

Bakassi Women in Cross-Border Trade with Nigeria (1963 to 2016): Motivations and Constraints

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Abstract— Bakassi, a peninsula rich in petroleum and natural gas, is Cameroon's, after a lingering border dispute over it with Nigeria which saw Cameroon emerging triumphant. As expected, a large extent of the peninsula's historiography has been pretty conflict-based than otherwise. It is within this basis that the underlying article explores yet an existent but casually exploited field – the experience of cross-border trade in the peninsula. Likewise, Cameroon's reluctant enthusiasm to make gender-equalized evaluations of trade inspired the spotlight of this research on the female gender. It is in this light that the write-up aims at delving into the reasons why the women of Bakassi (in the Cameroon side), ventured into cross-border trade with Nigeria between the years 1963 and 2016 as well as the different constraints witnessed in doing so. Relying on primary and secondary sources while consuming other disciplines where indispensable, the article depended on the thematic, chronological and descriptive models of analysis accordingly. From the objectives and methods adapted, the results of our findings proved that during the years under reflection, historical relationships, intermarriages, differences in natural resource base, differences in prices, devaluation of the Nigerian currency and the economic crisis of the 1980s all motivated Bakassi women to undertake the trade. As for the obstacles faced in the process, they varied from the economic standpoint to socio-cultural restrains. The economic hindrances included corruption, piracy, theft, fraud, price instability, transport and communication network problems and inadequate capital while the socio-cultural obstructions were mainly illiteracy, inadequate access to information and traditional prejudices.

Résumé— Bakassi, une péninsule riche en pétrole et en gaz naturel, appartient au Cameroun, après un différend frontalier persistant avec le Nigeria qui a vu le Cameroun sortir triomphant. Comme prévu, une grande partie de l'historiographie de la péninsule a été plutôt basée sur les conflits qu'autrement. C'est dans cette base que l'article sous-jacent explore un domaine encore existant mais nonchalamment exploité – l'expérience du commerce transfrontalier dans la péninsule. De même, l'enthousiasme réticent du Cameroun à procéder à des évaluations du commerce égalisées par genre a inspiré la mise en lumière de cette recherche sur le genre féminin. C'est dans cette optique que l'article vise à approfondir les raisons pour lesquelles les femmes de Bakassi (côté camerounais), se sont

aventurées dans le commerce transfrontalier avec le Nigeria entre les années 1963 et 2016 ainsi que les différentes contraintes constatées dans Ce faisant. S'appuyant sur des sources primaires et secondaires tout en consommant d'autres disciplines lorsque cela est indispensable, l'article s'est appuyé sur les modèles d'analyse thématique, chronologique et descriptif en conséquence. A partir des objectifs et de méthodes adaptées, les résultats de nos constatations ont prouvé qu'au cours des années sous réflexion, les relations historiques, les mariages mixtes, les différences de base de ressources naturelles, les différences de prix, la dévaluation de la monnaie nigériane et la crise économique des années 1980 ont tous motivé les femmes Bakassi pour entreprendre le commerce. Quant aux obstacles rencontrés dans le processus, ils variaient du point de vue économique aux contraintes socioculturelles. Les obstacles économiques comprenaient la corruption, la piraterie, le vol, la fraude, l'instabilité des prix, les problèmes de réseau de transport et de communication et l'insuffisance des capitaux tandis que les obstacles socioculturels étaient principalement l'analphabétisme, l'accès insuffisant à l'information et les préjugés traditionnels.

I. INTRODUCTION

Immediately after reunification, relations between the then Federal Republic of Cameroon and the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the boundary were generally beneficial both to individual citizens and their governments alike. Consequently, trade flow between the two was positive though typified by a significant flow of goods to Nigeria. This was even further concretised thanks to bilateral agreements between both countries. A good example was the one signed on the 6th of February 1963. It was a Protocol agreement signed between both countries based on the free circulation of population, goods and services in both countries. Among the many areas of cooperation selected, included were priority economic concerns in financial and custom matters; border exchanges, free movement of persons and goods, cultural and technical matters and judicial and legal assistance.¹ Within the Agreement, several measures were taken to foster bilateral cooperation in the commercial field. Notably, the parties pledged to significantly increase their volumes of trade transactions by all possible means. Most of the later specific agreements between the two countries of Cameroon and Nigeria were derived from this 1963 agreement. Nonetheless, it was the 26th February 1963 Protocol, among the many others signed after it that specifically dealt with organizing trade with the aim of facilitating the movement of persons and goods across their boundaries. This Protocol was timely and essential as it was one of the earliest concerns on how to regulate

cross-border movements.² In this line, the present article accentuates the relationship between the wants, needs or goals of the women cross-border traders under review and the constraints involved in achieving them. What were the rationale or motivations of the women traders and the general and gender specific constraints? From this problem, it will be interesting to examine the following three aspects: I) Motivations for Bakassi women cross-border traders; II) The Constraints witnessed by Bakassi women during cross-border trade with Nigeria; III) Policy Recommendations.

II. MOTIVATIONS FOR BAKASSI WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

Since independence, trade among countries of Africa has been evolving, with West Africa witnessing an increase especially from the 1990's. This expansion has been credited with profound regional integration, improved economic growth, unemployment reduction, market and product diversification, and improvement in food availability.³ In this article concerning Cameroon-Nigeria Cross Border trade relationship, the specific motivations for trade between the two while focusing on the women of the Bakassi Peninsula were grouped under Historical/Cultural considerations and Economic factors.

² Protocol Agreement covering control of movements of peoples and goods between the Federal Republic of Cameroon and the Federation of Nigeria, February 26, 1963.

³ Morris G., Saul M., "Women's Business Links; A preliminary assessment of Women Cross-Border Traders", p. 8 in Ndip, Tabi James, "Women in Trans-Border Trade within the Mamfe-Ekok Corridor in South West – Cameroon, (1988 to 2016)", PhD Thesis in History, University of Buea, 2018, p. 5.

¹ Bilateral Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Government of the Republic of Cameroon, February 6, 1963.

i. Historical and Cultural Relations

Historically, intra-regional trade in West and Central Africa has been characterized by a distinct North-South exchange of goods, where people in the arid and the semi-arid north specialized in livestock production while those in southern tropical lands specialized in agriculture and manufacturing. But both Cameroon and Nigeria share similar climatic conditions, with the northern parts of each country being semi-arid and their southern fronts sharing comparable tropical conditions. Being an East-West trading relationship, other factors determine the trade flows between Cameroon and Nigeria, specifically between women of the Bakassi Peninsula and Nigeria. Ethnic ties or networks, as a function of historical and cultural relations could not be undermined in acting as a driver to cross-border trade in the delimited area. Factually, ethnic networks facilitate trade within and across borders, and these networks play a particularly critical role in states where rule of law is weak and full information and formal third party enforcement of contracts are inadequate.⁴ In most rural border localities of Cameroon and Nigeria, the existence of ethnic, historical and cultural relations between people divided between both nations have influenced border enforcement of legal rights to seemingly appear particularly cumbersome, costly, or impossible.⁵ The ethnic groups on either sides of the border of both countries compose of both the Bantu and the Semi Bantu.⁶ The zone is considered to be the borderland between the Bantu and the Semi-Bantu speaking peoples with the Bantu generally in the Cameroon side and the Semi-Bantu in the Nigerian part.⁷ The Bakassi Peninsula and its people make up an extension of old Calabar territory in terms of language, culture and ancestral affinity.⁸ The socio-cultural integration of the south west peoples of Cameroon and especially the peoples of Bakassi with the eastern peoples of Nigeria go as far back as the 16th Century.⁹ The

peninsula is principally inhabited by the Efiks from Cross River State, the Ibibios, Annags, Orons and Andionis from Akwa-Ibom state as well as the Ijaws and Itshekiri from Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States¹⁰ in Nigeria. These groups perpetually interacted in a system of trade exchange. Thus, socio-cultural affinities were established permitting an attractive pull for the development of cross-border trade in the pre and mostly post independent reunified Cameroon with Nigeria. Even during hostilities at the heart of the Bakassi Crisis (1993-2006), cross-border trading between Cameroon and Nigeria did not stop mainly due to historical and ethno-linguistic ties.¹¹

Culturally, intermarriages across the border stimulated the trade. Some women of the Bakassi peninsula border communities were married to the different peoples of South-eastern Nigeria and vice versa. The intermarried claimed dual nationality and they were naturally inclined to criss-crossing the borders to visit their relatives without any disturbances from the border officials of both Cameroon and Nigeria. Sometimes, they bought trade items for sale in their dual border communities and crossed over claiming to visit their homes. Intermarriages were therefore a natural motivation and consequence of cross-border trade within the Bakassi-Nigeria cross-border trade axis.

ii. Economic Factors

Among the economic factors that acted as a motivating factor for the participation of Bakassi women in cross-border trade with Nigeria since 1963 could be identified differences in the natural resource base in relation to population size and density; differences in prices resulting from divergent trade policies; Devaluation of the Nigerian currency and the Economic crisis in the 1980s.

a. Differences in Natural Resources

Bakassi, on the Cameroon side has been blessed with varied food products like *Eru*¹² and *Egusi*,¹³ which the cross-border trade women take to Nigerian markets in the densely populated Nigerian eastern region. On the other hand, the vastness of the Nigerian population caused it to have a comparative advantage in the production and distribution of many manufactured goods where economies of scale, access to world markets and

⁴ Rauch, James E., 2001, "Business and Social Networks in International Trade", *Journal of Economic Literature*, 39 (4), 1177-1203 in Hoppe, Mombert (& alli), "Estimating Trade Flows, Describing Trade Relationships, and Identifying Barriers to Cross-Border Trade between Cameroon and Nigeria", World Bank Report No: 78283 and ACS2876, May 7, 2013, p. 4.

⁵ Hoppe, Mombert (& alli), "Estimating Trade Flows...", p. 5.

⁶ Familugba, J.O., & Ojo, O.O., "Nigeria-Cameroon Border Relations: An Analysis of the Conflict and Cooperation (1970-2004)", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 3, No 11, June 2013, p. 183.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Familugba, J.O. & Ojo, O.O., "Nigeria – Cameroon Border Relations..." p. 186.

⁹ Michael, T. Aletum, "Bakassi Conflict: a Socio-Political Approach", *Juridis Info*, n° 21, May 5, 1994, pp. 42.

¹⁰ Familugba, J.O. & Ojo, O.O., "Nigeria – Cameroon Border Relations..." p. 186.

¹¹ Konings, P., "The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary: Opportunities and conflicts" in *African Affairs*, 104 (415), 2005, pp. 275–301.

¹² Scientifically referred to as *Gnetum Africanum*.

¹³ This is a species of seed from melon botanically known as *Citrullus colocynthis*.

agglomeration are important.¹⁴ It is from this outlook that female cross-border traders of Bakassi were motivated in the trade since they were gaining access to Nigerian international markets. While these women mainly crossed with food stuffs to Nigeria, they usually bought manufactured goods like fabric, dresses and cosmetic products from there and back to the peninsula and beyond¹⁵ for resale. This ensured that, the cost in the Nigerian side became relatively cheaper and attractive to Cameroonian traders of Bakassi. Traders often gained access to international markets through their trade relationships with Nigeria

b. Differences in prices resulting from divergent trade policies

In many ways than not, dissimilarity in trade policies of both Cameroon and Nigeria acted as a rationale for the women of Bakassi to carryout cross-border trade with Nigerian markets nearby. A scenario that highlighted the role of price differences resulting from divergent trade policies in motivating female cross-border traders of Cameroon with Nigeria was the food crisis of 2008.¹⁶ During the crisis, Cameroon responded by eliminating rice import tariffs. The aim was to cushion the impact of escalating food prices and to reduce any potential civil unrest. Prior to the food crisis, Nigeria had a 109 % duty on rice imports. Then in February 2012, a total ban on rice imports was put in place.¹⁷ Such rice policy differences did encourage Cameroonian traders with Bakassi women inclusive to take advantage of higher prices on the Nigeria side of the border. Because trade policies are only partially enforced at borders, these price differences offered significant scope for trade. Consequently, it is evident that recent policies with regard to rice imports in Cameroon and Nigeria have led to substantial rice re-exports from Cameroon to Nigeria with border communities like Bakassi benefitting from the advantage.¹⁸

¹⁴ Hoppe, Mombert (& alli), "Estimating Trade Flows...", p. 8.

¹⁵ An interview conducted with Magdalene Ebong at Isangele on the 11th of April 2020 revealed that after having bought African fabric from Nigeria, she sometimes went to resale as far as in Kumba in the Meme Division of Cameroon. In doing so, she made encouraging profit.

¹⁶ Hoppe, Mombert (& alli), "Estimating Trade Flows...", p. 13.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Consult World Trade Organisation (2007), Trade Policy Review Cameroon, Geneva, Switzerland; and World Trade Organisation (2011), Trade Policy Review Nigeria, Geneva, Switzerland for an overview of trade policies in both Cameroon and Nigeria. An outline of these could however be gotten from Source: Hoppe, Mombert (& alli), "Estimating Trade Flows, Describing Trade Relationships, and Identifying Barriers to Cross-Border Trade between Cameroon and Nigeria",

c. Devaluation of the Nigerian Currency

Still in the economic domain was the devaluation of the Nigerian currency acting as a driving force encouraging Bakassi natives and other Cameroonian communities alike to pursue cross-border trade deals with Nigeria. According to Investopedia, devaluation is the deliberate downward adjustment of the value of a country's money relative to another currency, group of currencies or currency standard.¹⁹ The devaluation of the Nigerian Naira in the 1980s made Nigerian produced goods cheaper for Cameroonians, while the same goods were expensive for Nigerians. This was so because; the Francs CFA was exchanged for much Naira. Using the much acquired Naira, buyers from Cameroon with focus on Bakassi women, purchased more quantity of goods at a cheaper rate. For example, before devaluation, 1000FCFA was exchanged for 2 Naira 50 kobo in the early 1980s but as a result of devaluation, 1000FCFA was exchanged for 140 Naira in the 1990s. As it continued to fluctuate, it rose to 600, 700 and 805 Naira for 1000FCFA in the black market.²⁰ This attracted many Bakassi women traders who speculated better profits for the cheap goods bought from Nigeria. To married women, cross-border trade was a means to support their husbands financially for the survival of the family. This was the case with women whose husbands lost their jobs or suffered hardship brought directly or indirectly by the SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme) policies that caused the retrenchment of many workers during the economic crisis. To other married women, they argued that, cross-border trade with Nigeria was among the surest way to make money during those times to sustain their families.

d. The Economic Crisis

The Economic Crisis of the mid 1980s was another rationale for Bakassi women's participation in cross-border trade with Nigeria. Natan Jua asserted that only a holistic picture could explain the genesis of Cameroon's economic crisis,²¹ which will be attempted herein. Although the post-independent economy before 1986 experienced some relative growth and progress, it seems the economy was growing without development as it suddenly plunged into economic crisis in 1986.²² The

World Bank Report No: 78283 and ACS2876, May 7, 2013, p. 11-12.

¹⁹ www.investopedia.com. Consulted on the 31st of January 2022 at 04:30 AM.

²⁰ Ndip, Tabi. J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", pp. 144-145.

²¹ Nantang Jua, "Cameroon: Jump-Starting an Economic Crisis" in *Africa Insight* 21 (1), 1991, p. 162-170.

²² Ndip, Tabi James, "Women and the Economic Crisis in Many Division of Cameroon, 1986-2010", Memoire in History, University of Buea, 2014, p. 72.

roots of the crisis have been traced from some internal and external factors. The internal factors stemmed from the narrow based and dependent economy, unbalanced development and corruption while the external factors are ascribed to the worsening external environment such as the influence of neo-colonialism and a fall in the prices and demand for cash crops in the World Market.²³ The economic crisis may have had a common derivation throughout Africa but the effects varied across countries, regions, sectors, households and among women, depending on the economic, demographic and social circumstances.²⁴ It was however more imperative on the women probably because Cameroonian and other African men acted entirely as producers meanwhile women got involved in productive activities plus home management, child bearing and upbringing, as well as catering for the aged persons of their families. In this light, the economic crisis and the Structural Adjustment Programme led to an increase in the number of women involved in cross-border trade within the Bakassi-Nigeria margin in the late 1980s. This was so since the number of persons seeking for survival in informal activities amplified.

III. THE CONSTRAINTS WITNESSED BY BAKASSI WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

The widely acclaimed Rational Choice Theory opines that individuals act with specific constraints that are based on the information they have and the conditions under which they are acting. It emphasizes the relationship between the wants, needs or goals and the constraints involved in achieving them.²⁵ The Probability Theory of Hackling²⁶ which points to the prevalence of risk and uncertainty in ventures holds true in this case because the issues of risk and uncertainty are indeed similar to the exigencies faced by the women-cross border traders under study. They encountered numerous constrictions that acted as obstacles to their trade adventures as discussed in the proceeding themes and paragraphs.

i. Economic Constrictions

Economic obstacles like corruption, piracy, theft, fraud, price instability, transport and communication

network problems and inadequate capital and credit were not uncommon as distinguished in the ensuing clauses

a. Corruption

The phenomenon of cross-border trade in the African continent is characteristic of corruption, specifically in the form of bribery. Bribery, according to the English Dictionary²⁷ is the making of illegal payment to persons in official positions as a means of influencing their decisions. The habitual occurrence of bribery in intra-African trade relations has been a realistic canker worm. Women traders along the Rwanda-Burundi Borders were a glaring case, given the fact that their goods passed along unofficial border routes.²⁸ In the Bakassi peninsula, bribery was not uncommon. Another but related economic restraint in the business was licensing and Document Procedures. The licensing system aimed at ensuring a sustainable exploitation of many products like *eru*²⁹, fish and firewood gave local communities the right to exploit these for home consumption. To trade, however, small traders who constituted mostly women, needed to obtain licenses from government, which they were generally unable to acquire. This pushed many traders of the peninsula into informal trade relationships.

b. Piracy and Theft

Besides, piracy and theft added to the hardships of Bakassi women involved in cross-border trade with Nigeria. Dependent on water-way transportation to carryout cross-border trade with Nigeria, some Bakassi women cross-border traders have witnessed the unfortunate situation of having been robbed by pirates. Monica Ano Moki, an owner of a provision store in Isangele greatly made possible through cross-border trade with Nigeria, was a victim. Interview sessions with her revealed that, in returning from the Ikang market in Nigeria to Isangele, pirates attacked their boat full of goods including whisky and bags of rice.³⁰ In worse circumstances, these pirates not only looted goods and money, but also perpetuated cases of kidnap for high ransom demands.³¹ Oral evidence bore allusion to the prevalence of theft by loaders in the process of loading and off-loading of their goods. This situation was not uncommon in other parts of the national territory. At the Bamenda, Santa, Mamfe and Kumba markets for example,

²³ Ndip, Tabi. J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", p. 141.

²⁴ Ndip, Tabi James, "Women and the Economic Crisis...", p. 72.

²⁵ Green, S.L., "Rational Choice Theory: An Overview", A Paper prepared for the Baylor University Development Seminar on Rational Choice Theory, 2002, p. 73.

²⁶ Hackling, I., *The Emergence Probability*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

²⁷ Livio, "English Dictionary - Offline", version 6.1, released on March 21 2012, in Google Play Store Application.

²⁸ Ndip, Tabi. J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", p. 5.

²⁹ Ndip, Tabi James, "Ndip, Tabi. J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", p. 148.

³⁰ Interview with Monica Ano Moki at Isangele, 11/04/2020.

³¹ Idem.

there were loaders who stole certain goods either to resell or keep.³² Stolen items were usually not discovered until the trader concerned reached the final destination for resale. Such losses were hurtful and had a negative ramification on the profit margin of the concerned women.

c. Fraud

Aside from piracy and theft, fraud was not uncommonly witnessed by Bakassi women who partook in cross-border trading in Nigerian markets. Fraud – an act of deception carried out for the purpose of unfair, unlawful or undeserved gain was commonly known as Four-One-Nine (4.1.9.). It was a Nigerian confidence trick which existed before the era of former President Ibrahim Babangida and became pervasive during his tenure of office.³³ If one carried out a fraudulent act and got away with it in the cause of a business transaction thereby making undeserved profit, such a person was said to have made money out of ‘four-one-nine’. If caught, it was believed that the person had already made money out of the act thus had to ‘settle’ the law enforcement officers who got part of their share of profits. Many Bakassi women cross-border traders have fallen victim of these perpetrators of 4.1.9. This was either in the course of currency exchanges through black marketing or while purchasing certain goods from Nigerian traders whereby fake items were given in the place of genuine ones at same price. Women were more vulnerable than most men for certain reasons. Unlike men, most women could not concentrate only on specific trade items when they went to make purchases. They spent more time in the market buying other items not just for business but also for household use. In the course of buying, they got exhausted to the point that, they could easily be cheated or given fake items without realizing it. At other times, these women were in rush to get to the boat at specific hours of the day to get them back to the peninsula.³⁴

d. Price Instability

Instability in prices of goods bought and sold in Nigerian markets was another major obstacle to cross-border trade witnessed by Bakassi women. Sometimes in the Ikang market for example, there was excess supply of products like *eru* from other little Nigerian fishing port communities like Natonda to be sold in the same Ikang

market, main market of the Bakassi communities of Kombo Abedimo and Isangele. In such unfavourable scenarios, and given the fact that *eru* is a perishable product, Bakassi women of Cameroon were forced to reduce the prices per bundle as dictated by the forces of demand and supply. This price reduction brought price fluctuation of goods supplied to Nigerian markets and price instability. The resultant effect was reduction in profit margin and even registered losses. Such a scenario was usually discouraging to the petit and new traders who risked losing business capital. Such losses bringing instability could be attributed partly to lack of marketing information among the suppliers and buyers. Another scenario witnessed by these women leading to price instability had its roots from fluctuations in the currency exchange rate. Women cross-border traders in the Bakassi-Nigeria axis were familiar with the exchange of currency through black marketing. This nonetheless posed a problem because once the exchange rate dropped, cross-border traders from Cameroon exchanged Francs CFA for less Naira, which is the main medium of exchange in Nigeria. Hence the quantity of goods bought by these women was bound to drop. Moreover in certain years, currency fluctuations occurred after few hours only and on a daily bases. For example in the early 1980s, 1000Francs CFA could be exchanged for 2 Naira 50 Kobo. But in the 1990s, it changed to 140 Naira for same amount. The 21st Century has witnessed the exchange rate fluctuating between 650 Naira and 805 Naira for every 1000FCFA.³⁵ Noteworthy is the fact that, these currencies rose and fell with the changes in the United States Dollars in the international market. But a slight change in the Dollars resulted to more fluctuations in the Naira which further affected rates of exchange with the Francs CFA.

e. Transport and communication network problems

To add, transport and communication network problems could not go unmentioned. According to Patrick,³⁶ the term “failed state” is often used to describe a state perceived as having fall short at some basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government. Anyanwu³⁷ states that by a failed state we mean a state that is unable to meet the needs and aspirations of its masses.

³² Ndip, Tabi, James, “Women in Trans-Border Trade...”, p. 156.

³³ Ibid, pp. 156-157.

³⁴ This scenario was witnessed by author during a 2020 field work experience. Having left Kombo Abedimo in Bakassi, Cameroon on a boat to Ikang market on the 10th of April 2020, it was a realistic observation of both men and women traders hurrying to catch up with boats who left at specific times back to the peninsula.

³⁵ Ndip, Tabi, J., “Women in Trans-Border Trade...”, pp. 172-173.

³⁶ Patrick, S., “Failed States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas”, *International Studies Review*, 2007, pp. 644-662, 9 (1) in Okeke, O. Sunday and Oji, O. Richard, “Cross Border Crimes...”, p. 50.

³⁷ Anyanwu, U., “Failed States in Africa: The Nigerian Case since 1960” *American Journal of International Politics and Development Studies (AJIPDS)* 1 (1), 2005 in Okeke, O. Sunday and Oji, O. Richard, “Cross Border Crimes...”, p. 50.

Consequently, a failed state as opposed to a capable state is a state which has not succeeded to provide for its citizens such basics essentials like adequate security, food, water, electricity, health care, good roads, and what not. Correspondingly, it was therefore no bombshell when respondents in the peninsula clamoured many of these necessities as lacking. Relationally, this scenario complements exponents of the Relative Autonomy Theory, specifically low Relative Autonomy (that is the State becoming the paramount path for primordial accumulation of capital made possible by the embezzlement of public fund).³⁸

f. Inadequate capital and credit

The difficulties around Inadequate Capital and Credit were equally felt. Capital was among the key factors that affected the participation of women in cross-border trade because cross-border trading activities usually required substantial financial resources for profits to be reasonable. Both female and male traders often relied on personal savings and loans backed by interest as their main sources of capital accumulation. Inadequate finance served as a major impediment primarily to women cross-border trade because it was correlated with limited access to credit facilities. Women had limited ability to reinvest because they extended financial support to their immediate and nuclear families. The dilemma of inadequate capital was the cry and reality of many Bakassi women cross-border traders including Rose Bassey and Glory Etim.³⁹ In other cases, the loss of capital came as a result of the fact that, family members consumed goods of provision stores and table markets largely made possible through purchase from Nigerian markets.⁴⁰ With very minimal collateral, it made it worse for these women to receive credits and loans from financial institutions of any kind.

ii. Socio-Cultural Restraints

African societies have had an underlying dependence on women in managing household duties. Challenges incorporating the time consuming trade procedures and documentary requirements encroached more on women, giving the time needed for these household duties.⁴¹ High illiteracy rate/inadequate access

to information; traditional prejudices/male dominance were highlighted as major socio-cultural impediments.

a. Illiteracy

To begin, high illiteracy rate was a primordial constrain. Women cross-border traders in Bakassi were not able to fully explore or invest in functional education in which the pursuit of scientific and technological skills crucial for women to develop their capabilities was paramount. The women were lagging behind in crucial contemporary fields like Agronomy, computer literacy, human resource management, Management Science, to name but these few. Hence it was impossible for them to apply modern scientific methods in the cultivation of food and agricultural products that would have increased yields and trading items as well as conservation of perishables. Equally, many of these women lacked the skills or initiatives to make use of the internet in advertising their products or getting access to trading information and border rules. The buying, advertising, selling and paying of charges through the mobile phone and internet was predominantly unknown to most of these women. This could have reduced the stress and delays sometimes characterized by the cross-border trade with neighbouring markets in Nigeria.

b. Inadequate access to information

Indisputably, information is a very relevant aspect in cross-border trade. Most of the hardships faced by these women cross-border traders in Bakassi stemmed from lack of information about trading rules and regulations as well as available trading opportunities. Men and women traders were either not aware or not well informed of the details. This was compounded by the fact that trading procedures at the Bakassi-Nigeria Axis were not usually transparent and specific documentations were not always available as well. These circumstances adversely affected the profit margins of the traders.

c. Traditional prejudices

The role of culture in restricting women's access to, and control over productive resources in Anglophone Cameroon in general, subjugated them, thus operated as a major restraint to these women's socio-economic empowerment.⁴² Opposition from male partners, traditional prejudices and male dominance revealed the restriction. Information from both married and divorced women traders alike indicated that some male partners did not accept their wives to search for money by getting

³⁸ See Okeke, O. Sunday and Oji, O. Richard, "Cross Border Crimes...", p. 50.

³⁹ Interview with Rose Bassey, a.k.a. "Ma Quatre Cent" at Kombo Abedimo, 06/04/2020 and Glory Etim at Isangele, 11/04/2020.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mama Glory Etim at Isangele, 11/04/2020.

⁴¹ Marcelo M. Giugale in Paul Brenton, Elisa Gamberoni and Catherine Sear (eds) *Women in Trade in Africa; Realising the Potential*, New York, World Bank, 1981, p. 5.

⁴² Oben Dorothy, Atanga Lilian & Fondo Sikod "Culture Dynamics in Men's Perception of Women in Anglophone Cameroon", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 5, n° 8, 2016, pp. 36-44. in Ndip, Tabi J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", p.166.

involved in cross-border trade transactions. Some men complained of the abandonment of household duties in favour of the trade along the Cameroon-Nigeria borders.⁴³ The women cross-border traders were sometimes even labelled as prostitutes, probably because of the presence of retired prostitutes and the pervasive and subtle harassments from border officials that some of the women noted. Field work interview sessions with one of the ladies of Akwa 1, Kombo Abedimo revealed that, she was sometimes reprimanded from partaking in cross-border trade by the husband.⁴⁴ His reasons varied from the wife abandoning child raising duties to not wanting to allow the wife mingle and be influenced by prostitutes of the trade. This situation was not much different in other near border localities of the country. At the Mamfe town market for example, it was observed that some of the Ikom-line women in the Mamfe-Ekok trade corridor, contrary to former expectations and belief, were married. This development was explained by the fact that retrenchment, retirement and economic hardship left some married men with no option than to accept any form of income generating activities carried out by their wives. One of the Ikom-line women even had this to say:

...my husband never wanted me to do any form of trade that makes me stay out of my home for long hours. Unfortunately, he lost his job in 1993. We managed like that for four years and by 1997, when things became very hard, a friend introduced me to the Ikom-line business. I raised my capital from the sales of Bush Mango bought from the Ejagham villages of Ewelle, Kembong, Ajayukindip and Ogomoko. When I started following my friend to Ikom for business, my husband had no option than to accept.⁴⁵

IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This write-up makes a number of recommendations for facilitating cross-border trade that would open up additional opportunities for traders, farmers and the private sector in both countries.

i. For the Governments of both Cameroon and Nigeria

The border position of Bakassi to neighbouring Nigeria has launched a paradigm shift representing much sensitivity and insecurity that has disapprovingly been

affecting commercial activities in terms of volume and direction of flow of goods as well as the necessary infrastructure. Border insecurity reached its zenith during the famous Bakassi crisis and lasted over a decade of skirmishes and gun combats with a resultant loss of lives and displacement of people. Such could only but slow down commercial interactions and transactions between Bakassi with Nigeria especially as the numerous outlets/creeks that were hitherto very influential in trading activities prior to the crisis became strategic points for military schemes and assault points of both countries sealing the livelihood of the riverine inhabitants⁴⁶ and directly negatively intensifying each time soldiers of Nigeria and Cameroon clashed.⁴⁷ This discussion above alludes to the active environments but very porous nature of the borders to maritime transport since most of the roads are earth roads and seasonal and some not just usable for long periods of the year during torrential rains which causes an increase in the prices of basic commodities and consequent economic slowdown in the wet season being a major challenge to the commercial sector dynamics in Bakassi. The fact that the key challenge here is border insecurity and deplorable transport network is just a slender deviation in other parts of Africa like along the Zimbabwe - South African border, where Karolia⁴⁸ noted viciousness of the forces of law and order at the border post to be a deterring factor affecting the volume of flow of goods. This is aggravated by cases of sexual harassment as women are forced to engage in transnational sex while their male counterparts are sodomised.^{49,50}

⁴⁶ Ariye, E.C., "Nigeria, Cameroon and the Bakassi territorial dispute settlement: The triumph of bilateralism", *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, vol. 38, 2015, pp 24-33, at 'www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-574X' in Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende, "Cameroon-Nigeria ..." p. 18.

⁴⁷ Baye, F. M., "Implications of the Bakassi conflict resolution for Cameroon", *Africa Journal on Conflict Resolution*, vol. 10 (1), 2010, pp. 9-34, in Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende, "Cameroon-Nigeria ..." p. 18.

⁴⁸ Chirau, T. J. and Chamuka, P., "Politicisation of urban space: Evidence from women informal traders at Magaba, Harare in Zimbabwe", *Global Advanced Research Journal of History, Political Science and International Relations*, May, 2013, vol. 2(2), pp. 014-026, in Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende, "Cameroon-Nigeria ..." p. 18.

⁴⁹ Tay. N., "Women traders confronting sexual harassment at borders", at 'http://south-south.ipcundp.org/news/item/384-women-traders-confronting-sexualharassment-at-borders', 2010, [Accessed: 2 October 2011], 14pp in Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende, "Cameroon-Nigeria ..." p. 18.

⁵⁰ Matakanye J., "Ten raped on SA border daily: officials" at 'http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-5187-10%20raped%20on%20SA%20border%20daily%20officials/new

⁴³ Interview with Chief Ankeh Mbang Ankeh at Kombo Abedimo, 06/04/2020.

⁴⁴ Interview with Alice Yacob at Kombo Abedimo, 08/04/2020.

⁴⁵ Ndip, Tabi. J., "Women in Trans-Border Trade...", p.166.

The Cameroon government needs to carry out weighty infrastructural developments in the health, education, road, water and telecommunications spheres in Bakassi. This will ease the precarious living conditions of the Bakassi residents and act as incentives for other Cameroonians to accept working there, which oral evidence reveals the latter is hardly the case.⁵¹ This will also help to discourage any social movements that may be encouraging the intention to instigate the Bakassi indigenous people to reject the peace dividends that they stand to achieve from the implementation of the Green-tree Agreement.⁵²

For the reason that post crisis dynamics reveal an increasingly unaccounted and unofficial cash crop trade outflow towards Nigeria especially due to the deficiency of practicable road transport infrastructure and warehouses/storage tanks in the Cameroon side, post crisis trade management exhibits the need for our Cameroon government to set in vigorous confidence building measures while urgently boosting the transport and market infrastructure of this our richly endowed peninsula. This will urgently be conforming to the Green Tree Accord which insists on special public investment to enhance trade and commerce among other necessities.

For both governments of Cameroon and Nigeria, a key area for policy reform will be an overhaul of the import and export restrictions that have been existing. However, such reforms will have to overcome significant resistance from those groups benefitting from existing arrangements especially the women of the peninsula of Bakassi. The countries' governments should equally put in place strong institutions that will reinforce cross border trade policies and above all guarantee a stable political and economic climate that will enhance trade and regional cooperation. The revenue collection system has to be computerised at all levels of government in the entire national territories, not just in specific border regions. This will make revenue collection effective and efficient. Informal trade transactions will become increasingly official and recorded. So will the peninsula's economic archives be increased for the benefits of researchers and other stakeholders.

ii. For Bakassi Women Cross-Border Traders

Formation of Trade Unions and/or Trade related Associations is being recommended. Field evidence

s.aspx', [Accessed: 2 October 2011], in Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, Zephania Nji Fogwe, Nebota Catherine Mende, "Cameroon-Nigeria ..." p. 18.

⁵¹ Interviews with Ita Njong, Chief of Akwa 2, in Kombo Abedimo, 9/04/2020; and visualised during field work studies.

⁵² Tchouassi Gérard, "Conflict and Women...", p. 171.

demonstrated the individualistic conduction of trade flows by the women in the targeted study area. Consequently, the need for trade unions for traders of both gender as a whole, with more emphasis on those having women as target was emphasized. This was deemed necessary for certain reasons. The existence of trade unions among the Bakassi women embarking on any form of trade with Nigeria will heighten the capacity for receiving grants and subventions from the State. Even non-state organizations notably Non-Governmental Organisations, Inter-Governmental Organisations including individual free will donations will be more plausible.⁵³

Equally, it was recommended that these female cross border traders make more use of E-commerce despite the shortage and absence of electricity in many parts of these communities. This more e-commerce engagement was to be made possible in two ways: first, to be exploited by the women already owning generators. Secondly, the repayment of the monthly electricity bill of 1000 FRS⁵⁴ was to be taken seriously for its continuous presence. In so doing,, the women will be able to do more marketing and sales with their phones when possible, and equally remain updated about marketing information from Nigerian markets relating to exchange rates and estimates of supply quantities of their goods in these markets before effectuating voyages. This would be going a long way to reducing trade vulnerabilities.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has endeavoured to examine the different reasons that pushed women of the Bakassi Peninsula in Cameroon to venture into cross-border trade transactions with Nigeria. It was observed that, the reasons were historical, cultural and most especially, economic in nature. All these were grouped up to include intermarriages, differences in natural resources; differences in prices resulting from divergent trade policies; devaluation of the Nigerian currency and the economic crisis of the 1980s. Concerning the constraints faced in the process, they varied from the economic standpoint to socio-cultural restrains. The economic hindrances examined were corruption; piracy/theft; fraud; price instability; transport and communication network problems and inadequate capital. As for the socio-cultural obstructions, they were principally illiteracy, inadequate access to information and traditional prejudices. In other words, the essay portrayed that, in as much as Bakassi women witnessed many constrictions in their desire to

⁵³ This recommendation was based on the reality that acting singly, each trader could hardly benefit from grants and aids as compared to being in a group or union.

⁵⁴ The dispenser of this information, a member of the BIR (*Battalion Intervention Rapide*), championed for anonymity.

undergo cross-border trade in Nigerian markets, the article was able to attempt reasons why they pushed on or their motivations/ rationales. We were equally able to propose some note worthy recommendations to the governments of both Cameroon and Nigeria on the one hand and specific recommendations to Bakasssi women cross border traders on the other. To the Cameroon government, it was recommended that, infrastructural development and social facilities especially electricity are to be urgently addressed to boost residence in the entire peninsula and curb the ghost worker syndrome. This will eventually promote the volume of cross-border trade with neighbouring Nigeria as a consequence of increased stable population. From this perspective, the governments of both Cameroon and Nigeria are advised to put in place strong institutions that will regulate cross-border trade policies with the absolute computerisation of the revenue collection system to enhance transparency. For those Bakasssi women participating in cross-border trade, the formation of trade unions and other trade related associations was proposed to them. These were seen as a means to maximise team work, minimise trade losses and easily attract grants and aids from state as well as non-state actors. Will these urgent propositions be tested by all the stakeholders concerned?

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