

Smugglers Operations and the Misuse of Firearms by Nigeria Customs Officials in Idiroko Border, Ogun State: The Socio-Political and Economic Implications.

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ABSTRACT

The incessant confronts of smuggling and firearm misuse contribute to a pervasive climate of insecurity, undermining local communities' trust in law enforcement and the government. This study explores the operations of smugglers and the misuse of firearms by Nigeria Customs officials at the Idiroko border area of Ogun State. The study validates the claims of firearms misuse among customs officials in the study area. It also examined the causes of firearm misuse, the socio-political and economic implications and the efforts of the Nigerian government in addressing this menace. This study is predicated on the Situational Crime Prevention Theory. This mixed method of research of the qualitative and quantitative techniques was adopted, utilizing the exploratory research design. The quantitative data was subjected to statistical analysis, using measure of central tendency of; Average Weighted Response (AWR). While the qualitative aspect was analysed based on content. The study validates the claims of firearms misuse in the study area. The causes of firearm misuse among Custom officials were identified to include; lack of accountability mechanisms within the Custom service, lack of capacity training, corruption and poor welfare incentives for the personnel. The study also concludes that the Nigerian government has demonstrated little commitment towards curtailing the misuse of firearms among Custom officials. The study therefore proposes comprehensive reforms to address these challenges, including the enhancement of customs welfare services, capacity building for officials, and the implementation of robust accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: Border, Smuggler, Firearms and Nigeria Customs Service

INTRODUCTION

Smuggling across borders is a persistent challenge globally, with significant economic, social, and security implications. Nigeria, situated in West Africa, shares extensive borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The porous nature of these borders, characterized by vast and diverse terrain, facilitates illicit trade activities, including smuggling. In Nigeria, smuggling encompasses not only the illicit transportation of goods across borders but also the trafficking of human beings. Countries worldwide grapple with smugglers to varying degrees depending on the nature of contraband crossing their borders. A diverse array

of items is smuggled, including agricultural produce, narcotics, vehicles, small arms and ammunition, jewelry, second-hand clothing, ivory products, canned foods, and human trafficking victims (Faleye, 2015; Opanike & Aduloju; Raballand & Mjekpi; Prag, 2010).

The Idiroko border area, among others, has continued to grapple with persistent border porosity, often accompanied by violent and transnational organized crimes such as cross-border trafficking, human trafficking, illicit drug trafficking, and illegal arms trafficking. Consequently, this has over the years necessitated an enhanced border security management and governance to effectively address border crimes and other illicit activities. Border governance, also referred to as border management, entails facilitating the authorized movement of individuals for purposes such as business, tourism, refugee resettlement, and more, across the territorial frontiers of nation-states.

One of the measures implemented over time in Nigeria to enhance border governance and security is the establishment of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS). The agency has been tasked with monitoring border activities in strict adherence to border governance and security protocols. Among the various security agencies stationed at Nigerian borders, the Nigeria Customs Service has gained increased prominence, particularly in combating contraband smuggling and other illicit activities. However, numerous allegations and counter-allegations have surfaced over time regarding the indiscriminate use of firearms by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), allegedly resulting in the deaths of Nigerians at land borders and checkpoints nationwide. While officers of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) are legally authorized to carry firearms to combat the activities of smugglers and other criminal groups, recent incidents have raised concerns about their conduct. Despite expectations of professionalism, there have been reported cases of shootings involving innocent civilians (Vanguard, 2023).

While officials are tasked with the vital responsibility of safeguarding borders against the infiltration of contraband goods, arms, and illicit drugs, smugglers employ various illicit methods to evade the law. Unfortunately, in the process of apprehending these smugglers, altercations at border communities have resulted in the loss of innocent lives.

Besides gun battles with smugglers, it has been discovered that excessive speeding by the security agents while going after the suspected smugglers contribute to the casualties being recorded oftentimes. It is pertinent to note that the Customs Service of any country plays significant roles in border management, its ancillary function as a security watchdog helps to prevent harmful products like arms from being brought into the country, in addition to preventing smuggling in either banned goods for the protection of cottage industry or barring unscrupulous people from bringing in goods without paying stipulated duties.

However, despite the significant roles and efforts of the Nigeria customs service towards border security management, the misuse of firearms by the agency has not only remained a poignant issue but has also continued to be a recurring decimal within the border community. These cases of unprofessional conducts among Custom officials in the Nigeria State which has continued to claim innocent lives, is further exacerbated by poor monitoring of the agency by both the government and also the commission.

Statement of the problem

Nigeria's borders are often characterized as porous, permitting diverse trans-border criminal activities such as arms, goods and human smuggling. Despite the efforts of cross-border security agencies like the Nigeria Police, Customs Service, Immigration Services, and the DSS, incidents of criminality still persist, particularly at borders like Idiroko in the Southwest area of Ogun State which has overtime necessitated a need for enhanced border security management. The Nigeria Customs Service plays a prominent role in this area, though it has faced allegations of misuse of firearms, resulting in the loss of innocent lives within the border community. While several studies have explored the nature, causes, and effects of border porosity in

Idiroko, little attention has been paid to investigating the alleged unprofessional conduct of the Nigeria Customs Service regarding the misuse of firearms. This has led to numerous fatalities among residents. Therefore, this study aims to examine smugglers' operations and firearms misuse by Nigeria Customs officials at the Idiroko Border of Ogun State, analysing the socio-political and economic implications.

In light of this problem, the study addresses the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Are there claims of misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area?
2. What are the causes of the misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area?
3. What are the socio-political and economic implications of the misuse of Firearms on the residents of Idiroko Border?
4. What has been the efforts of the Nigerian government in addressing cases of firearm misuse in the study area?

Research Objectives

1. To verify the claims of misuse of firearms by Custom officials in Idiiroko border area of Ogun State.
2. To examine the causes of the misuse of firearms by Custom officials in the study area.
3. To interrogate the socio-political and economic implications of the misuse of firearms on the residents of Idiroko border area.
4. To examine the efforts of the Nigerian government in addressing cases of firearm misuse in the study area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of border

Borders constitute an integral aspect of human existence, shaping the dynamics of relationships between individuals and societies. Acting as both barriers and conduits, a network of borders serves to separate and connect different parts of humanity (Kolossoy, 2012). According to Newman and Paasi (1998), borders serve two primary purposes: territorial demarcation and defense against internal and external threats. Zartman (2010) further posits that borders transcend mere geographical delineation, intersecting with people's lives rather than merely dividing land. While appearing as thin lines on maps, borders possess multifaceted dimensions on the ground. Understanding human perceptions of borders and the intricate relationships between states and societies they encompass relies on a nuanced awareness of what it means to coexist alongside them (Zartman, 2010).

Borders are construed as both physical and symbolic demarcations of difference, serving as formal and informal institutions that shape spatial and social practices. They emerge as products of the communities they unite, with their significance and impact evolving in response to changing circumstances. In a world marked by notable disparities in wealth, rights, mobility, and living standards, borders transcend their role as mere geographical markers (Diener and Hagen, 2012). According to Ramutsindela (2014), borders serve three crucial functions for the majority of people: they establish and maintain order by delineating spheres of authority; they regulate access by keeping outsiders beyond clearly defined boundaries; and they ensure proper management of citizens and natural resources.

From the above, it is justifiable to state that the concept of borders is fundamental to understanding the organization and governance of human societies. Borders delineate territorial boundaries between nations, states, regions, or even smaller administrative units. While borders often have physical manifestations such

as walls, fences, or checkpoints, they also have abstract dimensions, including legal, political, and cultural aspects. The concept of border has overtime evolved in response to changing geopolitical dynamics, technological advancements, and socio-economic developments. While borders continue to serve important functions in regulating interactions between states and societies, debates persist regarding their effectiveness, legitimacy, and impact on human mobility, security, and global interconnectedness.

The concept of smuggling

Smuggling entails the clandestine transportation of goods across borders, encompassing both lawful commodities like alcohol and tobacco, and illicit items such as drugs and firearms. Additionally, it includes the illicit trafficking of immigrants, representing a broader spectrum of illegal cross-border activities (Wenngren, 2024). Similarly, smuggling relates to the movement of goods across border points, which is often conducted clandestinely and without the authorization or oversight of governmental border agencies (Titus, et al., 2016). Smuggling transcends national borders and is prevalent worldwide, often characterized by trade flows between affluent and economically disadvantaged nations (Bredow, 2015). The global imbalance in wealth distribution positions certain countries as hubs for international smuggling, while others serve as intermediaries facilitating the transit of illicit goods to less developed regions. Consequently, a complex network emerges, with some countries benefiting significantly from their central roles in the global smuggling market (Deflem & Kelly, 2021).

According to Basu (2013), Cross-border smuggling represents a logistics-intensive process and is often regarded as a fundamental capability for transnational criminal organizations engaged in illicit trade. The prevalence of smuggling in West African border towns is attributed to the inconsistent government policies regarding border management and the significant inefficiencies within government agencies tasked with border control. These weaknesses afford smugglers easy opportunities to circumvent border regulations and evade detection (Opanike & Aduloju, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the Situational Crime Prevention Theory.

Situational Crime Prevention Theory This study draws upon the Situational Crime Prevention Theory formulated by Ronald Clarke, which posits that crime can be prevented by modifying the spatial or situational elements of the environment in which criminal activities occur. This theoretical framework advocates for the development of strategies aimed at disrupting, restricting, or deterring criminal behaviours by altering the conditions that facilitate them. Clarke (1992) asserts that these strategies work by altering the perceived risks, rewards, and efforts associated with engaging in criminal activities through various environmental interventions. By manipulating the situational factors that influence criminal decision-making, such as the ease of access to targets, the presence of guardianship, and the level of surveillance, situational crime prevention seeks to reduce the opportunities for criminal behaviour.

The Situational Crime Prevention Theory underscores the importance of addressing environmental conditions and situational factors that contribute to criminal behaviour, rather than focusing solely on individual characteristics or social causes of crime. By implementing targeted interventions that modify the immediate context in which criminal activities occur, this approach seeks to create safer and more secure environments for communities, thereby enhancing public safety and reducing crime. In essence, crime prevention strategies, as outlined by the Situational Crime Prevention Theory, emphasize four main approaches: controlling facilitators, deflecting offenders, target hardening, and access control. This theoretical framework posits that situational factors, rather than inherent traits of offenders, are pivotal in reducing crime rates. By implementing discreet managerial and environmental changes, crime prevention efforts aim to deter criminal activity by making it less appealing to potential offenders, rather than solely

focusing on societal or institutional improvements (Clarke, 1992).

In the context of border management in Nigeria, the application of this theory becomes particularly salient. Law enforcement agencies tasked with upholding law and order at border stations can significantly enhance their effectiveness by developing new ideas and approaches. Notably, the prevalent issues of unprofessionalism and the misuse of firearms by customs officials underscore the urgent need for a shift in crime management techniques. Rather than relying solely on traditional methods, such as pursuing smugglers on foot, there is a compelling argument for leveraging technology and surveillance measures to improve border security. By embracing innovative approaches, such as advanced surveillance systems and data analytics, border management agencies can proactively identify and intercept illicit activities without compromising the safety of individuals or resorting to lethal force. This shift towards a more proactive and technologically-driven approach aligns with the principles of the Situational Crime Prevention Theory, which advocates for environmental modifications to deter criminal behaviour. The Situational Crime Prevention Theory offers valuable insights into the need for adaptive and forward-thinking strategies in border management. By prioritizing situational factors and leveraging technology-driven solutions, law enforcement agencies can mitigate risks, enhance effectiveness, and ultimately safeguard the lives and security of individuals within border communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed method of research of the qualitative and quantitative techniques, utilizing the exploratory research design.

The study area for this study is the Idiroko border area, situated between Nigeria and Benin, this area is a strategic and bustling geographical zone that epitomizes the complexities and challenges associated with border management and law enforcement in West Africa. The following points justify its selection in the methodology:

The Idiroko border is one of the busiest crossing points in Nigeria, with a significant volume of human and vehicular traffic and which also serves as a crucial gateway for traders, commuters, and migrants, facilitating substantial economic and social interactions between Nigeria and its neighbors.

The border area is a hub for various economic activities, including legal trade, informal cross-border trading, and, unfortunately, smuggling operations. This diversity presents a unique opportunity to study the impact of law enforcement practices on different types of economic exchanges. The Idiroko border exemplifies the broader issues faced by other borders in the region, such as porous boundaries, ethnic and cultural ties across borders, and the struggle to control illegal activities while promoting legitimate trade. By focusing on Idiroko, the study can generate findings that are applicable to other similar border zones, making it a representative case for broader regional analysis.

The study population of this study is the Idiroko border area of Ogun State. The target population consisted of the residents of this area. One-hundred and sixty (160) questionnaires were administered with the aid of simple random and purposive sampling procedures. For questionnaire part, one-hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were retrieved. Sixteen (16) qualitative interviews which entailed the Key-Informat Interview (KII) and In-depth Interview (IDI) were conducted. This cuts across the residents of the Idiroko border area of Ogun State, Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), Community Leaders, Civil Society Organizations, Media Practitioners, Border Experts and Government officials.

The quantitative data was subjected to statistical analysis, using measure of central tendency of; Average Weighted Response (AWR). While the qualitative aspect was analysed based on content.

ANALYSIS OF RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This segment presents the results from the data gotten from the study area. Data for the study were collected through a self-structured questionnaire and guided interview, which was thereafter used to measure and answer the research questions.

4, 3, 2, 1 were allocated to SA, A, SD and D respectively and the weight lies between 1 and 4, therefore AWR is interpreted as follows;

AWR between 1.00 to 2.50 (inclusive) means weak.

AWR between 2.51 to 4.00 (inclusive) means high,

Where;

T.W.R means Total Weight Response

A.W.R means Average Weight Response

Research Question I: Are there claims of misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area?

Item 1: Smuggling operations take place at Idiroko Border

Item 2: There has always been a clash between custom officials and smugglers in Idiroko border area of Ogun State.

Item 3: Custom officials in Idiroko border misuse firearms when trying to arrest smugglers

Item 4: The misuse of firearms by custom officials in Idiroko Border has claimed many innocent lives.

Item 5: Smuggling operations are usually accompanied with gun battles between Custom officials and smugglers in Idiroko border.

Table 1

ITEM	SA	A	SD	D	TWR	AWR
1	96	54	–	–	546	3.64
2	98	49	1	2	543	3.62
3	56	85	2	7	490	3.27
4	113	36	–	1	561	3.74
5	84	35	3	28	475	3.17

Decision Value: Weak = 1.00 to 2.50 High = 2.51 to 4.00

Table 1 indicated the respondents' responses towards the claims of the misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area. The empirical findings show that smuggling operations take place in Idiroko border area of Ogun State. (AWR Value, 3.64). The result also shows that there is always been a clash between custom officials and smugglers in the study area. (AWR Value= 3.62). It was also unveiled from the study that Custom officials in Idiroko border misuse firearms when trying to arrest smugglers. (AWR Value= 3.27). The result also indicates that the misuse of firearms by custom officials in Idiroko border has

claimed many innocent lives, with the highest (AWR Value of 3.74). The finding also shows that smuggling operations are usually accompanied with gun battles between Custom officials and smugglers in Idiroko border. (AWR Value = 3.17).

From the qualitative result, a Respondent in the study area notes that;

Claims of misuse of firearms among Custom officials in Idiroko is not only true, but it has also been a frequent thing here.

(KII/Resident/Male/ Conducted April 2024)

A respondent affirmed that;

The misuse of firearms by Customs officials across Nigerian borders has remained a matter of deep concern for our community. While we understand the necessity of curbing smuggling and maintaining border security, the methods employed by some officials have led to tragic consequences. In their pursuit of smugglers, innocent members of our community have been caught in the crossfire, resulting in unnecessary loss of life and instilling fear among our people.

(IDI/ Community leader/ Male/ conducted May 2024)

Similarly, another Respondent stated that;

Claims of firearms misuse by Custom officials is not untrue, we have had several cases of this occurrence, and many people have lost their lives to this unprofessional misconduct among Custom officials.

(KII/Resident/ Conducted April 2024)

A respondent said that;

In the process of running after smugglers, they most times end up killing innocent residents here. It is very true, in fact, it has become a usual thing in this axis. It is a very unfortunate incidents that we have continued to experience from time to time here.

(KII/Resident/Male/ Conducted April 2024)

Another Respondent noted that;

Yes, I do think that Custom Officials do misuse firearms across Nigerian borders, it has been documented in terms of cases of shootings, extra-judicial killings of alleged smugglers and also innocent bystanders in the process. Its all over the media and we also talk about this almost on a daily basis.

(KII/CSO/Male/ Conducted May 2024)

If I would tell you the truth, the misuse of firearms is not a new thing, it has been a recurrent and very disturbing issue, not only in Idiroko Border here but also across the other borders in Nigeria. Many innocent Nigerians have lost their lives to this ugly incident. Despite our regular plea to the government to put in place mechanisms to always check these officials, we have continued to experience this ugly incident.

(IDI/ Community leader/ Male/ conducted May 2024)

Research Question 2: What are the causes of the misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area?

Item 6: Altercations between Custom officials and smugglers causes Customs officials to misuse firearms.

Item 7: Corruption among Customs officials triggers the misuse of firearms.

Item 8: Poor welfare services of Custom officials motivate them to misuse firearms.

Item 9: The lack of proper monitoring of the Custom service is a cause of firearms misuse among the officials of the service.

Item 10: Illiteracy among Custom officials causes the misuse of firearms.

Table 2

ITEM	SA	A	SD	D	TWR	AWR
6	86	63	1	–	535	3.57
7	92	38	4	16	506	3.37
8	76	43	26	5	490	3.27
9	32	58	45	15	407	2.71
10	22	44	28	56	332	2.21

Decision Value: Weak = 1.00 to 2.50 High = 2.51 to 4.00

Table 2 indicated the respondents' responses on the causes of misuse of firearms by custom officials in the study area. The empirical finding unveils that, altercations between Custom officials and smugglers causes Customs officials to misuse firearm in the study area with the highest (AWR Value of 3.57). The result also indicates that corruption among Custom officials triggers the misuse of firearms in the study area. (AWR Value, 3.37). The empirical finding also showed that poor welfare services of Custom officials motivate them to misuse firearms in the study area (AWR Value, 3.27). The result indicated that the lack of proper monitoring of the Custom service is one of the causes of firearms misuse among the officials of the service in the study area. (AWR Value, 2.71). Findings from the result indicates that illiteracy among Custom officials is not a major cause of the misuse of firearms in the study area. (AWR Value, 2.21).

From the qualitative instrument, a respondent noted that;

Apparently, so many factors could be attributed to the causes of firearms misuse by Custom officials. Some of these officials are drunk while on duty post. Don't also forget that we have a very terrible circumstance in this country, we have dis-respect for the rule of law and also the men in uniform, normally when a security personnel is telling you to stop, you are supposed to stop, failure of smugglers to stop at checkpoints has always triggered these officials to run after them and start shooting. The smugglers often times use the civilians as human shield or soft target, so most times, while trying to shoot the smugglers, they end up shooting innocent civilians.

(KII/ Resident/Male/ Conducted April 2024)

Another Respondent said that;

We should begin to ask question such as, are these people really trained to be armed, what is the quality of their training. In the advanced countries of the world, before you can bear arms as a security personnel, you have to pass through series of training and test. Moreso, poor welfare service contributes to the misconduct of these officials. They are not well taken care, the emotional intelligence are not there, coupled with the

fact that these guys are hungry and angry. From another perspective, these guys do not really have the intentions to join the force but circumstances pushed them into becoming a part of these forces we are talking about.

(KII/Border Expert/ Conducted April 2024)

A Respondent of the sampled population stated that;

I think one cause might be inadequate training in terms of how to engage with civilians. The security force generally in Nigeria are poorly trained. They have limited access to continuous capacity building training, all these could have assisted it briefing and updating them in terms of recent humanitarian rules of engagement and also human rights and practices. Corruption is another cause, when they are bribed by either smugglers or armed gangs, when they are compromised, which often happen, it might cause the misuse of firearm in terms of firearms being used on target groups or rivals. Poor due diligence is another factor, most junior officers are not well supervised and they often time connive with armed groups and any altercation between them could trigger the misuse of firearm.

(KII/ CSO/Male/Conducted May 2024)

Research Question 3: What are the socio-political and economic implications of the misuse of Firearms on the residents of Idiroko Border?

Item 11: The misuse of firearms by Custom officials threatens the peace and security of the Idiroko border area.

Item 12: Frequent clash between Custom officials and Smugglers affects business and trading activities in Idiroko border area.

Item 13: The misuse of firearms by custom officials retards political development in Idiroko border area.

Item 14: The conflict between Custom Officials and Smugglers often claims people’s lives

Item 15: The frequent clash between Custom officials and Smugglers in Idiroko has continued to limit economic investment.

Table 3

ITEM	SA	A	SD	D	TWR	AWR
11	98	36	2	14	518	3.45
12	125	15	2	8	557	3.71
13	63	64	3	20	470	3.13
14	73	49	2	26	469	3.13
15	81	24	13	32	454	3.03

Decision Value: Weak = 1.00 to 2.50 High = 2.51 to 4.00

Table 3 indicated the respondents’ responses on the socio-political and economic implications of the misuse of Firearms on the residents of Idiroko Border. The empirical finding shows that, the misuse of firearms by Custom officials threatens the peace and security of the Idiroko border area. (AWR Value, 3.45). The result also indicates that, the frequent clash between Custom officials and Smugglers affects business and trading activities in Idiroko border area with the highest (AWR Value of 3.71). Findings from the study unveiled

that, the misuse of firearms by custom officials retards political development in Idiroko border area. (AWR Value, 3.13). The result also indicates that the conflict between Custom Officials and Smugglers often claims people's lives (AWR Value, 3.13). The result further indicates that, the frequent clash between Custom officials and Smugglers in Idiroko has continued to limit economic investment. (AWR Value, 3.03).

A Respondent note that;

From the socio-economic implications, two things are involved- by the time you cut down the life of a human, family head for instance, you are throwing the whole family into mourning, mourning because they don't have anything to eat because you have taken a way the bread winner of such family. And mind you if its a woman, all women have their own benefits and roles in the society. Now the implication is that, at the community level, it increases the number of dependants. Another implication is that, people will continue to work in fear which reduces socio-interaction within the community. This threatens the livelihood of the people, because if the people are scared to come out, how would they sell.

(IDI/ Community Leader/Male/ Conducted April 2024)

A respondent stated that;

The primary issue is the tragic and avoidable loss of innocent lives. Customs officials, in their zeal to intercept smugglers, often resort to excessive force, leading to the injury or death of bystanders. This not only results in immediate harm to individuals and families but also generates widespread fear and distrust within the community. Furthermore, without clear regulations and accountability mechanisms, there is little to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

(KII/ CSO Staff/ Female/ conducted June 2024)

A respondent also noted;

The misuse of firearms among Custom officials is a common issue across most of the borders in Nigeria. I mean it is not particular to the Idiroko border area alone. The impact has been profound and multifaceted. Families are mourning the loss of loved ones who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The psychological toll on our community is immense; people live in constant fear of violence erupting at any moment. Economically, this instability discourages local businesses and stifles the potential for growth and development. The social fabric of our community is strained as trust in the authorities, who are meant to protect us, erodes.

(IDI/ Resident / Female/ conducted May 2024)

A Respondent in the study area notes;

Of course, Yes, there are socio-economic and also political implications of firearms misuse in Idiroko. Don't forget we have cross border traders in the area, it scares people from participating in cross-border trade activities.

(KII/ Resident/Female/ Conducted May 2024)

Another Respondent stated that;

There are lots of socio-economic implications and first is that it impedes trade, we have the ECOWAS trade movement which allows people and goods to move across the borders without any form of checks and hindrances up to 90 days, so once you have this issue of firearms, it could cause people to be weary of crossing the borders for business. Basically, it retards cross border trade and development. Politically, it

significantly hurt the reputation of the country and also its adherence to the rule of law and human rights. Because most of these extra-judicial killings affects foreigners who are officially working at borderlands.

(KII/ Government Official/ Male/ Conducted April 2024)

A Respondent from another perspective stated that;

First and foremost, the population of the border area is dwindling time to time. Because of the fear of not being safe whenever there is a clash between Customs and Smugglers. Development in terms of infrastructure is no longer there. Also, people’s participation in political activities has reduced significantly in recent times. And yet the traditional rulers keep complaining of being neglected by the government. The little sustainable development we have here is the efforts of private individuals. Since it was opened in in the 60s, the place has continued to suffer political recognition.

(IDI/ Community Leader/ Male/ Conducted May 2024)

Research Question 4: What has been the efforts of the Nigerian government in addressing cases of firearm misuse in the study area

Item 16: The Nigerian government has overtime shown commitment in addressing the misuse of firearms by Custom officials in Idiroko border area.

Item 17: Custom officials who misuse firearms are usually apprehended.

Item 18: The Nigerian government has done little in addressing the misuse of firearms among Custom officials.

Item 19: The Nigeria Custom Service monitoring and accountability framework is effective

Item 20: The Nigerian State lacks good policies on monitoring security agencies.

Table 4

ITEM	SA	A	SD	D	TWR	AWR
16	1	5	129	15	292	1.95
17	2	5	98	45	264	1.76
18	87	52	6	5	521	3.47
19	2	14	78	56	262	1.75
20	30	92	8	20	432	2.88

Decision Value: Weak = 1.00 to 2.50 High = 2.51 to 4.00

Table 4 indicated the respondents’ responses on the efforts of the Nigerian government in addressing cases of firearm misuse in the study area.

The empirical finding indicates that, the Nigerian government has not shown commitment in addressing the misuse of firearms by Custom officials in Idiroko border area of Ogun State. (AWR Value, 1.95). The result also shows that Custom officials who misuse firearms are not usually apprehended (AWR Value, 1.76). Findings from the study also showed that, the Nigerian government has done little in addressing the misuse of firearms among Custom officials in the study area with the highest AWR Value of 3.47. From the result, the Nigeria Custom Service monitoring and accountability framework was discovered to be ineffective (AWR Value, 1.75). The empirical result also indicated that, the Nigerian State lacks good policies on

monitoring the activities of security agencies in the country. (AWR Value, 2.88).

A Respondent of the qualitative sessions said;

Mechanisms for disciplinary actions is very weak in Nigeria. The government has failed over the years, especially in putting in place, the necessary mechanisms and disciplinary actions towards cautioning these officials. Ideally, these officials are supposed to be accountable for every bullet they release. In the case of these officials, I have hardly heard of punishment being meted to them for misconduct, maybe they have been doing it but not in the public domain and if its not in the public domain, that means the government has not been doing anything in this regard.

(KII /CSO/ Male/Conducted May 2024)

A Respondent stated that;

I have only heard of police officers being reprimanded; I have never heard of any Custom officials being reprimanded for the misuse of firearms. If we have cases of Customs being reported, may be few, they don't even report their cases.

(KII /CSO/ Conducted May 2024)

A respondent stated that;

The misuse of firearms by Customs officials at the Idiroko border is a significant concern and highlights a critical gap in our policy and legal frameworks. Despite the essential role that Customs officials play in securing our borders and combating smuggling, there is an alarming lack of comprehensive policies and laws specifically addressing the proper use and control of firearms within this context.

(KII/ Border Expert / Male/ conducted May 2024)

A respondent also affirmed that;

I think there have been a little concerted efforts in the Nigerian context, we have some form of joint security architecture between Custom officials and other agencies. I also think there has been a lot of awareness raising as well by the government, civil societies and the media just to ensure that Custom officers are held accountable and not above the law. I also think there has been few cases of prosecution of Custom officials.

(KII /Security Personnel/ Male/Conducted May 2024)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study validates the diverse claims of firearms misuse among Custom officials in Idiroko border area of Ogun State. Also confirming the various clashes between alleged smugglers and the Custom officials. The empirical findings also attest to the frequent lost of innocent Nigerians who are being killed in the process of this clash between the Nigerian Custom officials and smugglers at the Idiroko border area of Ogun State. These findings align with the premium times media report of February 4, 2024, reporting the death of a teenager who was killed when Custom officials were chasing smugglers. It is justifiable to state from this report that, cases of firearms misuse among Custom officials are not restricted to Idiroko border alone but also to other porous borders across the country.

The empirical finding also underscores the diverse causes of firearms misuse in the study area. Some of which include; Corruption among Custom officials, poor welfare services, poor monitoring and

accountability mechanisms and lack of capacity building programs. Corruption was identified as a major factor of firearms misuse among Custom officials in the study area. This entails the act of taking bribes from smugglers and other network gangs in the border areas, any altercation in the process usually leads to a serious fire clash between the smugglers and the Custom officials. This finding resonates with the study of Agbiboa (2010), affirming that, Corruption has profoundly impacted Nigeria's development and security, leading to significant declines across various facets of national life. This pervasive issue, highlighted by Agbiboa in 2010, underpins many of the severe challenges facing contemporary Nigeria and One of the most critical areas affected is national security. Moreover, corruption fosters an environment where criminal activities can thrive. Law enforcement agencies, compromised by corruption, are often unable or unwilling to take decisive action against criminals. This emboldens criminal networks and insurgent groups, exacerbating insecurity. This clearly explains the reasons for reprisal attacks by smugglers and other criminal network across borderlands, during which innocent individuals lost their lives. The above findings also corroborate the position of Otubu (2011). The effective policing of crime is significantly impeded by several critical resource deficiencies, impacting the creation of a safe and secure environment for citizens who are in dire need of peace. Otubu (2011) highlights several key issues contributing to this challenge which include, poor welfare service conditions of security personnel and poor training facilities.

The empirical result also highlighted the socio-political and economic implications of the misuse of firearms among Custom officials in the study area. The misuse of firearms has overtime taken a heavy toll on the peace and security of the Idiroko border area, social relations and trade activities have been affected. The political implications were discovered to include; poor political participation among residents, low political development in the area and bad imagery of the Nigerian state. Without mincing words, peaceful and secure environments are essential for attracting both domestic and foreign investments. Investors seek stability to protect their investments and ensure predictable returns. Insecure environments disrupt economic activities, leading to decreased productivity. Frequent incidents of crime and violence can cause businesses to close early, increase absenteeism, and result in the loss of working hours. When people feel unsafe, their ability to work efficiently and productively is compromised, negatively impacting overall economic output. This has been the case at Idiroko border area of Ogun State. These findings also align with the submission of Achumba, Ighomereho, and Akpor-Robaro (2013), which affirmed that security is critical for a nation's development, and its absence means that economic growth and development cannot be achieved. Findings of this study also showed that the Nigerian government has demonstrated little or no commitment in checkmating the activities of the Nigeria Customs Service as evidences unveil that there is a lack of accountability framework and policies for checkmating the activities of officials of this service, which is a justifiable cause of firearm misuse in the study area.

Furthermore, a report by Chukwu David on *New Telegraph* news clearly corroborates the finding of this study. The headline reads "**Senate Advocates Punishment for Misuse of Firearms by Customs Personnel**". It is justifiable to infer from the advocacy by members of the House of Senate in Nigeria that the country lacks adequate laws and policies that should treat and address the misuse of firearms among officials of the agency. This could be attributed to the incessant occurrences of firearms misuse among Customs officials across Nigerian borders.

While many advanced climes have successfully implemented set of rules and regulations that guides firearms and the usage, most developing nations, with Nigeria inclusive have continued to battle with the poignant issue of firearms misuse, due to lack of regulations.

According to Pucnik (2001), modern European weapons regulation must adhere to the latest safety and technological standards. Consequently, legislation on weapons should comprehensively address the rights and obligations of individuals and business entities. These statutory provisions are essential for ensuring the protection of life, health, and safety of people, as well as maintaining public order. Without a doubt, the

regulation of weapons is inherently sensitive in social contexts. This sensitivity underscores the importance of legislative measures that safeguard life, health, and safety, in addition to upholding public order.

From an international perspective, it is imperative to note that agreed international standards exist to regulate the use of force and firearms by police. These standards include the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles for the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Central to these standards is the definition of legitimate force. Police officers may, at times, need to use force or even lethal force to maintain community safety and protect individuals from life-threatening attacks. However, such force must not be arbitrary; it must be proportionate, necessary, and lawful.

To adhere to these essential principles, police officers and other security personnel are expected to be adept at rapidly assessing threats to life. They require extensive training in tactical threat assessment to judge whether the use of force, including lethal force, is proportionate, necessary, and lawful in varying contexts. Unfortunately, many police forces worldwide are trained in how to fire a gun, but not sufficiently trained in determining if or when it should be fired

(The Standards)

Some of the international frameworks that guides firearms usage include; the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (1979), the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (1990), and the United Nations Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions.

The United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials has its origins in a 1975 seminar organized by Amnesty International, which included participation from police officers in The Hague. This document comprises eight articles, each accompanied by a commentary to aid interpretation. The United Nations Basic Principles consist of 26 detailed rules that define the rights and obligations of law enforcement officials, including the stipulation that firearms should be used only as a last resort when there is an imminent threat to life.

The term “law enforcement officials” as stipulated in these standards, encompasses all officers vested with police powers, whether appointed or elected, including military authorities, state security forces, customs officers, immigration officials, prison officers, paramilitary personnel, and border guards.

A central concern of these standards is the definition and application of legitimate force. As articulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no individual shall be arbitrarily deprived of their life. This principle mandates that any use of force by police, particularly lethal force, must be proportionate, necessary, and lawful. Arbitrary force results when these criteria are not met. Specifically, lethal force should only be employed in compliance with Article 9 of the UN Basic Principles, which permits its use solely in self-defense or in defense of others against an imminent threat of death or serious injury. <https://policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2016/10/Guns-and-Policing-Standards.pdf?x49094>.

Taking a queue from the above, it is justifiable to state that, despite the existence of comprehensive international standards set forth by the United Nations to regulate the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials, the Nigerian state has demonstrated significant non-compliance with these guidelines. The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, and the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions outline clear expectations for law enforcement practices, emphasizing the necessity for force to be proportionate, necessary, and lawful. However, several instances indicate that Nigeria has not adhered to these principles. It wouldn't also be out of place to state that, The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal,

Arbitrary, and Summary Executions emphasize the importance of accountability and thorough investigations into incidents of unlawful killings. In Nigeria, there is a pervasive lack of accountability for security personnel misconduct. Investigations into extrajudicial killings are often inadequate, and perpetrators frequently escape justice, undermining public trust in law enforcement. Furthermore, the international standards stress the need for extensive training in tactical threat assessment to ensure that law enforcement officials can make informed decisions about the proportionality and necessity of using force. In Nigeria, the training provided to police and other security personnel is insufficient, focusing more on the use of firearms rather than on assessing threats and de-escalating situations without resorting to violence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the operations of smugglers and the misuse of firearms by Nigeria Customs officials at the Idiroko border area of Ogun State, and other borders across Nigeria have profound socio-political and economic implications. These issues contribute to a pervasive climate of insecurity and fear among local communities, undermining trust in law enforcement and the government. Economically, smuggling distorts legitimate trade, deprives the government of essential revenue, and hampers local businesses' competitiveness. The misuse of firearms among Customs officials further exacerbates violence and human rights abuses, further destabilizing the region. From all indications, the Nigerian state is yet to comply with the international standards governing the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials. The arbitrary use of firearms, lack of accountability, inadequate training, and widespread human rights violations reflect a significant divergence from the UN's guidelines. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms in training, accountability mechanisms, improved border management and adherence to international human rights principles to align Nigerian law enforcement practices with global standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Towards addressing the menace of firearms misuse among Customs officials across borders, it has become very imperative to introduce specialized training in areas such as border management, advanced surveillance techniques, and crisis response. Training should also include human rights and the ethical use of firearms.
- In a bid to addressing the cases of firearms misuse among Custom officials, it is also important to equip officials with modern technological tools and provide training on their usage. This includes surveillance drones, biometric scanners, and data analytics software to enhance border control efficiency. This will always help to track criminals without running after them and shooting indiscriminately.
- There is also a need to improve the welfare services of the Nigeria Customs Service, this will help to reduce the cases of corruption among the officials.
- The Nigerian government should establish independent oversight bodies within the customs service to monitor and investigate allegations of misconduct, including misuse of firearms and corruption.
- To ensure adherence to these principles, law enforcement officials must receive extensive training in threat assessment. This training is critical for enabling officers to accurately evaluate whether the use of force, including lethal force, is proportionate, necessary, and lawful in various contexts. Effective threat assessment training equips police officers with the skills needed to identify direct threats to life and determine the appropriate response in diverse situations.
- The government should enforce legislative frameworks that govern the use of firearms by law enforcement officials. This includes revising existing laws to align with international standards and ensuring that all law enforcement agencies comply with these regulations. A robust legal framework provides a clear basis for the lawful use of force and firearms. By aligning national laws with international standards, Nigeria can create a consistent and enforceable approach to regulating law

enforcement conduct, thereby reducing instances of misuse and protecting citizens' rights.

- Collaboration with international bodies can provide additional expertise and support in developing best practices in the area of border security management.

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