

SECURITY DYNAMICS AND TRANSBORDER COOPERATION IN NIGERIA-CAMEROON BORDERLANDS, 1950-2024

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Abstract

This study examines the complex dynamics of transborder cooperation and security along the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands, a region historically shaped by colonial legacies, contested boundaries, and deep-rooted socio-cultural ties. The historical relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon, marked by the Bakassi Peninsula dispute and subsequent diplomatic resolutions, continues to influence bilateral interactions and border management. Security issues in the area are diverse, including insurgency, arms trafficking, smuggling, and communal conflicts, worsened by porous borders and limited government presence. The presence of armed groups such as Boko Haram and other non-state actors has exacerbated instability, undermining efforts at cross-border collaboration and threatening the safety of local populations. Data for the study were gathered from primary and secondary sources. The study emphasised the phenomenal rise in criminality and illegalities in the form of smuggling of small arms and light weapons, human trafficking, and prostitution, as well as other forms of illicit transborder activities in the area. These activities have generated serious security concerns not only for border communities but also for national economies astride the international boundary. Despite these problems, there are opportunities for stronger cooperation through joint security patrols, regional frameworks like the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and community-based peacebuilding efforts. However, effective transborder collaboration faces obstacles such as institutional weaknesses, mistrust, differing national interests, and inadequate infrastructure. The study concludes by emphasising the need for harmonised border policies, better intelligence sharing, and inclusive stakeholder engagement to promote sustainable peace and development.

Keywords: Border Security, Transnational Crime, Cooperation Mechanisms, Community Relations, and Regional Stability

Introduction

This study examines transboundary cooperation and security dynamics along the Nigeria-Cameroon border from 1950 to 2024. Border security is crucial for protecting a nation's security and sovereignty from potential threats. Its main goal is to control and monitor the movement of people across borders, reducing illegal trade and transportation of goods and individuals. Uzoma and Eudora stated that the border acts as the first line of defence against terrorism and is the ultimate safeguard of a nation's territorial integrity.¹ A country's ability to define and secure its borders largely influences its capacity to build stable and peaceful societies within its territory. Under international law, nation-states are recognised based on their ability to secure their borders and protect their citizens.² Nigeria, covering about 923,768 square kilometres, has 36,450 kilometres of land and maritime borders in the Gulf of Guinea, sharing borders with Benin to the West, Niger and Chad to the North, and Cameroon to the northeast and south-south. Additionally, Nigeria shares lake borders with Chad and Niger, and maritime borders with the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. The extensive size of Nigeria's borders emphasises the critical need for effective management and control to ensure national security.

The trans-border security relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon highlights a critical aspect of regional cooperation aimed at addressing shared security challenges. Due to their geographical proximity and the movement of people, goods, and ideas across their borders, Nigeria

¹D. N., Uzoma, and Eudora U. O., Border Security and National Security in Nigeria, *South East Journal of Political Science* 2(2), 2016: 214 – 225.

²W. Okunu, *Border Management and Security in Africa*. Accessed online at:<https://www.researchgate.net/file>. Accessed on 14/09/2025.

and Cameroon have developed a long-standing history of interconnectivity. This relationship presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in terms of security. The extensive and porous border between Nigeria and Cameroon has created an environment conducive to various trans-border security concerns. These concerns include, but are not limited to, cross-border criminal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, arms trafficking, drug trade, and the movement of extremist groups. As a result, both countries have recognised the need for collaborative efforts to combat these threats and to promote stability in the region.

Scholarly literature has shown that the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands have long been a site of complex interactions shaped by colonial legacies, ethnic affiliations, and evolving geopolitical interests of both Nigeria and Cameroon. From 1950 to 2024, this region has witnessed fluctuating patterns of transborder cooperation and security challenges, ranging from informal trade and cultural exchanges to insurgency, smuggling, and contested territorial claims.³ The objective of this study is to critically examine the historical trajectory and contemporary dynamics of transborder cooperation and security in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands, with a particular focus on how local, national, and international actors have influenced these processes.

Methodologically, the study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, combining archival research, oral history, and field interviews with stakeholders, including border communities, security personnel, and policy experts. It also utilises geopolitical analysis and conflict mapping to trace the evolution of security threats and cooperative frameworks over time. The study draws on both primary and secondary sources to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay

³M. O. Ejor, "Cross-border Criminality in the Cross River (Nigeria) and Southwest Cameroon Border Region, 1950-2010." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, 2018, p.41.

between state policies, regional integration efforts (such as ECOWAS and ECCAS), and grassroots initiatives.

The study covers the period 1950-2024, enabling a longitudinal analysis of key events, including the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, Boko Haram insurgency spillovers, and recent joint border patrols. It covers both formal and informal mechanisms of cooperation and conflict resolution, emphasising the role of local agencies alongside state and international interventions. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to policy debates on border governance, regional security, and sustainable peacebuilding in West-Central Africa.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands, stretching over 1,500 kilometres, represent a complex geopolitical space marked by porous boundaries, ethnic affiliations that transcend national borders, and persistent security challenges. Despite formal agreements and regional frameworks aimed at fostering transborder cooperation, the area remains vulnerable to insecurity driven by insurgency, smuggling, human trafficking, and communal conflicts. The presence of armed groups such as Boko Haram and other non-state actors has exacerbated instability, undermining efforts at cross-border collaboration and threatening the safety of local populations.

Limited resources, weak institutional coordination, and divergent national interests have often hampered efforts by both Nigeria and Cameroon to enhance border security. Moreover, the lack of trust between border communities and state security forces further complicates intelligence sharing and joint operations. While regional bodies like the Lake Chad Basin Commission and ECOWAS have promoted cooperative security initiatives, implementation remains inconsistent and reactive rather than strategic. This study examines the evolving dynamics of transborder cooperation and security in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands, identifying institutional, socio-

political, and operational barriers to effective collaboration. It will also investigate the role of local actors, traditional institutions, and international partners in shaping security outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing sustainable policies that balance national sovereignty with regional stability and human security.

However, due to the uniqueness of the area, this study examines three broad areas of human trafficking, smuggling of goods, and smuggling of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) for the period 1950 to 2024. The choice of the period is purposeful and essential because it marked the era in which transborder crimes grew with intensity in the borderlands, with significant security consequences. During this period, there was a global political convulsion that culminated in the Second World War, resulting in the capture of German Kameroun by Anglo-French forces. The British captured the area housing the German plantation, and one of the challenges of the British occupation was a shortage of labour, which led them to adopt policies that favoured immigration to Southern Cameroon. Thus, by 1954, the British policy in Southwest Cameroon encouraged Eastern Nigerians to migrate in their thousands to take advantage of the smuggling of migrant labourers across the border, to work in the hitherto German plantations, colonial firms, the civil service, or to engage in petty trading; hence, the boundary did not function at this period as a barrier. Although criminality is prevalent across all Nigerian borderlands, this work is limited to the Cross River (Nigeria)-South-west Cameroon border region, covering eight local government areas in Cross River State: Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Boki, Calabar, Etung, Ikom, and Obanliku. The South-west province of the Republic of Cameroon, comprising Bafoussam, Foumban, Mbouda, Bafang, and Bandjoun, serves as a melting pot for criminal activity.

Nigeria-Cameroon Historical Relations

Nigeria and Cameroon are located on the western coast of the African continent. Both countries shared a common experience as part of British West Africa; they both enjoyed peace as members of the conservative group of African states, which formed the Monrovia group shortly after Independence in 1960.⁴ In fact, Omede observed that although the two states were separated, they remained ordinary people, particularly those in the border towns.⁵ He gave a clearer picture of the situation in the following words: The frontier-line inhabitants are duly associated not by colonial effort but through ethnic affiliation. Rather, the creation of the colonial state disheartened its brethren.

In the same vein, Njoku posited that: The permanent presence of a population with a common historical experience, and of the ethnocultural stock on both sides of the ostensible international divide, is one of the natural features that defined Nigeria-Cameroon relations.⁶. The fact here is that ethnic groups and sub-groups of Nigerian extraction cut across the Nigeria-Cameroon international boundary. For instance, the Ibibio, Efik, Ejagham, and Boki are ethnic groups and subgroups in Nigeria that inhabit the boundary between the two nation-states. Other ethnic groups found along the border between the two countries include the Ejagham and Boki of the Manyu division. These ethnic groups are divided between Nigeria and Cameroon.⁷ The Ejagham-Nigeria are located in the Nchang area, close to Mamfe town, extending to Ikom-Nigeria. In the north, they (Ejagham) also extend from Agbokim on the Cross River to the Oban Hills and

⁴F. Okoro *Understanding Nigerian Foreign Policy*. Calabar: CAIS Publishers, 2002, p.38

⁵A. J. Omade, Nigeria's Relations with Her Neighbours, Kamla-Ref 2006, Study Trobids 4(1), 2006, p. 69

⁶N. L. Njoku, Neither Cameroon nor Nigeria: We Belong Here. The Bakassi Kingdom and the Dilemma of Boundaries and Co-existence in Post-Colonial Africa. *Africana*, 2012: 183 – 209.

⁷ Barildum, K. Nigeria-Cameroon Diplomatic Relations: Dynamics, Challenges and Strategic Options, *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, Kampala International University, 6(3): 127–134.

Calabar at the estuary of the Cross River. The analysis of Pemunta on the Nigeria-Cameroon ethnic link is clear and precise. He noted thus:

... that Ejagham and Bayangs have similar socioeconomic and political institutions with a standard historical connection to the outside world by virtue of their trans-border location on the Cameroon-Nigeria border.⁸

Again, there are the Anyang and the Keyaka-Ekoi people, consisting of the Obang, Ekwe, and Keaka, with ethnic associations to those within Nigeria.⁹ In the same vein, the Kanuri of Nigeria and those of Cameroon are also related. The close ethnic affinities of these border communities are such that they share deities and totems, ancestral shrines and major rites, and virtual and annual festivals, which they all participate in despite the artificial colonial boundaries that separate them. The adoption of this historical analytical perspective is necessitated by the fact that inquiring into some similar process in modern diplomatic relations and noting recurrent patterns serves as a guide to understanding the contemporary diplomatic behaviour of both countries.

Immediately after Independence in 1960, Cameroon-Nigeria relations shifted from pretentious friendship and cooperation to conflict, marked by mutual suspicion, distrust, and outright alienation. Southwest Cameroon was historically part of the Nigerian state, which should reciprocally maintain a cordial relationship with Nigeria, but, on the contrary, with the attainment of statehood, Cameroon's relationship with Nigeria became more conflictual to the bewilderment of many analysts. Ate could not hide his feeling when he noted that the contemporary experience of hostility is somewhat ironic and perplexing. From the pre-colonial through the colonial rule, most of the people and territories that presently constitute Nigeria's immediate neighbours were

⁸J. Ekpenyong, "Prospects and Constraints for Cameroon – Nigeria Socio-Economic Cooperation along the Eastern Border" in Asiwaju, A. I. (ed). *Development of Border Regions*. Lagos: Joe Talolu Press, 1993, p. 108.

⁹ F. Ntoi, The People of Ako: Migration and Settlement, Yaomde: Niva, 2023, p.33.

part and parcel of administrative state units within the territory of present-day Nigeria.¹⁰ Indeed, the respective peoples in these countries are ethnoculturally linked to a similar population. Bassey traced the shift in the Nigeria-Cameroon relationship to the Euro-African relationship. In this sense, the inconducive and long but ill-defined colonial border (1680 kilometres or 1050 miles) has been a source of conceptual and historical issues that have engaged the attention of scholars since the independence of Nigeria-Cameroon diplomatic relations.¹¹ The contested area: the Bakassi Peninsula, of about 1,000 kilometres of mangrove swamps and submerged islands, is of great economic value. With a large oil deposit and enormous seafood resources, the Bakassi Peninsula became a strategic and political, rather than legal, matter for both countries.¹²

Indeed, the shift in the relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon has been of historical proportions, especially with the colonial power's redefinition of the boundary, which led to a clash between tradition and modernity that continues to haunt the reality between the two countries in their contemporary diplomatic relations. The European imperial powers disguised their activities to acquire African territories under the pretentious toga of protectorate systems as the legal basis for much of their activities. This system effectively met the European powers' needs for a degree of control over their protectorate, excluding that of their rivals, while building a fragile peace among the local authorities.¹³ In the pre-colonial era, the contested Bakassi Peninsula was part of

¹⁰B. Ate, and E. Akintermwa (eds). *Nigeria and its Immediate Neighbours. Constraints and Prospects of Sub-Regional Security in the 1990s*. Lagos NIIA, 1992, p. 91.

¹¹J. R. Bassey, The Loss of Bakassi to Cameroon: A Study in Legal and Diplomatic History, *UNIUYO Journal of Commercial and Property Law*, 2010, p.48

¹²O. Akinyemo, Borders in Nigeria's Relations with Cameroon in F. Arts Humanities (IAII) 3(9), 2014: 13 – 20.

¹³ J. R. Bassey "The Loss of Bakassi to Cameroon: A Study in Legal and Diplomatic History." *UNIUYO Journal of Commercial and Property Law*, 2010:88-97

the ancient kingdom of Calabar (Nigeria), and in 1914, it was under British colonial rule. However, through a series of treaties with the Imperial powers, Britain ceded the territory to Germany first. It was later placed under the mandate of the League of Nations and the Trusteeship of the United Nations, overseen by France. The most crucial agreements with significant impact on the demarcation of the Nigeria-Cameroon border include:

- The Anglo-German Treaty
- The Anglo-German Protocol was signed in Obokum (sic) in 1913
- The Exchange of Letters between the British and the German government in 1914
- The endorsement in 1961 by both the United Nations General Assembly and the International Court of Justice for the plebiscite conducted in Northern and Southern Cameroon in 1961
- The diplomatic role, accompanied by a map, was dispatched to the government by Nigeria in 1962, accepting the result of the plebiscite.¹⁴

From the above, it is clear that Germany contributed significantly to the redefinition of boundaries in West Africa, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. Nicholas supported this position when he observed that:

The arrival of Germany in the region and its success in signing treaties with the Cameroon Kings of Akwa and Bell of Douala on July 14, 1884, set the tone for most of what is considered acceptable boundaries in the region. These treaties, in effect, proclaimed the German protectorate extending from the Rio del Rey area to Gabon.¹⁵

¹⁴Barildum, K. Nigeria-Cameroon Diplomatic Relations: Dynamics, Challenges and Strategic Options, *KIU Journal of Social Sciences, Kampala International University*, 6(3): 127–134

¹⁵ K. T. Nicholas, and B. Sam, “The Cameroon and Nigeria Negotiation Process over the Contested Oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula” *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 2(1), 2010: 77-83

It is interesting to note that at the time the 1884 treaty was signed, Bakassi was under the jurisdiction of the Efik Kingdom. Again, between 1893 and 1913, the Rio del Rey, which demarcated German Cameroon and the Nigeria Protectorate, indicated that Bakassi was part of Nigeria. According to Bassey, the 1884 treaty had several implications for Anglo-Efik relations and for Nigeria-Cameroon relations and diplomatic intercourse. On the Efik, the treaty recognised and encouraged British officials to interfere in the Efik people's internal politics. The treaty also bore on the conflict between the two countries.

Security Dynamics in Nigeria-Cameroon Borderland

The Nigeria-Cameroon borderland, stretching approximately 1,690 kilometres, has long been a zone of vibrant cultural exchanges, economic interaction, and geopolitical tension. From colonial legacies to contemporary security challenges, this region has evolved into a complex landscape where transboundary cooperation and conflict coexist. Over the decades, the border has become increasingly porous, facilitating not only legitimate movement but also illicit activities that threaten regional stability.

Historically, the colonial partitioning of Africa laid the foundation for many of the borderland challenges faced today. Arbitrary boundaries divided ethnic groups and communities, creating artificial separations that ignored cultural and linguistic continuities.¹⁶ Post-independence, Nigeria and Cameroon inherited these borders, which have mainly remained unmanned and under-resourced. With over 1,400 illegal routes compared to 84 official entry points, Nigeria's border

¹⁶ L. O. Adenipekun, National Security Policies of Nigeria and the Benin Republic as Strategies for Curbing Cross-border Crimes. *African Journal of Stability & Development*, 14(1&2), 37-72. Accessed online at: <https://doi.org/10.5398/ajsd.2022.140> 13/09/2025.

with Cameroon is particularly vulnerable to infiltration, smuggling, and unregulated migration.¹⁷

This porousness has made the region a hotspot for transnational criminal activities, including human trafficking, arms proliferation, and drug smuggling. Weak institutional structures, corruption, and lack of coordination among border security agencies exacerbate the problem, making effective surveillance and enforcement difficult.

One of the most pressing security threats in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland is insurgency, particularly the activities of Boko Haram and its splinter factions. Since its emergence in northeastern Nigeria in the early 2000s, Boko Haram has exploited the porous border to establish operational bases, recruit fighters, and evade military pressure. The group's ideology, rooted in anti-Western sentiment and radical Islamism, has found resonance among marginalised youth in border communities.¹⁸ The borderland's rugged terrain and limited state presence have provided Boko Haram with strategic advantages. Cross-border raids, kidnappings, and attacks on villages have become common, destabilising both Nigerian and Cameroonian territories. The group's expansion into Cameroon's Far North region has prompted joint military operations, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), involving troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.¹⁹ Despite these efforts, Boko Haram remains a persistent threat, adapting its tactics and exploiting governance gaps.

Other armed groups, including bandits and separatist militias, have also contributed to insecurity. In Cameroon, the Anglophone crisis has led to the rise of armed separatists seeking

¹⁷ J. Ekpenyong, "Prospects and Constraints for Cameroon – Nigeria Socio-Economic Cooperation along the Eastern Border" in Asiwaju, A. I. (ed). *Development of Border Regions*. Lagos: Joe Talolu Press, 1993, p.109.

¹⁸ M. Shehu and M. Abdurashid, Border Security and Transnational Threats: A Comparative Analysis of Nigeria-Niger Border Dynamics. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 7(4), 2013: 205-211.

¹⁹ M. Shehu and M. Abdurashid, Border Security and Transnational Threats: A Comparative Analysis, 7(4), 2013: 205-211.

independence for the English-speaking regions. These groups have occasionally clashed with Cameroonian forces near the border, creating spillover effects in Nigerian communities. Banditry, often driven by economic desperation and weak law enforcement, manifests in cattle rustling, highway robbery, and attacks on traders, further undermining local stability.

Smuggling is a pervasive issue in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland, driven by economic disparities, high tariffs, and weak regulatory frameworks. Goods such as petroleum products, textiles, electronics, and agricultural produce are routinely trafficked across the border. In this regard, smuggling is seen as part of a wider network of activities that feature not only illegal or unrecorded trade in goods but also all forms of unauthorised movement of persons across states' territorial boundaries, including political refugees and even criminals who seek asylum from policies or laws operating in their home state. In the course of field work, Bassey Patrick opines that while smuggling sustains livelihoods for many borderland residents, it also fuels corruption, deprives governments of revenue, and finances criminal networks.²⁰

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is particularly alarming. These weapons, often smuggled through informal routes, empower insurgents and bandits, escalating violence and making conflict resolution more difficult. Drug trafficking, including the movement of cannabis and synthetic narcotics, has also increased, posing public health and law enforcement challenges.²¹ Efforts to curb smuggling have included border closures, increased patrols, and bilateral agreements. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and local complicity, often driven by poverty and lack of alternatives, undermines these initiatives.

²⁰ Bassey Partrick, 50+, Male, Lecturer, Calabar, interviewed on 16/09/2025

²¹ Raymond Edet, 50+, Male, Security Personnel, Akabuyo, interviewed on 13/09/2025

The security challenges in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland have profound humanitarian consequences. Frequent attacks by insurgents and bandits have displaced thousands of people, creating a growing population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Camps in Borno State (Nigeria) and the Far North region (Cameroon) are overcrowded and under-resourced, with limited access to food, healthcare, and education. Women and children are particularly vulnerable. Many have been subjected to sexual violence, forced recruitment, and exploitation.²² The breakdown of traditional livelihoods such as farming, fishing, and trading has deepened poverty and food insecurity. Insecurity also disrupts access to basic services, as schools and clinics are often targeted or abandoned due to fear of attacks.

Recognising the transnational nature of the threats, Nigeria and Cameroon have engaged in various cooperative efforts. The MNJTF remains a cornerstone of regional security strategy, facilitating joint operations and intelligence sharing. Bilateral agreements have also been signed to enhance border management, including the deployment of surveillance technologies and the establishment of joint border commissions.²³ International actors, including the United Nations, European Union, and African Union, have supported these efforts through funding, capacity-building, and policy advocacy. Programs aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE), promoting community resilience, and strengthening governance have shown promise, though sustainability remains a concern.

²² M. Shehu and M. Abdurashid, Border Security and Transnational Threats: A Comparative Analysis of Nigeria-Niger Border Dynamics, *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 7(4), 2013: 205-211.

²³ R. Nelson, Border Security in a Time of Transformation: Two International Case Studies-Poland and India. A Report of the CSIS Homeland Security & Counter Terrorism Program, *Europe Program and South Asia Program*, 2010, p.55.

The security dynamics of the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland reflect a complex interplay of historical, political, and socioeconomic factors. Insurgency, banditry, and smuggling continue to challenge state authority and threaten regional stability. The role of Boko Haram and other armed groups underscores the need for coordinated, multifaceted responses that go beyond military solutions. Addressing the humanitarian impact requires inclusive policies that prioritise development, human rights, and community engagement.²⁴ Ultimately, securing the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland demands a holistic approach, one that integrates security, diplomacy, and grassroots participation. Only through sustained cooperation and investment can the region move toward lasting peace and prosperity.

Looking at the challenges to transborder cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon, evidence abounds that transborder collaboration between Nigeria and Cameroon holds immense potential to foster regional stability, economic integration, and collective security. However, despite shared interests and geographic proximity, efforts to build robust cross-border collaboration have been consistently undermined by a range of structural and political challenges. From trust deficits and political tensions to resource constraints and institutional weaknesses, the path toward practical cooperation remains fraught with complexity.²⁵ One of the most persistent obstacles to Nigeria-Cameroon cooperation is the legacy of mistrust rooted in historical disputes and political sensitivities. The Bakassi Peninsula conflict, which spanned several decades and culminated in a 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in favour of Cameroon, left deep scars in bilateral relations. Although Nigeria eventually ceded the territory in 2008, the process

²⁴A. Tandia, “Borders and Borderlands Identities: A Comparative Perspective of Cross-Border Governance in the Neighbourhoods of Senegal, the Gambia and Guinea Bissau.” *African Nebula*, Issue 2, September, 2010:18-42.

²⁵ A. J. Omade Nigeria’s Relations with Her Neighbours, Kamla-Ref 2006, Study Trobids 4(1), 2006: 33-42.

was marked by domestic resistance, local grievances, and lingering resentment among affected communities. This episode reinforced perceptions of betrayal and external imposition, weakening the foundation for mutual trust.

Differing governance styles and internal conflicts have also fueled political tensions. Cameroon's Anglophone crisis, which has escalated since 2016, has created a volatile environment near the border, with separatist groups clashing with government forces. Nigeria, wary of spillover effects and sympathetic to the plight of English-speaking Cameroonians, has occasionally been perceived as a passive observer or reluctant partner. These dynamics complicate diplomatic engagement and hinder the development of joint strategies for border management and conflict resolution.²⁶

Practical transborder cooperation requires substantial investment in infrastructure, personnel, and technology resources that both Nigeria and Cameroon struggle to mobilize consistently. Border regions are often marginalised in national development plans, resulting in poor road networks, limited communication facilities, and inadequate security installations. This underdevelopment not only hampers surveillance and law enforcement but also discourages economic activity and cross-border trade.²⁷ Institutional weaknesses further exacerbate the problem. Border management agencies in both countries suffer from limited capacity, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption. Coordination between customs, immigration, and security forces is often fragmented, with overlapping mandates and poor information sharing. Joint initiatives, such as the Nigeria-Cameroon Transborder Security Committee, have made some progress, but their

²⁶O. A. Chukwurah, "Borderland Communities and Right to Development" in Asiwaju, A. I. (ed) *Development of Border Regions*. Lagos: National Boundary Commission, 1989, p.147.

²⁷F. N. Ikome, "The Inviolability of Africa's Colonial Boundaries: Lessons from the Cameroon–Nigeria Border Conflict," *Institute for Global Dialogue*. Occasional Papers No. 47, November 2004, p. 214.

effectiveness is constrained by inconsistent funding, lack of political will, and weak accountability mechanisms.

Moreover, local governance structures in border communities are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, leading to disconnects between national policies and grassroots realities. Without meaningful community engagement, efforts to promote cooperation risk being top-down and unsustainable. Nigeria and Cameroon face distinct security challenges that shape their respective priorities and approaches. Nigeria's northeastern region has been plagued by the Boko Haram insurgency since the early 2000s, prompting a militarised response focused on counterterrorism and internal stabilisation. Cameroon, while also affected by Boko Haram in its Far North region, must simultaneously contend with separatist unrest in its Anglophone provinces and cross-border banditry.²⁸

These divergent threats lead to differing strategic emphases. Nigeria tends to prioritize counterinsurgency operations and intelligence gathering, while Cameroon emphasizes territorial integrity and regime stability. As a result, joint security efforts often lack coherence and shared objectives. For instance, while both countries participate in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), operational coordination is frequently hampered by mismatched tactics, communication gaps, and competing interest.²⁹

Opportunities and Suggestions

Transborder cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon presents a strategic opportunity to transform a historically volatile frontier into a corridor of peace, prosperity, and integration.

²⁸ O. Ede, 'Nigeria – Cameroon boundary: Diplomatic Intrigues and Crisis.' Paper presented at the Conference on Nigeria's international boundaries. Lagos: NIIA, April 5–7, 1992, p.87

²⁹ Ede, Oscar. 'Nigeria – Cameroon boundary: Diplomatic Intrigues and Crisis.' Paper presented at the Conference on Nigeria's international boundaries. Lagos: NIIA, April 5–7, 1992

Despite persistent challenges, including insecurity, weak institutions, and political tensions, both countries stand to benefit immensely from coordinated efforts that address shared concerns. By focusing on regional integration, civil-military collaboration, and borderland development, Nigeria and Cameroon can unlock the potential of their borderlands and foster long-term stability.

One of the most promising avenues for trans-border cooperation lies in deepening regional integration. Both Nigeria and Cameroon are members of regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). These platforms offer frameworks for harmonizing trade policies, facilitating cross-border movement, and coordinating security strategies. Enhanced integration can reduce trade barriers, promote legal migration, and encourage joint infrastructure projects that benefit both sides of the border. Policy recommendations include establishing a Nigeria-Cameroon Border Commission with representation from both national and regional institutions. This body could oversee trade facilitation, conflict resolution, and development planning. Additionally, aligning customs procedures and adopting shared digital platforms for border management would reduce delays and corruption, boosting economic activity and trust.

Security remains a cornerstone of practical transborder cooperation. The presence of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, coupled with banditry and smuggling, has made the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands highly volatile. Civil-military collaboration offers a pathway to address these threats while preserving the rights and dignity of border communities. Joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated counterinsurgency operations, such as those conducted by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), should be expanded and institutionalised. However, military efforts must be complemented by civilian oversight and community engagement. Establishing Civil-Military Liaison Units in border regions can help bridge the gap between

security forces and local populations, fostering trust and improving early warning systems.³⁰

Training programs that emphasize human rights, conflict sensitivity, and community relations should be mandatory for security personnel operating in border areas. Moreover, involving traditional leaders, youth groups, and women's associations in security dialogues can enhance legitimacy and local ownership of peace initiatives.

Border regions are often marginalized in national development agendas, despite their strategic importance. Investing in infrastructure such as roads, bridges, markets, and communication networks can stimulate economic growth, improve service delivery, and reduce the appeal of illicit activities. Development also plays a preventive role by addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and exclusion. Policy suggestions include launching a Nigeria-Cameroon Border Development Initiative, jointly funded by the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon and supported by international partners. This initiative could prioritise education, healthcare, and vocational training in border communities, with a focus on youth empowerment and gender inclusion. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) along the border could attract investment, formalise trade, and create jobs.

Summary and Conclusion

Transborder cooperation and security dynamics in the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands remain complex yet critical to regional stability. Historical relations between both nations, marked by colonial legacies, territorial disputes, and shared ethnic ties, have shaped the current security landscape. Persistent threats such as insurgency, smuggling, permeable and poorly managed borders challenge effective collaboration. However, bilateral frameworks like the Cameroon-

³⁰G. L. Adeola, and Fayomi, O. "The Political and Security Implications of Cross-Border Migration between Nigeria and her Francophone Neighbours" in *International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow*, 1 (3), May 2012: 1-12.

Nigeria Mixed Commission and joint military operations offer promising avenues for cooperation.

To enhance security and development, both countries must prioritize trust-building, harmonise border management policies, and invest in community-based peace initiatives. Strengthening institutional capacity, promoting intelligence sharing, and engaging local stakeholders are essential to overcoming operational and political hurdles. Ultimately, a coordinated and inclusive approach to transborder governance can transform the borderlands from zones of insecurity into corridors of peace, trade, and integration.

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