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Introduction

Borderlands are both melting pots and security hot spots. Often neglected in the development strategies of postcolonial states, they are an arena for cross-border crime and represent a dynamic place of historically fostered cultural and socio-economic exchange at the same time.

One of the most vital border regions in West Africa is the frontier between Nigeria and Benin. Both economies depend to a large extent on their cross-border trade, illegal and legal. As an essential part of the Abidjan-Lagos transport and migration corridor, it also represents a key transport vein in the ECOWAS region.

Worries of border porosity and fears of criminal activity spilling-over from Nigeria to Benin are increasing. This is due to the potential spread of threats related to international terrorism and cross-border crime in the Sahel region to the coastal states, especially linked to the growing power of Boko Haram in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

The aim of this short essay is to discuss the concrete security challenges resulting from the cross-border exchanges between these two countries. Before doing so, the cultural and geographic landscape of the borderland will be analyzed and the nature of cross-border activities identified. It is argued that a more holistic approach is necessary when looking at border issues, taking into account the nexus between peace, security and development.¹ More efficient border management as well as bilateral infrastructure development should be at the heart of the efforts to make the border region between Nigeria and Benin an economically viable and safer environment.

Analysis of the nature of cross-border flows between Nigeria and Benin

a) Geographical conditions of the Beninese-Nigerian border

The international border between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin is roughly 700 km long. The current border corresponds to the inter-colonial border between British and French territories that was set up in 1889.² Due to the fact that between these two countries hardly any natural boundaries exist, in some parts its exact demarcation remains unclear. The border region includes a large surface of lagoon- and marshlands in the Ouémé valley, which have traditionally been used as transport and trade routes and which are very difficult to control and monitor by migration and customs authorities. The multiple local markets found along the border line, from the North to the South, are the backbone for the buzzing web of exchange taking place between both countries. These markets also constitute the main places of contact and exchange between people, who come from both rural and urban areas.³

Historically, the border region has always been the center of economic activities between both countries. The Southeast in particular, with its numerous local markets including Lagos and Badagry, has been a focal point of economic activities dating back to colonial times.⁴ Consequently, the border region is particularly busy between Lagos and Sémé-Podji in the South. Today, the economic needs of the big cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou and Lagos which are linked through the border corridor in the South are constitutive of this cross-border vitality. This is further fuelled by a high permeability of the borders. Along the entire border lies a labyrinth of little creeks and streams, which have never been forbidden and are unmonitored by the police and the border control.⁵ The lagoon linking Porto Novo to Lagos and its pirogue traffic further facilitates the transport of agricultural goods, such as rice and cooking oil.⁶ Geographical conditions play a vital role: the proximity of major consumption markets and the absence of natural boundaries are important contributing factors in making contrabandism an "institution"⁷ within the entire region.

1. Bassey, Celestine and Oshita, O. Oshita, "Governance and Border Security in Africa", Malhouse Press, Lagos, 2010, p. 316.
2. Flynn, Donna K., "'We Are the Border': Identity, Exchange, and the State along the Bénin-Nigeria Border", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 2, May 1997, p. 314.
3. Sossou-Agbo, Anani Lazare, "Dynamique territoriale à la frontière bénino-nigériane: rôle des marchés du Sud-Est", *Conférence Les Frontières Mobiles, 11e rencontres du Réseau BRIT, Geneva/Grenoble, 6-9 September 2011*, pp. 2-3, citing Mondjannagni (1963).
4. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 2.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. Ibid., p. 13.
7. Ibid.

b) The cultural conditions of the border region

The cultural homogeneity of the border zone is crucial for the extraordinary cross-border dynamics. When the border was fixed in 1889, it divided up the Shabe Yoruba of which the majority became part of French Dahomey whilst some of the eastern Shabe villages joined British Nigeria. This separation, which forced many Yoruba into a nation with the Dahomean Fon, a former enemy, was the source for resentment.⁸ The current borders, a colonial remnant, separated a homogeneous socio-cultural group. Even today, linguistically and ethnically similar groups can be found all along the border: the above mentioned Yoruba in the South together with the Gun and Ajo speaking group; the Beriba in the center and the Fulani and Hausa in the northern parts of both countries. Oshita is convinced that: "The majority of these border residents consider de beacon stones signifying official boundary marks as mere symbols of the geographical state, which for them have no bearing on the social and cultural ties of the live and blood human beings."⁹ The cultural vicinity builds the basis for a high density of economic and social exchange across the border.¹⁰

The dense economic activities are also fostered by the socio-economic structures of Yoruba societies. Present in the south and central regions of the border, the Yoruba follow the practice of building associations between members of different Yoruba states residing in Benin, Nigeria or elsewhere in the region.¹¹ These associations create strong social bonds through structures such as the "réseaux de tontine"¹² (solidarity/protective networks) which enable joint cross-border trade ventures to take place between members. Micro-finance structures offer necessary financial support for start-ups of business

ventures and commercial activities in the region. These have existed for decades and are based on criteria such as kinship and solidarity. The ethnical and linguistic proximity together with the laid out forms of social organization favor a close web of trade relations. Also, all kinds of exchange and commercial endeavors – legal or illegal – are undertaken.

c) Informal cross-border trade – the most common cross-border activity

Today, the border is vital for both countries as well as for the larger sub-region. Especially the Beninese economy is highly dependent on informal trade with its giant neighbor, in particular the practice of re-exportation of goods.

These activities are lucrative, mainly due to the non-harmonisation of economic policies between Nigeria and Benin. Apart from having two different monetary regimes, the naira and the CFA franc which are not pegged to each other, it is the difference in import tolls especially - generally higher in Nigeria - that have spurred undeclared commercial activities and engendered benefits from re-exportation activities. Studies of the Laboratoire d'Analyse et d'Expertise Sociale (LARES) have shown that Benin as well as Nigeria have structured their development politics around the trade of re-exportation:¹³ Benin imports goods from Europe and Asia and exports them to the Nigerian market. Re-exportation is practiced by all of Nigeria's CFA neighboring countries, but Benin is the champion in this field. This is mainly due to the geographical proximity between the two cities of Cotonou and Lagos.¹⁴

According to estimations, informal cross-border trade constitutes around 75% of Beninese GDP.¹⁵ This figure, which contrasts with an average of 43% in all of sub-Saharan Africa, illustrates the dependency of the Beninese economy on this activity and on its strategic position as "Etat-entrepôt"¹⁶. Nigeria, with its immense and steadily growing national consumer market, represents Benin's main trading partner in the region. Concerning the Nigerian side, informal cross-border trade is estimated around 20% of its GDP and includes trade with all its neighbors, especially Niger and Cameroon. Hence we can observe a highly unequal relationship, with Benin being

8. Op.cit. Flynn (1997), p. 314, citing Asiwaju (1976).

9. Op.cit. Bassey and Oshita (2010), p. 311.

10. Ibid.

11. LARES, "Le trafic illicite des produits pétroliers entre le Bénin et le Nigeria : vice ou vertu pour l'économie béninoise ? ", Série Echanges régionaux, Cotonou : September 2005, p. 44.

12. Oguniola, John Igwe, Bio, G. Soule, " L'Etat entrepôt au Bénin : commerce informel ou solution à la crise?", Karthala, Paris, 1992, p. 56.

13. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 11.

14. Ibid.

15. Afrika, Jean-Guy K. and Ajumbo, Gerald, "Informal Cross Border Trade in Africa: Implications and Policy Recommendations", African Economic Brief, AfDB, Vol. 3 No. 10, November 2012, p. 8.

16. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 11, citing Igué (1992).

much more dependent on the openness of the Nigerian (illegal) market than vice versa. Nigeria has already taken advantage of this in the past by using its border policies to manifest its power. In 2003, when the border between the two countries was closed by Obasanjo, the Beninese economy found itself in high distress.¹⁷

A key commodity illegally imported to Benin is petrol. Cheaper in Nigeria, petrol is smuggled into Benin in large quantities. This contraband business is an important source of income for many of the border community members. In 2004, 73% of the Beninese market was satisfied by illegally imported petrol which is more readily available in remote regions and more affordable than the petrol offered by the state-owned SONACOP. For some other commodities, such as agricultural goods, the volume of informal cross-border trade between Benin and its neighbors is estimated to be ten times higher than declared at customs.¹⁸

Informal cross-border trade can be seen as a positive or negative phenomenon, depending on the viewpoint taken. On the one hand, it is a manifestation of an ancient solidarity between people that were separated by colonial borders.¹⁹ It can be seen as an expression of entrepreneurship and economic dynamism that is healthy for any economy and which secures the livelihood of many families. On the other hand, custom evasion deprives the state of important revenues which contributes to the weakening of public institutions and the state's legitimacy.

Especially Benin, which depends to a large extent on its fiscal income²⁰ collected through the port of Cotonou and the border customs officials, loses a huge amount of money which could potentially be used for the general benefit of the country (infrastructure etc.).

d) Transnational criminal activities: the main challenges

Informal trade – both legal and illegal – is the most common form of trans-border activity in the region. Less common, but still important is transnational organized crime (TOC), which has been growing in the region over the past few years. Despite increasing sub-regional and international cooperation, criminal cross-border activities remain a key variable of instability in the sub-region. It is only in recent years, that the complexity of TOC has steeply increased.²¹ This development has occurred parallel to an increased commitment towards free movement of persons and goods in the ECOWAS region that is designed to stimulate growth and stability in the region.²²

TOC in West Africa has existed since the 1960s where individuals and transnational syndicates operated smaller scale activities. Since the troubled 1990s in Liberia, small arms and mercenaries added to the mix. It is since the 1990s that criminal activities have become more widespread and complicated in West Africa.²³ It should be noted that, contrary to being a cause of insecurity, cross-border crimes in the region "...are mostly symptomatic rather than causes of instability in the sub-region²⁴". Despite increased sub-regional cooperation to tackle TOC significant improvements are still to be desired.²⁵

Transnational criminal activities across the Nigerian-Beninese border are manifold. They include the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, narcotics and human beings as well as cross-border armed attacks after which criminals often easily retreat to the other side of the border to evade prosecution.²⁶ The porosity of the border between Nigeria and Benin and weak governance on both sides facilitate, like in other border regions in West Africa, transnational crime. Crime has increased around the big cities as well as the border villages during the last years.²⁷ Some villages became real exchange markets for stolen goods and contraband, such as Djoffin (Bénin, in

17. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/45407/nigeria-benin-border-closed-to-curb-banditry-and-smuggling>, consulted on March 10, 2014.

18. Lesser, Caroline, Moisé-Leeman, Evdokia, "Informal Cross-Border Trade and Trade Facilitation Reform in Sub-Sahara Africa", OECD Trade Policy Working Paper No. 86, 2009, p. 13, citing Azam (2006).

19. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 11, citing Igué (1995).

20. Op.cit. OECD (2009), p. 24: "Similarly, VAT collected on imports at the border, often represent more than half of total VAT revenues in developing countries. In Benin and Zambia, this share even reaches 70% and 67% respectively (Walsh, 2006 and Keen 2003)."

21. Addo, Prosper, "Cross-border Criminal Activities in West Africa: Options for Effective Responses", KAIPTC Paper No. 12, May 2006, p. 21.

22. De Andrés, Amado Philip, "West Africa under Attack: Drugs, Organized Crime, and Terrorism as the New Threats to Global Security", UNISCI Discussion Papers, No. 16, January 2008, p. 204.

23. Op.cit. Addo (2006), p. 3.

24. Ibid. p. 2.

25. Onuoha, Freedom C. and Ezirim, Gerald E., "Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime in West Africa", Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, 24 June 2013.

26. Adeola, Gabriel Lanre and Fayomi, Oluyemi, "The Political and Security Implications of Cross Border Migration between Nigeria and her Francophone Neighbours, International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow, Vol. 1 No. 3, May 2012, pp. 6-7.

27. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 6.

Médédjonou), and part of a broader illegal trade network. Informal traders and criminals find refuge and complicity in both border communities²⁸ and are hard to track down. TOC between Benin and Nigeria increased dramatically in 2003, involving an international robbery network led by the infamous Hamani Tijani that led to multiple border shut downs from the Nigerian side.²⁹

Armed attacks and extortion at illegal checkpoints and criminal activities are experienced especially along the Benin-Nigeria corridor. The most spectacular example would be the double attack on several banks at Dantokpa market in Cotonou in 2008 by Nigerian criminals that entered the country undetected via the lagoon. Apart from leaving casualties and many injured, a huge amount of CFA was stolen from the banks as well as from market vendors.³⁰

The Beninese-Nigerian border is furthermore prominent for the smuggling of narcotics, small fire arms and light ammunitions that are being transported through Benin on their way to Nigeria or Ghana.³¹ Human trafficking is also rife: 200.000 children in West and central Africa are subjected to forced labor and trafficking, many of whom pass from countries such as Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin to Nigeria, Gabon, the Gulf States and Europe where they live and work under slave-like conditions.³² With Benin being one of the main transit countries and Nigeria being a key destination country in terms of human trafficking (other than the trafficking of women, for which case Nigeria represents a place of departure)),³³ it is not surprising that the border between these two countries is an important route for traffickers.³⁴

Structures of transnational criminal networks in West Africa

West African crime networks are characterized by a high degree of flexibility and an organizational structure that is non-hierarchical.³⁵ It is interesting to note that “[t]he criminal enterprises in West Africa use similar techniques to that of legitimate traders and business people, typical of lineage-based societies.”³⁶ This makes them difficult to detect and observe.

The 2006 study of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) on cross-border criminal activities in the region, states that regional cross-border crime in West Africa is very different to crime networks for example in America. This is due to its limited hierarchy and a structure that does not resemble classical corporations.³⁷ In West Africa, it is more common to have loosely structured, project-based and non-permanent criminal activity which is difficult to detect since there is hardly ever permanent membership in gangs. Normally, West African transnational networks consist of recruited relatives or friends living across the border that come together for a specific project. The average size of the gang is small, usually three to five people, who are “desperate to make quick money”³⁸. Newly recruited members often do not know their employer directly. The 2008 study “West Africa under Attack: Drugs, Organized Crime, and Terrorism as the New Threats to Global Security” by UNISCI (Research Unit on International Security and Cooperation) asserts that secrecy and loyalty to the group are key. This is ensured through cultural pressures (village, ethnic group) as well as through the use of religious rituals threatening supernatural punishment in case of betrayal.³⁹ One key ingredient is having a close relationship with border officials or politicians in order to facilitate and engender complicity or if caught to ensure acquittal. Today, West Africa is not only an attractive location for criminal gangs (see Guinea Bissau), but regional groups even export their “business model”: a very loose, fragmented, business oriented system that proves itself successful in “the global village of modern ‘disorganized’ crime”.⁴⁰

28. Ibid., p. 20.

29. Op.cit. Adeola and Oluyemi (2012), p. 7.

30. http://www.ipsinternational.org/fr/_note.asp?idnews=5150, consulted on March 9, 2014.

31. Op.cit. Adeola and Oluyemi (2012), p. 6.

32. Op.cit. Addo (2006), p. 8, citing Human Rights Watch (2003).

33. Sawadogo, Wilfried Relwende, “The Challenges of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa”, *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 and 2, 2012, p. 98.

34. Ibid. p. 99.

35. Op.cit. Addo (2006), p. 10.

36. Ibid. p. 3.

37. Ibid. p. 10.

38. Ibid.

39. Op.cit. De Andrés, p. 219.

40. Ibid. p. 218.

Transnational Terrorism: will Benin become the new Northern Cameroon?

Since the rebellion in Mali in 2012, the creeping transformation and significance of the Sahel region in the web of international terrorism and the resulting threat to the entire region has become impossible to ignore. In the context of globalization, Al-Qaeda and other external terrorist groups have forged links with West African crime networks around human trafficking, drugs, diamonds and weapons.⁴¹ The international and cross-border dimensions of this threat are palpable; they are evident for example, when looking at the link between the Libyan revolution and the crisis in Mali in terms of the mobility of weapons.⁴²

One key concern at the Nigerian-Beninese border is the activities of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and their possible spill-over into Benin. Boko Haram is becoming stronger and its activities and attacks have continued to multiply,⁴³ despite a strong state security response in the Northern parts of the country. It has already had a regional impact, illustrated by the violence that spilled over into northern Cameroon at the beginning of 2013. This led to multiple kidnappings of foreigners as well as the closure of the border in February 2014, in order to curb the mobility of fighters. With Beninese troops supporting the AU mission in Mali, Benin has become a target for extremists from the East as well as the Northern regions, where borders are scarcely watched. Movements of rebels between Mali and Burkina Faso are suspected in regions not far from the Beninese border. When the French foreign ministry issued a travel warning for the North-eastern regions of Benin in 2013, it created a huge diplomatic fuss.⁴⁴ The Beninese government criticized this warning as an exaggeration and as scaremongering. This illustrates the grey area in which Benin is situated at the moment concerning terrorism threats. Despite various rumors and some reports on "imported extremism",⁴⁵ for example of

extremist preachers moving from Nigeria into Benin and taking over mosques in the main cities, there is no confirmed concrete information on terrorist elements and activities on Beninese territory at this time.

It is obvious that, as a transit state in the region, Benin is not isolated from these regional dynamics and will have to react to them. Given that the transport of narcotics, weapons and human beings are tightly interwoven with terrorist activities and directly impact on not only state security but on people's individual security, these illegal cross-border activities need to be curbed more efficiently. In light of the commitment made by ECOWAS (that entitles freedom of movement to persons and to goods), the key challenge is controlling cross-border flows without inhibiting the vitality that is healthy to the economy and vital for individuals from the border communities.

The concept of human security

The various cross-border flows depicted pose a challenge to security. They not only challenge the state by circumventing its control and threatening its institutions, but this also puts individuals at risk: they are the ones who face increasing insecurity when crossing the border.

Let us take for example the main activity taking place between Nigeria and Benin: informal cross-border trade. Traders encounter many difficulties due to having no public transport at their disposal and often travelling by night and through marshlands, where gangs are waiting to intercept arriving pirogues filled with goods. They face extortion through illegal stops, corrupt security officials and increasing crime on the main road into Lagos.⁴⁶ The majority of traders are women, who are also vulnerable to physical abuse when travelling these distances. Sossou-Agbo argues that the people using the border zone or living there find themselves in a space full of risks and dangers instead of development and self-fulfillment. The population is living in constant insecurity as one shock, such as temporary border closing, can have devastating consequences for the economic wellbeing of the people.⁴⁷

Hence, it is important to view security from the perspective of human security, which is crucial when it comes to informal cross-border trade and the border region in general. It is more relevant than solely looking at the state

41. Ibid.

42. Op.cit. Al-Jazeera (2013)

43. See e.g. BBC News, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26816222>, consulted on April 16, 2014.

44. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/actu/20130224T204047Z20130224T204045Z/>, consulted on March 5, 2014.

45. Op.cit. Adeola and Oluyemi (2012) p. 2.

46. Op.cit. Afrika and Ajumbe (2012), p. 9.

47. Op.cit. Sossou-Agbo (2011), p. 6.

point of view, which sees its right to control which goods and which people enter its territory threatened by these cross-border activities. Human security is a concept that evolved in the 1990s and focuses on a range of non-military threats to states and individuals, such as political violence, environmental degradation and threats that transcend national borders.⁴⁸ It was first conceptualized in the Human Development Report of 1994.⁴⁹ The concept, whose exact definition remains disputed, stipulates a people-centered approach on security, complementary to a pro-poor and people-based development approach. It is opposed to the more traditional notion of security as state-centered concept that focuses on international security, national interests, and power politics.⁵⁰ When designing migration and border policies, traditional security concepts still prevail. Only gradually has the human perspective of security become subject of conceptualization and research. However, it is still insufficiently being taken into account by policy makers when devising border strategies. This is clearly illustrated by the stigmatization and illegalization of informal cross-border traders and complete border shut-downs as a main means to curb criminal activities. Taking on a more human-based approach would allow for more holistic border policies that enable control without taking inefficient and nationalistic measures, such as a complete border shutdown.

Also on the regional level, much needs to be done in terms of human security approach. Olawale states that the ECOWAS peace and security framework includes “human security” as a concept, but: “...trans-border insecurity in the sub-region [ECOWAS] [is] inadequately reflected and/or prioritized in ECOWAS’ peace and security architecture”.⁵¹ However, theoretically, there exists a sufficient amount of provisions in ECOWAS documents that assure the rights of ECOWAS citizens to mobility and

security. The principle of free movement of people is laid out in both Article 2 and Article 27 of the ECOWAS Treaty and forms one of the key objectives of ECOWAS. The 1979 Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment and its four Supplementary Protocols - all ratified by both Benin and Nigeria - contain detailed rights of Community citizens. They allow them to enter, reside, and establish in the territory of all Member States.

Moreover, bilateral agreements have been signed between the two countries concerning border management, resulting for example in the “Fire for Fire” cooperation, where security forces from both countries perform common anti-piracy patrols along their common sea border.⁵²

One can see that - on paper - security provisions, including human security aspects, are integrated in the regional legal corpus and are applicable to both countries. However, the everyday experiences of travelers and traders crossing the border are highly contradictory to these legal stipulations. The behavior of security officials, who – in some cases systematically – violate these provisions, is crucial in this respect. It is the lack of implementation of an existing legal framework, which theoretically provides for human security in the border region, that is the main challenge and creates such difficulties for citizens at the border. The enforcement of free mobility is the responsibility of the member states that are usually more willing to sign treaties and agreements than willing to (and/or being capable of) implementing their contents.

The link between development and security

Supporting the quest for human security is the striking fact that border regions often exhibit a low level of development compared to the core centers of the country. Built upon fragile power after independence and weakened through continuing border conflicts, the postcolonial African state has rarely been able to exercise control over its entire territory.⁵³ Even if a state power is strong enough to penetrate its entire territory, governments tend to disregard development of border communities, since these are often the target for destruction during the time of war. It is also the historically

48. Olawale, Ismail, “ECOWAS and Human Security”, 28 October 2011, p. 167.

49. Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-1994>.

50. Ibid. p. 166.

51. Ibid.

52. http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20172:nigeria-benin-anti-piracy-patrols-successful&catid=51:Sea&Itemid=106, consulted on April 14, 2014.

53. See e.g. Boone, Catherine, “Territorial Politics and the reach of the state: unevenness by design”, *Revista de Ciencia Política*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2012, pp. 623-641.

grown uncertainty in relation to border regions that make states hesitant to invest in them: "For security reasons, no government or individual is willing to invest in the border communities because of war."⁵⁴

It is hence not surprising that the border communities along the Nigeria-Beninese line suffer from poor infrastructure, a lack of access to educational facilities and low development in general.⁵⁵ This is especially the case for the Ogun state in Southwestern Nigeria. As stated by Oshita, "African countries have always conducted governance as if the people outside the cities have no need for peace, security and development."⁵⁶ This results in very limited possibilities and choices for the border population in terms of their survival and livelihood, and pushes them into informality and illegality.

It is their peripheral positioning that, coupled with the dynamics unleashed by globalisation, makes border regions an interesting research subject, but also a potential hot spot of phenomena such as organized crime. It is no coincidence therefore, that the lower Sahel region from Mauretania across Mali to Northern Nigeria constitutes such a troublesome region today. They are all places located at the very fringes of centralized power. Borno state, home to the infamous Boko Haram, has one of the lowest Human Development Indices worldwide.⁵⁷

There are, however, some positive trends to be observed in terms of integrating and coordinating development and security policies in Nigeria and Benin. At the beginning of

2014, both countries, together with Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo signed the Treaty to establish the ECOWAS Abidjan-Lagos Corridor. This is a 1025 km road project, linking the region's main ports and cities to each other and will become a key transport vein.⁵⁸ The multi-million dollar infrastructure project aims at stimulating socio-economic development and enhancing the economic growth of the countries involved. At the same time, it is designed to make the movement of persons across the borders safer and quicker.⁵⁹ Similar projects have been pursued in the East African Community (EAC), a regional organization which has been very successful in terms of ensuring human mobility.⁶⁰ The Kenya-Uganda-Rwanda Corridor Integration Projects are one such example that has successfully taken up cross-border infrastructure projects combined with the setup of Joint Border Committees (JBC).⁶¹ These Committees include government agencies from both countries as well as businesses, in order to "enhance efficiency at borders".⁶²

In a similar logic, Nigeria and Benin have recently increased their commitments to transnational infrastructure plans⁶³ as well as the establishment of a Joint Border Post (JBP). The JBP at Sémé would be one of seven posts in the region, whose construction is a key component of the ECOWAS Commission's Regional Road Transport and Transit Facilitation Program and is supported by the EU's 9th EDF.⁶⁴ The merging of customs and security processes at the border would speed up the current formalities with the eventual objective of completely lifting borders in order to create a border-less ECOWAS region.

From a human security perspective, a joint border control is certainly to be welcomed: to begin with, a step towards jointly controlled border processes would speed up procedures for travelers. Secondly, this new arrangement has the potential of reducing extortion of travelers by security officials. However, this also highly depends on the management of the newly organized security staff as well as their sanctions and control mechanisms. At the moment, no practical assessment of the changing conditions for travelers can be made: by April 2014, the JBC still has not been implemented at the Sémé border, even though the project was originally set to be completed by June 2012.⁶⁵

54. Adeyinka, Adetunji Musilimu, "Trans-Border Movement and Trading Activities across Nigeria-Benin Republic Border", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 5 No. 1, January 2014, p. 420.

55. Ibid.

56. Op.cit. Bassey and Oshita (2010), p. 312.

57. www.ng.undp.org/documents/.../NHDR-%20PowerPoint-Rev.ppt, consulted on March 10, 2014.

58. <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=036&lang=en&annee=2014>, consulted on April 10, 2014.

59. <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=066&lang=en&annee=2014>, consulted on April 10, 2014.

60. UNECA, Regional Integration, "Progress on Regional Integration in Africa", Trade and Infrastructure Division, Addis Ababa, 2012, p. 6.

61. <http://www.information.go.ke/?p=732>, consulted on April 11, 2014.

62. USAID, Joint Border Committees: A look at Malaba Border, Kenya, available at http://www.competafrica.org/Files/Malaba_JBC_Case_Study_rebranded_June_2013.pdf, consulted on April 11, 2014, p. 1.

63. <http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/coming-and-going-border-and-regional-infrastructure-set-upgrades>, <http://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/article/benin-nigeria-power-interconnection-project-sharing-energy-in-west-africa-11791/>, consulted on April 3, 2014.

64. <https://www.devex.com/projects/tenders/ecowas-one-stop-border-posts-elaboration-of-manual-of-procedures-for-the-malanville-joint-border-post-between-benin-and-niger/91381>, consulted on March 20, 2014.

65. <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=023&lang=en&annee=2011>, consulted on April 10, 2014.

Conclusions: the way forward

The objective of this essay is to illustrate the socio-economic conditions shaping the Nigeria-Benin border region and to demonstrate the complexity of cross-border movements. Civilian and commercially linked cross-border exchanges represent the majority of transnational activity between these two countries. However, it is the threat of terrorist activities and the smuggling of arms, human beings and narcotics as well as the sustainable yet informal fuel trade that have received the most attention during the last years. In this context, the argument of national security is being used to defend tough border controls and the infringement on the peoples' right to free movement. The development-oriented, human security approach – though present in ECOWAS protocols – has not yet been sufficiently ingrained in the regional security practices.

There has however been some progress made in fighting illegal cross-border activities. Regional coordination has improved in many areas. For example, regarding small arms (Convention on small arms and light weapons, their ammunition and related materials, June 2006), human trafficking (Plan of action and declaration) and narcotics (the newly established ECOWAS Drug Control Unit). It has also focused on terrorism, under the auspices of ECOWAS, with the recent adoption of the regional Counter Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan. However, it results from the absence of significant improvement of these problems that "...the underlying factors contributing to the outbreak of these crimes as well as the complex linkages between them"⁶⁶ have not yet been sufficiently addressed. This is necessary to achieve significant improvement of these problems. Transnational criminal activities in West Africa are rather one of the symptoms of larger underlying structural problems⁶⁷ than the cause of insecurity.

It remains an important task for policy makers to accept the link between peace, development and (human) security as the cornerstone of their security policy. Underdeveloped border regions, whose citizens have no alternative to illegal cross-border activities, are a fertile ground for criminal networks as well as terrorist activities.

The envisaged closer cooperation in terms of infrastructure between Benin and Nigeria, reiterated by Yayi Boni and Goodluck Jonathan in recent meetings,⁶⁸ and the establishment of the Sémé Joint Border Post are promising developments. However, the implementation and practical implications for the many people crossing the border every day still remain to be assessed.

66. Onuoha, Freedom C., Ezirim, Gerald E., "'Terrorism' and Transnational Organised Crime in West Africa", Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, 24 Jun 2013.

67. Op.cit. Addo (2006), p. 21: "The root causes of the region's problems [including cross-border crimes]...were linked above all to question of governance, human rights and transparency,"; p. 2: "These cross-border crimes are mostly symptomatic rather than causes of instability in the sub-region".

68. See e.g. <http://www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvnews/97093/1/nigeria-benin-agree-to-jointly-rehabilitate-badagr.html>, consulted on April 15, 2014, consulted on April 14, 2014.

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About this study

This publication seeks to examine the concrete security challenges resulting from the cross-border exchanges between Benin and Nigeria. This border has received increased attention due to fears of a spread of Boko Haram activities towards the neighbouring countries as well as regionally operating transnational organized crime networks that are often associated with terrorist activities.

Taking into account the cultural and geographic landscape of this border region, which represents a key transport route in the ECOWAS context, the nature of cross-border activities will be presented and their impact on security will be assessed. This paper argues that a more

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holistic approach is needed when designing border and security policies. It shows that cross-border movements and exchanges between the two countries are manifold but mainly peaceful in nature as well as economically important for the borderland communities. More efficient border management as well as bilateral infrastructure development should be at the heart of the efforts to make the border region between Nigeria and Benin an economically viable and safer environment.

This publication aims to stimulate the debate on the concept of human security. This is an alternative approach to a state-centered security concept that is still widely represented in sub-Saharan Africa today.