



KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTRE

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Rethinking Border Management Strategies in West Africa: Experiences from the Sahel

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Align national border management strategies into a sub-regional ECOWAS strategy to allow for an integrated regional approach to border (in)security.
- Prioritise capacity building of all the agencies involved in border management (particularly Customs, Police and Immigration) as a cost effective way of maintaining the security of the state.
- Involve border communities in managing the security of borders.

Introduction

The 2012 crisis in Mali, and by extension, the Sahel, has brought several critical questions to the fore in terms of border management. The ease and speed with which rebels, weapons and contraband materials were smuggled into the Sahel from Libya further exposed the inadequacy of established structures in terms of agencies, systems, policies, laws and procedures relating to border security management. Over the years, globalisation and the rise in terrorist threats and transnational criminal activities have made border management issues a matter of economic and national security. However, despite the awareness of West African states of the threats or benefits of effective border management, with the exception of Senegal¹, there

has not been a common approach or rigorous effort at both the national and sub-regional levels to implement holistic border management strategies. At the continental level, the African Union (AU) has passed a series of regulations since the late 1990s that seek to guide border management in Africa. At the same time, there has been recognition of the need to harmonise and consolidate these agreements to ensure the implementation of specific border management clauses.

Thus, in 2007, first steps were taken by the AU to develop a continental strategy for enhancing border management in Africa. The draft strategy document was finalised in May 2012 and full- scale

¹ The Senegalese Ministry of Interior requested technical assistance support from the MIEUX Project (Migration EU Expertise). Since then, MIEUX experts went on a mission to

Senegal to work with Senegalese officials. A strategic document and an action plan have been developed to facilitate the implementation of the strategy which was finalized in May and will be launched by the third-quarter of 2013.

Rethinking Border Management Strategies in West Africa: Experiences from the Sahel

implementation is envisaged for June 2014, although more work and consultations have to be done by roping in more stakeholders, including regional training institutions, to increase local ownership and a wider awareness of the strategy. The strategy rests on three pillars: cooperation and coordination; capacity building; and community involvement. The first pillar is borrowed from the Integrated Border Management Concept² widely used by the European Union, while the remaining two are additions introduced by the AU. Similarly, at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) level, there have been agreements and resolutions adopted to enhance border security³. However, unlike at the AU, these have not translated into a sub-regional border security strategy. Despite these drawbacks, some member countries such as Senegal are in the final stages of developing their national border management strategy.

This Policy Brief discusses border management challenges in light of the Mali and Sahel crises. It argues for documentation of existing national strategies on border management and their alignment into an ECOWAS strategy. These strategies, when enforced, will be critical in addressing border insecurity issues in the sub-region, particularly in the wake of the Sahel experience.

Border Management in West Africa

Border management essentially entails controlling and regulating the flow of people, goods and services across a country's borders⁴ in the national interest and usually for the maintenance of peace and security. These tasks are typically undertaken by government agencies (Customs and Excise, Immigration and Police) with different combinations of agencies according to the country's laws.

In West Africa alone, there are a total of 35 international boundaries characterised by high levels of porosity. This makes them highly vulnerable to threats such as trafficking of people, drugs, small arms and light weapons as well as recent instances of terrorism. Nonetheless, border security issues are not always integrated into national security or economic strategies, and border agencies are usually ill-equipped, ill-trained and poorly resourced.⁵ In the sub-region, appropriate infrastructure such as detection equipment and scanners are not always present at some border posts, especially the further away from the capital. The Customs administration in different countries of the region is also not usually equipped with national databases of offenders, their networks and types and volumes of illicit commodity seizures.⁶

Compounding the issue are understaffed agencies and unmotivated staff who do not effectively collaborate and coordinate their activities nationally and regionally. Consequently, the instability

² The integrated border management concept emphasizes national and international coordination and cooperation among all the relevant agencies involved in border security and trade facilitation. These are meant to establish effective, efficient and coordinated border management in order to reach the objective of open, but well controlled and secure borders (Guidelines for Integrated Border Management Guideline in EC Cooperation; 2009).

³ These include the ECOWAS Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, 1990 (Chapter 6, Article 12) and the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security 1999, (Chapter X, Article 46).

⁴ Borders ensure a state's territorial sovereignty, as states are recognised under international law by their ability to maintain their borders, secure their territories and protect their citizens. See Okumu, W. (2011). Sudan Border Management and Security. *Concordis Briefing 4*.

⁵ In monitoring visits conducted by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) Regional Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) programme in the 15 ECOWAS countries since 2009, alumni, security sector operatives and civil society actors have been unanimous in reiterating the need for periodic and targeted training programmes and resources to be able to effectively combat the insecurity around the borders.

⁶ KAIPTC, SALW Report 2012

Rethinking Border Management Strategies in West Africa: Experiences from the Sahel

engendered by the Arab Spring and the growth and increase in transnational organised criminal groups and their transnational activities has severely tested the response mechanisms put in place to secure the borders.

Challenges and Lessons from the Sahel

Geographically, the Sahel is a semi-arid belt of barren, sandy and rock-strewn land, mostly hostile to human habitation. The nomadic lifestyle and temporary communal life leaves inhabitants at the periphery of government control, and thus easy prey to the inducements of non-state actors. Core Sahelian states are: Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Chad and Burkina Faso. However, the empirical experiences discussed here are those gathered primarily from Mali and Niger.⁷

Following from above, border agents mandated to manage the country's borders lack the capacity to carry out their mandates effectively. In Niger and Mali, for instance, personnel at border posts are ill equipped and poorly motivated. Lack of office space and accommodation for border patrol and control personnel, coupled with inadequate means of communication have also severely tested the capacity of these agents to carry out their work effectively. Additionally, inadequate skills and poor understanding of the job are prevalent. Aggravating these problems is the poor awareness of national constitutive laws and regional agreements⁸ relevant to the effective conduct of their work. In Mali and Niger, for example, personnel posted to the border areas complained of

lack of adequate training and logistics to effectively carry out their work. Some posted to the Tessalit⁹ region of Mali bemoaned poor working conditions and lack of logistical support. These two countries occupy vast territories thus making patrolling very difficult, a situation which calls for regular training and improvement in working conditions for such personnel.

Another key factor that is useful for border management is the inclusion of border communities in the management of the borders. At the local level, most border management efforts do not take advantage of border communities. The local community usually has intimate knowledge of the terrain, the criminal syndicates, meeting places and other security issues. Nevertheless, they are not always involved in managing the borders. Their inclusion and incorporation of local perspectives is useful in informing state actors of the threats in the border areas. The gaps created by these omissions are filled by transnational criminal networks. Some of their members even marry local women in order to enjoy the social protection associated with being part of a community.¹⁰ Thus, border agencies must actively involve the local community thereby earning their trust and gradually reducing their reliance on other non-state groups.

In the Sahel region, the lack of comprehensive national border management strategies has meant that most countries derive their responses to border management issues from documents such as the Customs and Police legislation, leading to a scattered policy approach. Nonetheless, Senegal has taken bold steps in this regard by being the first Sahel country to develop a national border management strategy¹¹. Large-scale migration and

⁷ The KAIPTC SALW programme ran a special project – the Sahel Project – in five Sahelian countries: Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Nigeria. Five courses were run on border security management, security sector reform, small arms proliferation, maritime piracy and transnational crimes, and collaborative policing. Experiences from Mali and Niger form the basis of this paper.

⁸ Some of these operatives are not familiar with their own national laws and those formulated at regional level such as the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

⁹ This is located in northern Mali and borders Algeria.

¹⁰ Goita, M., (2011) West Africa's growing terrorist threat: Confronting AQIM'S Sahelian Strategy. *Africa Security Brief*, No. 11. Africa Centre for Strategic Studies.

¹¹ The strategy ensures better management of the country's land, sea and air borders and strengthens internal security. It seeks to facilitate the movement of people and goods and promote cross-border cooperation and economic development.

Rethinking Border Management Strategies in West Africa: Experiences from the Sahel

the increase in transnational trafficking coupled with its strategic location as an important transit point for irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe have informed Senegal's efforts at the national level to prioritise border management.

Responses to border management challenges in West Africa

At the ECOWAS level, there are some protocols and regulations that provide for interventions on border management. The 1999 ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, for instance, under Article 46, talks about control of cross-border crime but makes little mention of related areas of border management. The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons of 2006¹² under Article 22 also encourages the strengthening of border controls through sub-regional cooperation and capacity building but, understandably, it stops short of prescribing a more comprehensive border management strategy such as the AU's draft strategy. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework in turn emphasizes cross-border initiatives¹³ as a means of reducing tensions, fighting cross-border crime and enhancing community welfare, among other concerns. ECOWAS has also been reviewing the Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan in response to the terrorist activities and threat in the region. These initiatives address aspects of border management but do not address comprehensively border insecurity issues as a whole.

Thus despite the challenges and threats posed by border insecurity, there is a lack of a common approach in terms of policy formulation, especially

at the national and sub-regional levels. The AU's strategy, therefore, offers the blueprint from which ECOWAS and national governments can formulate their own context-specific strategies for a more integrated regional response to the challenges of border management. Despite the many challenges associated with the implementation process, the strategy will nevertheless be useful as a starting point for national and regional efforts at border management. However, the primary responsibility for managing borders rests with the state, which must necessarily put in place the structures and policies required to maintain national sovereignty and protect its citizens.¹⁴

Looking forward

In order to improve border management in West Africa, experiences from the Sahel recounted above must be rigorously examined. The first emphasis must be placed on the importance of a robust policy on border management at the national and sub-regional levels.

Secondly, it is critical to continue to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies and their allied institutions in the sub-region. The unrest in the Sahel was worsened by the weak capacity and logistical constraints of law enforcement agencies. Thus, as part of capacity building programmes, the ECOWAS Convention text – as far as it relates to border security management and concepts such as Integrated Border Management – could be integrated into the training of the security and law enforcement agencies¹⁵ in the region. To this end, a recent Sahel project being implemented by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)¹⁶ which seeks to enhance the capacities

¹²See the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and related Materials. Available at www.ecowas.int.org. (Accessed 12 December 2013).

¹³See the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) document, under Section 68.

¹⁴ Draft African Union Strategy for Enhancing Border Management in Africa, 2012, Addis Ababa.

¹⁵ These could be the Police, Gendarmerie, Military, Customs, Immigration, Prisons etc.

¹⁶This project is funded by the government of Japan and seeks, together with UNDP, ECOWAS and the KAIPTC, to train over 800 personnel in Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Nigeria and Niger by April 2014.

Rethinking Border Management Strategies in West Africa: Experiences from the Sahel

of security sector operatives in selected Sahel countries must be commended and replicated.

Lastly, border communities must be involved in border management processes since they are a haven for all kinds of criminal activities. Sub-regional and national policies must consistently focus on them. For instance, in Sierra Leone, police have community boards which allow them to interact with the local population, present a human face to them and simultaneously gain their trust. Thus they are able to receive information on any security issue in the community.

Conclusion

The Sahel region has undergone a shake-up since the events in Libya and the sand is still settling on the complex security challenges facing the region. Increasingly, border management today requires certain skills and delicate balancing between tightening controls on cross-border movements and the facilitation of cross-border flows. A first step towards achieving this is to develop and align national and sub-regional policies which can be operationalised across the region for an integrated regional approach to border management. The Sahel thus offers useful lessons to the rest of the ECOWAS states in terms of reducing some of the vulnerabilities exploited by non-state actors for the maintenance of peace and security.

About the Author

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