harris (2007), reaffirms that: "collective efforts are needed if common

problems are to be solved or somehow managed." He acknowledges that "global problems can be solved by no nation singly, only by a number of nations working together."

Unregulated cross-border migration in the region has posed a great threat to security building in Nigeria. The multiplier effects of free movement of persons have been colossal. Cross-border crimes perpetrated by transnational criminals have become an issue the Nigerian government must independently face. Other member countries of ECOWAS seem to perceive cross-border crimes in Nigeria as a problem that does not concern them.

ECOWAS Framework on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment

The ECOWAS Protocol that supports the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment was established in the ECOWAS Treaty which encourages ECOWAS member states to abolish obstacles to the free movement of persons, services, and capital (ECOWAS, 1979). In line with the African Union (AU) migration framework, the protocol expressly supports the migration of people within the sub-region. Specifically, the ECOWAS protocol is generally aimed at ensuring the free movement of ECOWAS citizens from their countries of origin to other parts of ECOWAS without hindrances. To achieve this, the protocol attempted to abolish any form of migration obstacles within ECOWAS by placing emphasis on the right of residence and establishment. By and large, there are three-phased approaches to achieving this, namely; (i) the right of entry and abolition of visas; (ii) the right of residence; and (iii) the right of establishment. In fact, the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 was aimed mainly to unify West African countries as an economic community. To achieve this, certain policy frameworks were put in place by the 16 sovereign member states of ECOWAS, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The free movement of persons of member states is promoted as an agenda for economic cooperation and regional integration. Thus, borders within ECOWAS are relatively porous, thereby posing a security threat.

According to the protocol, any citizen of ECOWAS who holds a valid travel document and international health certificate can visit another member state for up to 90 days under the free visa requirement. To facilitate the free movement of people, the protocol also includes the movement of vehicles for the transportation of persons. Accordingly, private vehicles are allowed to enter the territory of another member state and remain for a maximum of 90 days, if the following is provided: a valid driver's licence, ownership certificate, and insurance policy, and an international customs carnet recognised in the community. Commercial vehicles are allowed to enter the territory of another member state for a maximum of 15 days and all the documents stated under private vehicles must be presented. Commercial vehicles are not allowed to engage in commercial activities while in the territory of a member state other than their own. The protocol also reserves the right of member

states to refuse entry to community citizens belonging to the category of inadmissible immigrants (Abebe, 2017).

Accordingly, achieving the above-stated protocol as advanced by ECOWAS is predicated on four adopted supplementary protocols namely:

- I. Supplementary Protocol on the Code of Conduct for the Implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment (1985)
- II. Supplementary Protocol on the Second Phase (Right of Residence) (1986)
- III. Supplementary Protocol Amending and Complementing the Provisions of Article 7 of the Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Establishment (1989)
- IV. Supplementary Protocol on the Implementation of the Third Phase (Right to Establishment) (1990).

However, Nigeria's involvement in the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 has been a major development in integrating West African countries. Various protocols have been instituted and all countries have ratified the protocols but the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment has caused widespread condemnation owing to embedded challenges. The protocol allows easy movement of people from one place to another without difficulties but through this, people easily carry with them weapons, drugs, and on getting to their destinations, cause havoc. It gives room for the establishment of companies and citizens can live peacefully without any problems. The essence of the protocol is to improve the relationship that exists between West African countries in terms of trade, commerce, politics, and social events among others. However, it has been argued that the protocol has adverse effects apart from creating a free room for movement, criminals have availed themselves of this initiative to perpetrate their nefarious activities (Mobolaji & Alabi, 2017). These have a lot of implications for the security of the sub-region. There has been a threat to the security of lives and properties as weapons are readily available as a result of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons through ECOWAS borders (Opanike, 2015).

Irregular Migration in the ECOWAS Region and Cross Border Armed Banditry in Nigeria

The 2020 Human Freedom Index shows that Nigeria ranks 131 out of 162 countries in terms of security and safety (Vásquez and McMahon, 2020). In the same vein, the 2022 Global Terrorism Index ranks Nigeria as the sixth most terror-impacted country in the world (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). Owing to suspected cross-border armed banditry and terrorism in the ECOWAS region, Nigerian government has in the past attempted to adopt a policy action to reduce the adverse consequences of transboundary criminalities in Nigeria. For instance, between 2019 and 2020, the Nigerian government restricted free movement of persons within Nigerian borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

(Kwarkye & Matongbada, 2021). Despite this measure failed to yield the expected outcome (Ogbonna, Lenshie & Nwangwu, 2023).

Extant explanations of the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria are varied, ranging from arms proliferation, ungoverned spaces, state repression, governance failure and state fragility, elite conspiracy, contradictions of the Nigerian political economy, low-level inter-agency collaboration, and intelligence sharing to ineffective implementation of relevant regional protocols in West Africa (Ogbonna, et al., 2023: 306).

According to the study conducted by Ogbonna et al (2023), a security expert who granted them interview explained that external factors, which include the inflow of small arms and light weapons, the influx of fighters and terrorists who stream(ed) into Nigeria through the Sahel, as well as increases in border porosity are responsible for insecurity in Nigeria. He further argued that despite the fact that there are external factors responsible for insecurity in Nigeria, internal governance failure in Nigeria has reinforced the externally-induced security challenges in the country. Governance failure in Nigeria has manifested in several folds, and has replicated significantly within security agencies in Nigeria. The porous nature of the borders is compounded by inadequate border security personnel, poor logistics, obsolete surveillance facilities, and corruption among the border security agencies (Idris, 2022). This position is in line with Adebayo's argument, who maintains that Nigeria's Immigration and Customs officials are sabotaging the land border closure policy by taking bribes from motorcyclists carrying illicit goods through illegal routes (Adebayo, 2020). Arguably, the porous borders and ungoverned spaces thesis are sometimes created by government officials at different levels. Therefore, it is further argued that the unregulated migration in the ECOWAS region is enabled by internal governance failures both at the regional and state levels. For instance, Bish et al. (2022) maintain that some of the firearms that proliferate in Nigeria are smuggled from places like Chad, Libya, Mali, and Niger. They enter into Nigeria through Northern Nigeria, especially, North East, Nigeria. This justifies the reinforcement of external and internal factors that militate against internal security, and empower armed banditry in the country. The activities of bandits, kidnappers, terrorists, and other violent non-state illegal groups have continued unabated due to illicit and smuggled fire arms, thereby exacerbating crime and violence in Nigeria (del Mercado, 2022).

Armed banditry and insecurity in Africa, and Nigeria in particular have historical antecedents. As a result of lingering insecurity in the ECOWAS region, international criminal organizations (ICOs) in West Africa, or crimes perpetrated by West Africans elsewhere in the world, have being a matter of major international concern (Ezeanyika and Ubah, 2012) Criminality is most noticeable in the areas of armed robbery, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and fraud, and, there is the regionalisation of armed banditry in ECOWAS. For instance, it was alleged that some criminal gangs in northern Nigeria have included demobilized ex-combatant groups from neighbouring countries (Vines, 2004). In

Sierra Leone too, demobilized fighters are recorded as forming armed gangs such as the West Side Boys who may possibly receive firearms from the regular armed forces. This is also the case with the Guinea-Bissauans, Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and Senegalese gendarmerie reports groups of up to 15, armed with automatic weapons, involved in trans-border criminal activities (Ezeanyika and Ubah, 2012). This takes place in Casamance but also close to the northern borders with Mali and Mauritania. These transnational criminal groups in the region are involved in cattle rustling, smuggling, and armed robbery, etc. For example, between 2000 and 2003, the Senegalese authorities, prosecuted 2,400 members of crime groups, 1,500 charged with armed robbery, 600 with cattle rustling, and 300 for smuggling (Niang, 2004). In Benin, there is also a multinational criminal gang Hamani Tidjani that specializes in car-jacking and car theft in several West African countries, as well as Nigeria-based oil bunkering syndicates that are highly international, including but not limited to Moroccans, Venezuelans, Lebanese, French and Russians (Ezeanyika and Ubah, 2012). In fact, oil bunkering is another notorious pattern of transnational organized crime in recent years, and has been a colossal threat to the socio-economic and security environment in Nigeria. Of course, it suffices to know that illegal firearms trafficking has also posed enormous threats to Nigeria's national security, and has undoubtedly fuelled ethnic/religious armed conflicts as well as armed robbery in Nigeria. This scenario has resulted in monumental security challenges with far-reaching implications. Firearms trafficking is believed to have a close relationship with armed robbery perpetrated by holders in possession of illicit arms.

The global drug trafficking market was worth US\$426 billion to \$652 billion in 2014. It represents about one-third of the total retail value of transnational crimes. This market was worth US\$1.7 billion to \$3.5 billion in 2014, which represents 10 to 20 percent of the legal arms trade. Twenty-one million men, women, and children around the world are currently thought to be victims of human trafficking, which the International Labour Organization estimates generates US\$150.2 billion in profits each year. The Asia-Pacific region is responsible for US\$51.8 billion of this market, with around 11.7 million victims. Developed Economies and the European Union are responsible for another third of the market value with US\$46.9 billion, even though there are "only" 1.5 million victims, one-eighth as many as the Asia-Pacific region. Organ trafficking conservatively generates approximately US\$840 million to \$1.7 billion annually from around 12,000 illegal transplants. This estimate comprises the "sales" of the top five organs: kidney, liver, heart, lung, and pancreas. Crude oil theft is estimated to be worth at least US\$5.2 billion to US\$11.9 billion annually as of 2015. However, this only includes data from six countries: Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico, Syria, Russia, and Nigeria, all of which have high levels of theft as well as available statistics. Nigeria has in recent years been the epicenter of worldwide crude oil theft (May and Clough, 2017).

Trans-border armed robbery activities have severely been reported in Nigeria, and the robbers take advantage of the porous borders to specialize in the theft of cars (Koroma, Diallo, Gueye and Ikoh, 2013). In Benin, armed bandits usually target government vehicles used to convey staff salaries.

In a report by the UNODC, some criminal gangs in Nigeria which include ex-combatants from the neighbouring countries engage in highway robbery and dispossess Nigerians of their expensive cars, and then move across the border to Niger or Chad where the vehicles are either dismantled and sold as spare parts or wholly sold to unsuspecting customers. Nigerians also suffered from the activities of Hammani Tidjani's criminal gang from the Republic of Benin. Tidjani and his gang specialized in carjacking and theft. The gang would move into Nigeria in a convoy and rob Nigerians of their cars and thereafter move back to their base in Benin. For several years, the gang operated unhindered because of collaboration with security officials in the Benin Republic. Before Tidjani, there was another trans-border armed robbery gang led by Shina Rambo who also had his operation base in Benin Republic (Koroma, Diallo, Gueye and Ikoh, 2013).

The challenge of piracy and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea threatens Nigeria's national security as well as regional stability (Adetula, 2015). In this regard, as advanced by the author, Nigeria has shown commitment to working with other countries within the West African sub-region to address the menace of transnational criminality including smuggling, human trafficking, and cross-border banditry. He further maintains that it is observed that Nigeria's security agencies have been grappling with the incidents of arms smuggling, armed banditry, and human trafficking along the country's 773-kilometre (460-mile) Cotonou-Badagry road. However, Adetula (2015) submits that:

While the collective efforts of Nigeria and other West and Central African states at combating transnational organised crime and the spread of terrorism are yielding some gains, lack of political will, bad governance, and poorly equipped and motivated military and security agencies, coupled with other problems such as the porosity of borders and non-involvement of the people continue to inhibit real progress. For example, some of the regional initiatives toward curbing transnational criminality and addressing security threats lack the required financial resources.

According to Eme (2018), the prevalent view, however, is that it stems from a multiplicity of sources that aggregate to a complex dimension of no love lost amongst the security agencies. The escalating incidences of clashes amongst these security agencies in Nigeria pose the complex question of who guards the guards. This stems from the fact that while the security agencies paradoxically abdicate their statutory responsibility of securing life and property to dissipating their professional skills and material resources in prosecuting debilitating acrimonious rancour, the society that depends so much on them is invariably exposed to the vagaries of security threats (Eme, 2018). Beyond this very deficiency, there

appears to be an obvious lack of ‘political will’ by politicians to face the challenges posed by Nigeria’s porous borders seriously. Corruption and other primordial variables have remained factors sabotaging the security of Nigeria, especially in the areas of trans-border organised armed banditry, human and arms trafficking, oil bunkering, piracy, etc.

Crime overtook political and religious issues as the most important cause of lethal violence in Nigeria in 2018, with 3,425 fatalities recorded in 1,191 incidents (Ukoji, Ayodokun & Eze, 2021). Further, Zamfara state was most hit with fatalities from lethal criminal incidents as it recorded 896 victims, seconded by Kaduna state with 262 casualties. Both states are from the North-West region which has largely been ravaged by banditry and cattle rustling. Lagos State came third in the ranking with 225 fatalities as it witnessed numerous incidents of cultism, domestic violence, hooliganism, and extra-judicial killings. States with the least lethal crime incidents included Yobe, Borno, and Gombe states, all in the North East. Other causes of lethal violence in 2018 included land issues (2,106 fatalities), cattle grazing (1,867 fatalities), and road accidents (1,302 fatalities).

Largely, the rate of trans-border crime in ECOWAS has arguably taken the place of political and religious issues as a major cause of violent death in Nigeria. Kidnapping, cultism, and armed robbery have remained a threat to peace and security across the 36 states of Nigeria. Out of 3,425 fatalities caused by criminal incidents, banditry resulted in 930 across 15 states, with Zamfara (714) and Kaduna (100) states accounting for over half of the total (Vanguard, 2019). The situation in Zamfara and other northern state have defied the government’s efforts to overcome it. In the Nigerian government’s efforts to combat armed banditry, it drafted Special Armed Forces which provided alternative means of fighting crimes. In 2018, there was a special security formation outfit that jointly combined various security-providing services including the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force, and the Nigerian Navy. Also, the State Security Service, the Nigeria Police, and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps combat banditry, especially in Zamfara which the study classifies as a crime zone state.

The situation is further exacerbated by the existence of largely unregulated borders and ungoverned spaces in the region. For instance, border areas between Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin are under-policed. The porous nature of these borders serves as veritable aid to the cross-border movement of criminals. Further, has been argued that illicit small firearms from post-Gadhafi Libya and other parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel regions have found their way into ECOWAS through the porous borders exploited by criminal syndicates.

Conclusion

The dialectics of human migration, a new dimension of security threats, and the attendant synthetic approaches by the ECOWAS, as well as the Nigerian government, have pointed to the “inelastic political will” of both regional and national governments to sustainably

tackle cross-border crimes. The phenomenal diversities and complexities of the West African region in the post-colonial era are quite worrisome. The region has for decades experienced a trinity of military incursions, civil wars, and institutionalised corruption. In this regard, Bauer and Taylor (2005) noted that West Africa, a region that has seen more than its share of tragedy and upheaval in four decades of independence, and a historically volatile region. Today, in this 21st century, the free movement of persons across national borders as promoted by the ECOWAS Protocol has more or less been a phenomenon that has continued to impact the security architecture and composition of the different ECOWAS member states, Nigeria inclusive. Sadly, Nigeria has in serious terms taken its share of this phenomenon.

In light of this, the current study has drawn a connection between the porosity of West African borders and the ills of criminal activities in Nigeria. In this study, the impacts of border insecurity in the region have been theoretically and empirically examined and the trends and patterns of human migration investigated. The study reveals that human migration in West Africa has largely led to trans-border crime, thereby posing colossal security challenges through armed banditry. In specifics, kidnapping and armed robbery have become a pervasive trend in Nigeria. For instance, the current criminal activities in the North East and North West in Nigeria and other regional crises are claimed to be as a result of the unregulated movement of persons and illegal movement of small firearms to Nigeria. Although there are conflicting sentiments on the dimension of armed banditry in the country, there seems to be a consensus agreement among scholars and policymakers that the fragmented bandit groups do not have any form of political interests rather; their activities are fundamentally tied to their quest for economic survival through illegal and criminal means.

Recommendations

International relations within the ECOWAS region are to some extent cordial and coordinated, though not without some identifiable contradictions. Thus, the relationship that exists among the ECOWAS countries is expected to entrench sustainable security architecture that can withstand both internal and external security challenges. However, the protocol that promotes free movement of persons and materials within the region has by implication encouraged unofficial and illegal movements of persons through the natural and porous borders in West Africa.

It is within this premise that the study recommends that, considering the volatility of the region it is timely for the ECOWAS members to demonstrate strong political will to redefine the ECOWAS framework on the movement of persons within the region. Hence, the Protocol that offers free movement of people is suggested to be amended in a manner that can empower member states of ECOWAS to protect their borders against illegal movements.

In addition, the study suggests that the Nigerian government has the option of redefining its relationship and partnership with neighbouring countries in terms of infrastructure development. In this case, there is a need for the government of Nigeria to develop a strong tie, through its foreign policy goals, with neighbouring countries such as Benin, Chat, Niger, and Cameroon regarding infrastructure development and security enhancement. It is observed that poor infrastructure development facilitates the free movement of criminals who move from one country to another. For instance, inadequate security lights at the borders can facilitate the unregulated movement of persons who may attempt to smuggle dangerous weapons and other small arms.

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