Cameroon-Nigeria Border Conflict Incidence on Trade Patterns and Dynamics Within Near-Border Settlements of the Bakassi Peninsula, Cameroon

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To cite this article:

Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende. Cameroon-Nigeria Border Conflict Incidence on Trade Patterns and Dynamics Within Near-Border Settlements of the Bakassi Peninsula, Cameroon. *Urban and Regional Planning*.

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2017, pp. 11-19. doi: 10.11648/j.urp.20180301.13

Received: September 27, 2017; **Accepted:** October 14, 2017; **Published:** January 19, 2018

Abstract: Historicity, geo-strategic and economic bearing has snatched the discourse on border environments from contemporary geographical literature. Yet, these environments have stoutly become hotspots for violent expression of conflicting entitlements to natural resources and socio-economic opportunities. The Bakassi Peninsula at West Africa's lone gulf (of Guinea) which replicates *par excellence*, the combination of resource-space tussle and conflicting territorial claims and resolution approaches between Nigeria and Cameroon, has unravelled major trends and dynamics of commercial activities for communities within the area. Within this politically hotbed peninsula is Ekondo Titi, a commercial hub undergoing significant dynamics in the periods before, during and after the *Bakassi Crisis*, laid to rest by the Green Tree Accord whose political palliative was no economic panacea to the quantitative and qualitative trade responses in the area especially on the Cameroonian side. This study purposively sampled 100 respondents involving traders, farmers, council workers and other stakeholders in Ekondo Titi of Cameroon. A chi square analysis at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom of 9, portrayed a significant association between commercial sector dynamics and border insecurity in Ekondo Titi especially as trade patterns assumed a three period pendula-like mood. Post crisis trends reveal an increasingly unaccounted and unofficial cash crop trade outflow towards Nigeria in the dearth of practicable road transport infrastructure, warehouses/storage tanks, and other domestic marketing infrastructure. Post crisis trade management exhibits the need for the government of Cameroon to set in robust confidence building measures while drastically enhancing on the transport and market infrastructure.

Keywords: Crops, Border, Ekondo Titi, Commerce

1. Introduction

The border concept as an entity has a deep rooted history in the social sciences from multidisciplinary (historical, geographical, socio-economic, anthropological and political lenses) analysis and approaches [1]. The meaning and categorization of borders lies in their objective or subjectively perceived function(s) such that they can be considered as an area of division and demarcation or alternatively of contact, exchange and integration. In the simplest expression, borders may separate or connect constituting an area of demarcation, separation or division,

referred to by political geographers as a frontier or a boundary [2]. Borders thus constitute separating spaces of territorial sovereignty serving as a barrier to human, economic, cultural and social exchange and movement. For nations' interest, where border resources abound, extreme political or military confrontation erupts [3], although borders generally serve as areas of exchange, interaction and integration permitting a geographically wider, politically inclusive, and economically active and space in which heterogeneous identities exist and are encouraged to flourish [2]. Ordinarily, borders are areas of contact, exchange and integration that as in the case of Cameroon and Nigeria it is the Bakassi peninsula, where Ekondo Titi has grown into the

economic capital of Ndian Division and perhaps has potentials to second Kumba in the South West Region. It is located between latitude 4.5° and 5° N of the Equator and longitude 8° to 9° E of the Greenwich Meridian at whose

northeast is Dikome Balue, east and southeast is Mbonge northwest is Mundemba, west is Kombo Itindi and south is Bamusso.

Figure 1. Location of Ekondo Titi in the South West Region.

Such commercial sector is the core of economic growth and structural transformation. Growth in this sector's activities has become a focus of development policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and significant contemporary progress is made through building infrastructure and trade-related policies. The commercial sector has a huge potential for creating employment, catalysing investment and fostering growth in Africa. At the dawn of independence, most African nations introduced reforms which were meant to stimulate growth and development including the commercial sector [4]. This saw the creation of enabling environments for the free flow of trade across borders.

Trade flow trends in Africa are masked by difficulties in determining the actual role played by commercial activities in the growth of border towns [5]. There is nevertheless a widespread evidence of commercial activities in Sub-Saharan Africa border towns such as Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya "[6], [7]" South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique "[8], [9]", Congo "[10], [11]", and Equatorial Guinea-Cameroon [12].

The border trade dynamics examined in this study are the persistent changes in the volume and direction of flow of goods and services (exchange), and commercial infrastructure witnessed in the Bakassi area, specifically in Ekondo Titi between Cameroon and Nigeria. The Bakassi conflict affected the flow of goods between the two nations as most of the borders linking the two nations were blocked during the period of the crises and later reopened when the peninsula was handed to Cameroon. For instance, between 1993 when the crisis started 2006, trade flows of food crops, non-timber forest products and semi-finished products witnessed a significant drop by over 50% [13].

The Cameroon-Nigeria border serves as the broader divide between West and Central Africa whose regional trade communities of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) fostered teeming trade transactions in recent years. Political tensions between Cameroon and Nigeria since the 1960s have not obliterated the dynamism of international economic relations and especially regional cross border trade flows [14] with recent developments of infrastructure. Classical examples of border towns that have witnessed significant growth in Africa include the north-eastern Congolese market of Ariwara, the Ugandan town of Arua, and the Yei/Juba in southern Sudan [15]. In Cameroon, border towns such Mora in the Far North, Kribi and Kye-Ossi in the South, Douala in the Littoral, Idenau, Mamfe, Limbe and Ekondo titi in the South West Region continue to witness dynamics in commercial activities. Ekondo Titi, in the Bakassi Peninsula has witnessed changes in commercial activities from the 1980s both in type and volume of trade worthy of investigation.

2. The Problem

Cameroon border towns are economically active environments with a flow of goods and services such as Mamfe, Idenau, Ako, Kyé-Ossi, Kribi and Ekondo Titi.

Ekondo Titi's trend is a direct inverse replica of the Bakassi conflict while stakeholder responses are determined by the socio-political environment as noted in the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea Kye-Ossi border [12], and partially attributed to transport sector evolution as in the Dumbo border town [16]. The case in point stems from an Ekondo Titi land use dynamics "[17], [18], [19]" and responses to a changing political collegiality between nations and regional economic blocs. These have invariably constrained economic development "[20], [17]" leading to a border natural resource harmonious development paradox "[21], [17]". This entangled problem web requires a probe into the trends and dynamics of this sensitive environment and its growth potential under stable conditions in keeping with the Green Tree Accord which insists on special public investment to boost trade and commerce amongst other things.

3. Methodology

In this study, we purposively sample 100 respondents in some neighbourhoods around the Ekondo Titi Port. The target population were those involved in commercial activities in Ekondo Titi ranging from the Ekondo Titi port, custom officers and workers of the Ekondo Titi Council. Based on an Ekondo population of some 5000 inhabitants [22], a 20% sample was considered to representatively portray the level of trade and commercial activities. Traditional authorities and some village elders were interviewed for their experiences with the evolution of types of goods, volume and direction of flow, as well as infrastructural development. Descriptive statistical techniques were used as well as the association between commercial sector dynamics and border insecurity in Ekondo Titi and the dynamics of commercial activities and related challenges in Ekondo Titi through a chi square analysis at 0.05 level of significance and a degree of freedom of 9.

4. Presentation of Results

4.1. Trends and Dynamics of Commercial Activities

Commercial activities witnessed significant swings changes between 1980 and 2016 in Ekondo Titi. Such changes can be grouped into three phases. The First phase that can be termed the Pre-Bakassi crisis period was seemingly characterised by a significant flow of goods to Nigeria. The second phase was the Bakassi crisis period (1993-2002) which saw a drop in the trade activities between Ekondo Titi and Nigeria giving way for a corresponding increase in the flow of goods and services towards Kumba. The third phase being the post Green Tree Accord period 2006 witnessed another upward shift in the type goods, volume and direction of flow to Nigeria. Of importance is the fact that the change was characterised by alterations in the type of goods, the flow direction of goods and the market infrastructures that are available to facilitate trade. Given the

fact that the near border town of Ekondo titi represents a focal point for development in Ndian Division, an investigation on the trends and dynamics of commercial activities and the challenges was done.

The trends and dynamics are presented for three time periods on the basis of volume and direction of flow of goods, and the state of market infrastructure. These periods include the Pre Bakassi (1980-1993), the Bakassi crisis (1993-2006) and the post Bakassi crisis period (2006-present). The Pre-Bakassi crisis period corresponds to the years between 1960 (independence period) to 1993. This was a period which was characterised by significant trade flows through the Ekondo Titi beach market (Table 1).

Table 1. Main items supplied to Nigeria from Ekondo Titi between 1980 and 1994.

Item	Product	Total flow of goods (tons)	Item total (tons)
Non-forest timber products	Eru	296402	653122
	Bush Mango	191990	
	Snails	149050	
	Others	15680	
	Rice	31320	
Food	Garri	1037066	1244742
	Plantain	69894	
	others	106462

Figure 2. Direction of flow of goods during the pre-Bakassi crisis era.

The key infrastructure at the time include warehouses, markets, stores, storage tanks (palm oil) and a motorable road linking main town Ekondo Titi to Ekondo beach through Highway Quarters. Some of these structures have witnessed significant dilapidation (Table 4) and are out of use as of now. Their presence serves as a pointer to the effectiveness of trade activities during this period. The PAMOL palm oil storage tank for instance (Figure 3), with a storage capacity of 1800 tons, was used at the time to store oil for its eventual supply to Nigeria. With the drop in oil production, these tanks have, over the years remained unused since the 1990s.

Source: Fieldwork, March 2017.

Figure 3. PAMOL Storage Tanks at the Ekondo-Titi Beach.

Item	Product	Total flow of goods (tons)	Item total (tons)
Semi-finished	Palm oil	450	1487
	Palm kernel	651	
	Rubber	386	
	Others	-	

Source: Phytosanitary Brigade, Ekondo Titi and Fieldwork, 2017.

There was a regular flow of goods and services between Ekondo Titi and Nigeria. Traders from Ekondo could easily sell their food items and NTFPs as well as purchase semi-finished and finished products from Nigeria. In addition, traders from other parts of Cameroon such as Kumba, Bafoussam and Douala moved into Ekondo Titi to buy goods. Most of these traders preferred the Ekondo Titi Nigeria channel because it gave them an opportunity to avoid paying huge charges as custom duties at the Douala port. Consequently, they preferred to make use of the Ekondo Titi port which served as an *entrepot* at the time. Based on the direction of flow, it was estimated that a majority of the traders in Ekondo Titi concentrated their dealings with Nigeria than with other towns such as Kumba. This was partly encouraged by the poor state of the Kumba-Ekondo Titi highway (Figure 2).

The Bakassi crisis era was between 1993 and 2006. During the Bakassi crisis which began on 23 December 1993, most trading activities witnessed an ebb logically as a war zone any trade stakeholder in the region could be exposed to the

war. Understandably there was a significant drop in goods supplied from Ekondo Titi to Nigeria and vice versa (Table 2 and Figure 4).

Table 2. Trade flows to Nigeria from Ekondo-Titi during the Bakassi crisis.

Item	Product	Total flow of goods (tons)	Item total (tons)
Non-timber forest products	Eru	148201	326561
	Bush Mango	95995	
	Snails	74525	
	Others	7840	
Food	Rice	15660	622371
	Garri	518533	
	Plantain	34947	
	others	53231	
	Palm oil	150	
Semi-finished	Palm kernel	251	587
	Rubber	186	

Source: [13] & Fieldwork, 2017.

Figure 4. Trade flux between Ekondo Titi and Nigeria during the Bakassi Crisis.

The drop in the quantity of goods traded made some traders leave the activity completely. This negatively affected the state of commercial infrastructure as most of the warehouses and storage tanks were either under-utilised or abandoned (Figure 5). People found it difficult to bear the cost of renting or using warehouses and stores due to the fact that their scales of operation had dropped.

Figure 5. State of market infrastructure during the Bakassi Crisis.

The Post-Bakassi crisis era start between 2006 after the signing of the Green Tree Accord till present. Even after the resolution of the Bakassi crisis, there were still fears in the minds of traders as to whether future clashes will not ensue [17]. This contributed to create an initial standstill phase of commerce. As time went on, activities started gaining

grounds, leading to an augmentation in the volume of flow in favour of the Ekondo Titi – Nigeria channel (Figure 6). It is important to note that the early phase of this period was characterised by a drop in the quantity of good traded since traders were not sure of the state of security (Table 3).

Figure 6. Trade flux between Ekondo Titi and Nigeria after the Bakassi Crisis.

Table 3. Trade flows to Nigeria during the early post crisis period.

Item	Product	Total flow of goods (tons)	Item total (tons)
Non-timber forest products	Eru	162	605
	Bush Mango	210	
	Snails	67	
	Others	166	
Food	Rice	41659	42049
	Garri	355	
	Plantain	25	
	Others	10	
Semi-finished	Palm oil	3288	5687
	Palm kernel	208	
	Rubber	2191	
	Others	-	

Source: Estimates from Phytosanitary Brigade, Ekondo Titi & Fieldwork, 2017.

This negatively affected the state of commercial infrastructure as most of the warehouses and storage tanks were under-utilised while some warehouses were abandoned (Table 4). As time went on and there were a series of

confidence building measures such as the intensification of the patrol team, traders increasingly got back to business. Commercial activities are yet to gain the steam it had prior to the crisis.

Table 4. Evaluation of market infrastructure evolution in Ekondo Titi.

Element	State before crisis	State during crisis	State after crisis
Market	Good	Deteriorating	Good
Storage tanks	Good	Deteriorating	Abandoned
Roads	Deteriorating	Deteriorating	Deteriorating
Warehouses	Good	Good	Abandoned

4.2. Discussion of Results

The dynamics of commercial activities in the border town of Ekondo Titi is liable to the fall in the prices of goods as triggered by the nature of transport network. This was complemented by a change in the demand of goods as a function of seasons (Table 5).

Table 5. Demand situation for products as a function of seasons.

Items	Wet season	Dry season
Eru	Constant	Constant
Bush Mango	Increase	Decline
Snails	Increase	Decline
Rice	Constant	Constant
Plantain	Decline	Increase
Vegetables	Increase	Decline
Garri	Decline	Increase
Cocoyam	Decline	Increase
Palm Oil	Constant	Constant
Palm Kernel	Constant	Constant

Figure 7. Factors of commercial dynamics in Ekondo Titi.

The most outstanding factor is border insecurity replicating from the Bakassi crisis even though border towns have an established tradition of economic stimulation which encourages trade and investment “[17], [12]”. The border position of Ekondo Titi to neighbouring Nigeria has introduced a paradigm shift depicting much sensitivity and insecurity that negatively affects commercial activities in terms of volume and direction of flow of goods as well as the necessary infrastructure. Border insecurity reached its peak during the famous Bakassi crisis and lasted over a decade of skirmishes and gun battles with a resultant loss of lives and displacement of people. Such could only but slow down commercial interactions and transactions between Ekondo Titi with Nigeria especially as the numerous outlets/creeks that were hitherto very instrumental in trading activities prior to the crisis became strategic points for military manoeuvres and assault points of both nations sealing the livelihood of the riverine population [23] and directly negatively intensifying (Table 6) each time soldiers of Nigeria and Cameroon clashed [24] amounting to more than 50% (Figure 7) perception while road network made for only 30%.

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests for Border insecurity and commercial sector dynamics.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.944 ^a	9	.026
Likelihood Ratio	19.471	9	.021
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.953	1	.086
N of Valid Cases	100		

Table 6 shows a significant inverse association between border insecurity and commercial sector dynamics in Ekondo Titi ($X^2 = 18.944$, $df = 9$, $p = 0.026 < 0.05$) as confirmed by the chi-square ($X^2_{cal} = 18.944$) being greater than the critical chi square ($X^2_{crit} = 16.919$).

This discussion above alludes to the active environments but very porous nature of the borders to maritime transport since most of the roads are earth roads are seasonal and some not just usable for long periods of the year during torrential rains which causes an increase in the increase prices of basic commodities and consequent economic slowdown in the wet season being a major challenge to the commercial sector dynamics in Ekondo Titi (Table 7).

Table 7. Chi-Square Tests for challenges to commercial dynamics.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.165 ^a	20	.001
Likelihood Ratio	43.275	20	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.136	1	.144
N of Valid Cases	100		

There are clear challenges affecting the commercial sector in Ekondo Titi ($X^2 = 44.165$, $df = 20$, $p = 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$)) especially as the chi-square (X^2_{cal}) is greater than the critical value ($X^2_{crit} = 31.41$). The fact that the key challenge here is border insecurity and poor transport network is just a slight deviation in other parts of Africa like along the Zimbabwe -

South African border, where Karolia (2009 as cited in [25]) noted brutality of the forces of law and order at the border post to be a deterring factor affecting the volume of flow of goods. This is aggravated by cases of sexual harassment as women are forced to engage in transnational sex while their male counterparts are sodomised “[26], [27]”.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the trends, drivers and challenges of commercial activities in the border town of Ekondo Titi. Results confirm that commercial activities have witnessed dynamics as exemplified by the changing volumes and direction of flow of goods and services. The key drivers of this dynamics include issues of border insecurity and the Bakassi Crisis, and poor transport network. The conclusion drawn is that there are observed changes in the volume and direction of flow of trade between Ekondo Titi and Nigeria during the pre Bakassi, the Bakassi and post-Bakassi crisis periods. Cognisant of the degree of freedom of 9 at 0.05 level of significance, there is a significant association between commercial sector dynamics and border insecurity in Ekondo Titi. At 0.05 level of significance, there exist significant challenges associated with the dynamics of commercial activities in Ekondo Titi. At this level of findings, it may perhaps be worthy to suggest that the government of Cameroon should consider to improve the road network linking Ekondo Titi and rest of Cameroon so as to enable it and the rest of the country stir its trade and commercial sector at the same time pursuing the border town development road map of the Ministry of Commerce to improve border town market infrastructure including warehouses and storage facilities especially at the Ekondo Titi beach. This would be an across-nationality confidence building mechanism amongst traders that would eventually peter out fear and negative security concerns.

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