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BORDER COMMUNITIES AS CENTRE FOR CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION: ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined and seeks to contribute knowledge to the scientific understanding of issues and development challenges confronting border communities as centre of cross border migration in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve this, the paper focused on issues and problems bedevilling the border communities with a view to identifying barrier faced by migrants at the destination area; analysed the local perception of the socio-cultural changes as well as migrants and locals' perspective of issues and challenges in the border communities. The study adopted cross-sectional survey approach and collected data majorly from the primary sources through structured questionnaire, focus group discussion, field observation and in-depth interview. Four border communities in Akwa Ibom State, namely, Oron, Ibeno, Ibaka and Ebughu were selected for the study through purposive sampling technique. The snowball sampling and simple random sampling methods were used to select 500 respondents for the study. Findings from the study show that insecurity is the major challenge facing the area. This is attributed to the influx of foreigners and other category of people who engaged in various socio-economic activities such as fishing, trading, farming etc. The study found that the major barrier faced by migrants at the destination region was financial problem. This is because most of the migrant enter the country through illegal route without evidence of sufficient fund, which is a strong condition for entry into Nigeria. The study recommends, among other things, the use of mobile surveillance system, video and thermal surveillance system to check illegal entries into the country. This would also help in checking acts of criminalities in the border communities. Job creation for the unemployed youths will also go a long way to reducing the security challenges facing the area.

Keywords: Migration, border communities, cross-border migrants, economic development.

Introduction

Unarguably, cross-border movement through whatever means brings about talent exchange, population growth, cultural diversity, security challenges, among others. The movement of people across border is a form of migration that is driven by several economic, social, environmental, touristic and political factors, among many motivations. Therefore, borders form the meeting points of competing territorial system, which considerably mediates trans-border economic relationships (Williams, Vladimir and Bernadina, 2001). Traditionally, borders are institutions that serve to

mark the functioning barriers between states, to impose control over the flows of people and regulation of cross border trade, or indicate the evolving gateway to facilitating contacts and interchange. The border area is a complete environment with conflicting interest of variety of actors (Hageman, Karen, and Berger, 2004). From the standpoint of O'Dowd (2003), borders are places of economic and political opportunities for nations and states as well as for a host of other interest groups and agencies, legal and illegal. Thus, in all of human existence, borders have played significant role – political, economic etc to nations and states. However, economic and commercial potential are core activities in the border communities (International Studies in Population, 2018).

Globally, border communities provide the avenue for development, infrastructure, trade, economic and commercial activities. Obviously, these strategic economic potentials have not been utilized to develop border communities basically due to some strategic reasons. Of note, these communities are far from the national political centre of the nation, and therefore, have little or no influence on decision-making and the allocation of resources. Most of these border communities are a “pass through economy”, one in which too little value is added locally to the billions of dollars of commerce passing through its corridors each year. Consequently, the neglect and marginalization of border areas, border communities and border crossers has great impact on communities beyond the border itself.

Interestingly, borders are important entry points for infectious diseases, which if not properly handled could spread and affect the entire country's population. Evidently, diseases such as the COVID-19, tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, poliomyelitis and malaria and so on are among the diseases that are prevalent in the border areas. According to Anand (1995), diseases that currently poses the greatest risk, both to the border crossers and the public at large is TB. More than 75 per cent of patients diagnosed with TB in EL Paso, Texas identify contacts in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Similarly, Kahn et al (2003) reveal that 27 per cent of the male Senegalese migrants were tested HIV positive compared to 1 per cent from non-migrants' male from the same area. Hence, sexually transmitted infections are more likely to spread among migrants as well as their permanent partners residing in the sending communities (Kane et al, 1993).

In the view of Popoola (2016), certain changes play out in border communities as a result of the presence of migrants. These include cultural integration or disintegration, changes in dressing, language problems, health challenges, security issues, spread of new knowledge and ideas, new sexual practices and changes in sexual health. In recent past border communities have experienced external aggression and threat from terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling of illegal goods, illegal immigration, arms and drugs trafficking, arm robbery, banditry etc. Owing to these challenges, the Nigerian government had in 2003 set up Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA) as an interventionist agency to develop all border communities through the implementation of planned and sustainable projects. Despite these lofty idea and effort by the federal government, the Nigeria border communities still face numerous challenges. Specifically, the security challenges experienced across the country are due partly to the porous nature of Nigerian borders as well as lack of opportunities for the youths in the border communities to be accommodated in the greater master plan that has to do with the development of the country.

Based on the foregoing, it becomes imperative for empirical analysis of the issues and development challenges associated with cross-border migration in border

communities within different context. Akwa Ibom State provides an interesting setting for this study given its dual status as a coastal and an oil producing entity. This status provides an easy destination point for migrants who are most likely to be interested in taking advantages of the prospects of improved socio-economic activities for livelihoods, businesses and employment opportunities.

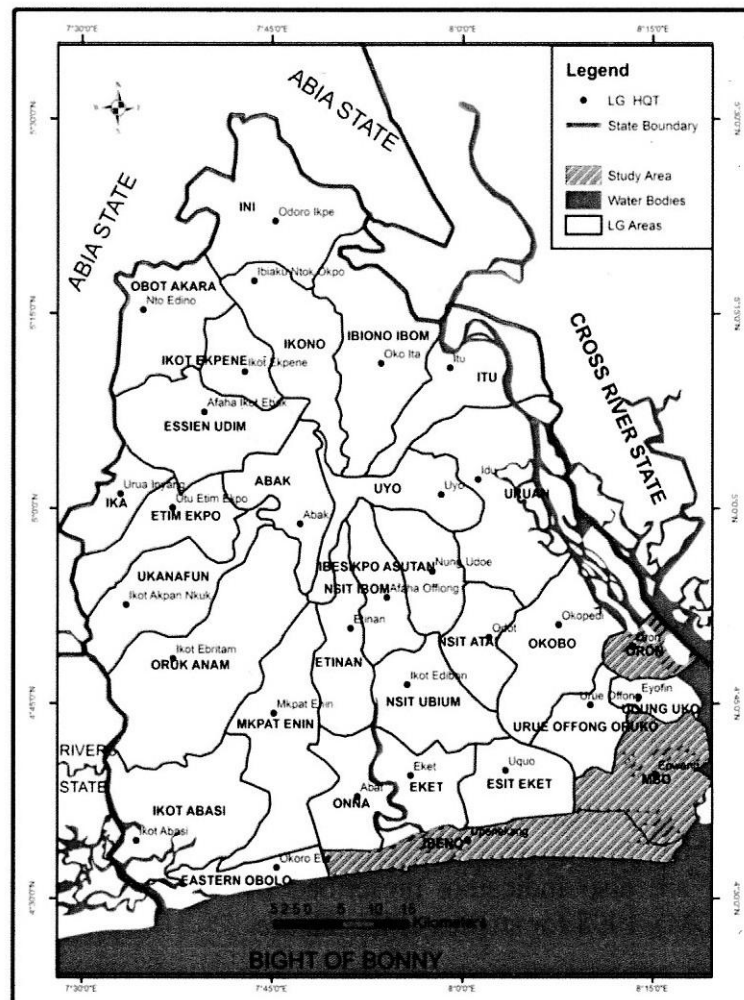
Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine issues and socio-cultural problems arising as a result of the presence of cross-border migrants in border communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. Assess the development challenges confronting border communities as centre for cross-border migration.
3. Recommend measures that would aid in checking illegal entries into the country as well as how insecurity in border communities could be curbed.

The Study Area

Figure 1: Border communities in Akwa Ibom State



Source: Ministry of Land and Town Planning Uyo, 2019

As earlier indicated, the study area consists of four borders communities, namely, Oron, Ibeno, Ibaka, Ebughu in Akwa Ibom State (see figure I). Akwa Ibom State is located North of the equator and within the humid tropics. It has between Latitude $4^{\circ} 30^1$ and $5^{\circ} 30^1$ North and Longitude $7^{\circ} 30^1$ and $8^{\circ} 25^1$ East of the Greenwich Meridian. Akwa Ibom covers a total land area of 8,421km with an ocean front that spans a distance of 129km from Ikot Abasi in the West to Oron in the East (Akwa Ibom State Government, 1989). The state is bordered on the East by Cross River State, on the West by Rivers State and Abia State and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean.

Akwa Ibom State is made up of 31 Local Government Area. According to the 2006 National Census, Akwa Ibom is home to some 3,920,208 million people (2,044,511 males and 1,875,698 females) which are 2.8% of Nigeria's population. Of these figures, 345,249 people are said to be living in these border communities (National Population Commission, 2006). The population of the state is evenly distributed except in the vast areas of permanent swamps along the Enyong Creek and the coastal areas of Eket, Mbo and Oron, which are sparsely populated. About 60% of the population are agrarian, 25% is commercially oriented while the remaining 15% constitute the civil and public sector.

Method and Materials

Data for this study were collected majorly from the primary sources through structured questionnaire, focus group discussion, in-depth interview and personal observation. Two set of questionnaire were administered to both cross-border migrants and members of the host communities (Oron, Ibeno, Ibaka and Ebughu border communities) who are adult of 18 years and above. The variables that were collected for the study using questionnaire included the following:

Table 1: Research Data Set

S/N	VARIABLES	UNIT
1.	Water supply	Types/Number
2.	Educational facilities	Types/Number
3.	Health facilities	Types/Number
4.	Unemployment	Length of time
5.	Violence	Types/Number
6.	Access to land	Number
7.	House ownership	Types/Number
8.	Insecurity	Types/Number
9.	Transportation Issues	Types/Number
10.	Cultural challenges	Types/Number

The data set used for this study were chosen for various reasons: Firstly, they are the variables used by other researchers (Popoola et al, 2017; Blum, 2019); and second, they are also indicators prescribed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 1998 for studies of this nature.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Two sampling levels were used in the study which included the sampled communities and the respondent's sample. Border communities for the study - Oron, Ibeno, Ibaka and Ebughu in Akwa Ibom State were selected through purposively

sampling technique. The identified border communities were those that fall within 15km from the international border line with recognized border control post for the arrival and departure of international passengers (Harvey, 2008). The study sampled 500 respondents across four border communities comprising 400 cross border migrants and 100 members of the host communities. The number of questionnaire that were administered to the cross-border migrants in the study area was determined using snowballing sampling technique in which an initial identified cross border migrant would refer other household with similar characteristics and the process continued until the pre-determined target sample had been reached.

Similarly, the population of the host community was determined by the use of a minimum sample of 10 per cent of the population. The study used 25 per cent of the cross-border migrants' population to make it more representative as the study also employed various interactive and humanistic qualitative data collection methods to get information from members of the host communities. The qualitative techniques employed were helpful not only to overcome the limitation of the survey methods, but also to gain a deeper insight of the socio-cultural issues affecting the border communities. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to the four border communities and members of the host communities were chosen using simple random sampling approach. In distributing the questionnaires to the members of the host communities, respective family heads were sort for, and where they were not available, the family representative were given the set of questionnaire.

Methods of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis captured from the field research involved the use of descriptive techniques. The descriptive data were analyzed using charts, tables and simple percentages.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of Respondents

The demographic information of a people helps to understand issues that surround a particular problem in any society. The study considered the demographic information of the respondents regarding issues and development challenges arising in border communities as centre of cross-border migration in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of migrants in the study area

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25	183	45.75
	26-35	119	29.75
	36-45	51	12.75
	46 and above	47	11.75
Education	No formal	230	57
	Primary	67	17
	Secondary	99	25
	Tertiary	4	1
Marital Status	Single	220	55
	Married	177	44
	Divorced	3	1
	Widow	0	0

Occupation	Farmer	17	4
	Trader	89	22
	Fishing	153	38
	Public/civil servant	1	1
	Unemployed	10	3
	Others (Artisan)	130	32
Household Size	1-2	8	2
	3-4	20	5
	5-6	252	63
	7	120	30
Income	<N20,000	20	5
	N20,000-N50,000	188	47
	N51,000 – N100,00	190	47.5
	>N100,000	2	0.5
Gender	Male	303	76
	Female	97	24
Nationality	Ghanaians	225	56
	Nigerians	115	29
	Cameroonians	50	13
	Beninese	5	1
	Togolese	5	1
Religion	Christians	280	70
	Muslims	120	30

Source: Field Data, 2019

The demographic information of the respondents indicated that the respondents were mostly in their active ages and were able to work in their destination region. Among the respondents, 45.75 per cent (183) were within the ages of 18-25, 29.75 per cent (119) were within the ages of 26 – 35, 12.75 per cent (51) were within the ages of 36-45 and 11.75 per cent (47) were 46 years and above. The ages of the respondents were within the active age of 18 – 60 and it is an indication that the respondents were productive and can contribute to the development of the host community. The active age group of the respondents is also an indication that they are susceptible to anti-social behaviour such as violence behaviour, drug abuse, sexual abuse, rape, prostitution etc, which is very prevalent among youthful and active age group.

The respondents were mostly people without any form of formal education. Among the respondents, 1 percent (4) had tertiary education, 25 per cent (99) had secondary school education, 17 per cent (67) had primary school education and 57 per cent (230) had no formal education. These figures were an indication that the educational attainment of the migrants was low. The figures show the low level of educational attainment in most of the West African State. This is attributed to poor funding of education and infrastructure as well as corruption in the sub-region. This is basically the root cause of poverty and other socio-economic problem bedevilling the sub-region.

The study assessed the current occupation of the migrants in the study area and discovered that the major occupations of the migrants were fishing, artisans and

trading. The occupation patterns are attributed to the issue of most migrants being non-indigenes who may have not been able to secure places into the state civil service. The Atlantic Ocean also makes fishing an easy occupation in the study area which accounts for a large number of the respondents being into fishing. The fishing activities has been a source of job opportunity and income generation to many. It has also attracted the activities of sea pirate and other criminal elements which often see the fishermen as soft target in the high sea. This has caused serious security concern for the border communities.

The nationality of the migrants was also examined and the results indicated that 56 percent were Ghanaians (225), 29 per cent from Niger Republic (115), 13 percent from Cameroon (50), Benin Republic 1 per cent (5) and 1 per cent from Togo (5). The Ghanaians were mostly involved in fishing. These figures indicate that majority of the migrants were from countries of the West African sub-region, which are Nigeria's immediate neighbours. This pattern of cross-border migration is basically due to extant ECOWAS protocol, which eliminate visa/entry permit and also allow for free movement within the sub-region for residence and establishment. In addition, the mass movement of this nationals into Nigeria's border communities is attributed to the porous nature of borders and poor implementation of our immigration policies by relevant government agencies.

The study also show that more than half of the migrants were men (76 percent) and 24 percent were women. The numbers indicated that there was a greater tendency for men to migrate than women. This was also a pointer to the fact that gender is a factor in migration (Popoola et al, 2017). As shown in table 2, 47.5 percent of the migrants had incomes between ₦51,000 and ₦100,000, 47 percent had incomes of between ₦20,000 – ₦50,000, 5 percent had incomes of less than ₦20,00 and 0.5 percent had incomes of greater than ₦100,000. A large proportion of the migrants had income which was above the minimum wage of the country. The income could be as a result of employment and steady income generated from socio-economic activities through which the respondents could adequately cater for themselves and their families. As table 2 further show, 63 percent of the migrants had household sizes of between 5-6 persons, 30 percent had household sizes of more than 6 people, 5 percent between the sizes of 3-5 persons and 2 percent had household sizes of 1-2 persons. A large proportion of the migrant had household sizes of between 5 and 6 and the average household size was 6. The large proportion of this household size is a threat to the health of the migrants as most of them live in crowded places and single room apartment which could lead to outbreak of diseases.

The study also assessed the demographic characteristics of the respondents who were members of the host community and the following information were obtained:

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of members of the host communities

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25	14	14
	26-35	28	28
	36-45	21	21
	46 and above	37	37
Education	No formal	13	13
	Primary	29	29
	Secondary	39	34
	Tertiary	19	14
Marital Status	Single	25	25
	Married	74	74
	Divorced	0	0
	Widow	1	1
Occupation	Farmer	5	4
	Trader	38	38
	Fishing	26	26
	Public/civil servant	18	18
	Unemployed	3	3
	Others (Artisan)	1	1
Household Size	1-2	8	8
	3-4	14	14
	5-6	25	25
	7	53	53
Income	<N20,000	14	14
	N20,000–N50,000	32	32
	N51,000 –N100,00	34	34
	>N100,000	20	20
Gender	Male	77	77
	Female	23	23

Source – Field Data, 2019.

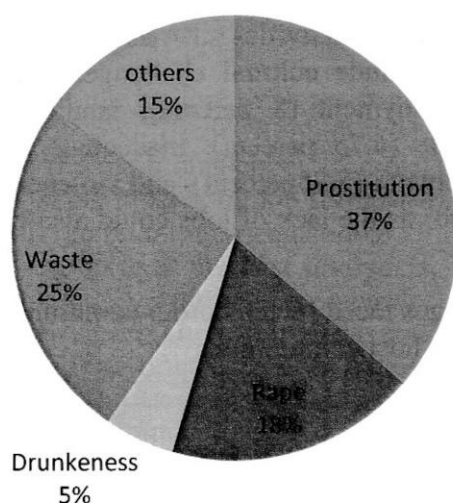
The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicated that the respondents were mostly in their active ages and they were able to work in their origin region. Among the respondents, 14 percent were within the ages of 18 – 25, 28 percent were within the ages of 26- 35, 21 percent were within the ages of 36-45 and 37 percent were 46 years and above. The ages of the respondents were within the active age of 18 – 60 which is an indication that the respondents were productive and can contribute to their immediate community. In the aspect of marital status of the members of the host community, 25 percent of the respondents were single, 74 percent were married while only 1 percent was widowed. The data indicated that many people in the study area were married and therefore have been in the area for a while and are able to contribute their views to the study.

The study also looked at the current occupation of the members of the host communities. This was to help ascertain the capacity or incapacity of the members to also contribute to the growth of their region. The results of the study indicated that the

major occupations of the indigenes were traders (38 percent), fishermen (26 percent) and public servants (18 percent). The occupation patterns indicate that a higher proportion of the members of the host community were into trading. Fishing is also seen as a major source of livelihood due to the nature of the study area (coastal area) and the public service also employs people from the host community into various offices and levels. This is an indication that the level of economic and commercial activities going on in the area has attracted migrants and other people into the border communities.

The study examined the socio-cultural problems that arise as a result of the presence of migrants in the border communities from the perspectives of the members of the host communities and the following information were obtained.

Figure 2: Socio-cultural problems arising as a result of the presence of migrants in border communities



Source: Field Data, 2019

The major socio-cultural problem that arises as a result of the presence of migrants in the host communities include, increase in prostitution (37 percent), increase in waste generation (25 percent), increase in rape (18percent) and issues of drunkenness (5 percent). Focus group discussion and in-depth interview further affirmed this position especially on the involvement of the migrants in anti-social issues in the community. For instance, it was reported that seven (7) Ghanaian men raped a local woman to death in Ibaka community. The Ghanaian migrants were also reported to be involved in sexual relationship with married women. More so, some of the male migrants got married to the community women illegally without payment of dowry and other traditional rites. All these are against the culture and tradition of the community. It was further revealed that some female migrants from Cameroon were also engaged in prostitution, which is a serious health risk to the community.

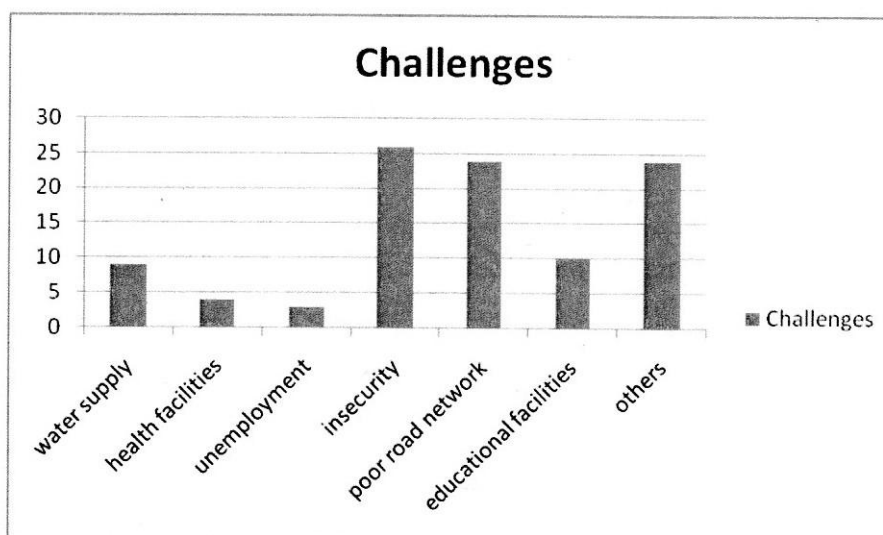
Development challenges confronting border communities as centre of cross-border migration.

Table 4: Development challenges faced by border communities

Challenges	Number	Percentage
Poor water supply	5	1.25
Inadequate health facilities	23	5.75
Unemployment	32	8
Violence	12	3
Land problems	27	6.75
Housing problems	34	8.5
Insecurity	204	51
Poor transportation	21	5.25
Cultural challenges	42	10.5
Total	400	100

Source: – Field Data, 2019

The study looked at the development challenges faced by border communities. The major challenge was the challenge of insecurity (51 percent). This is attributed to the high influx of foreigners to the host communities due to the activities of oil exploration and other socio-economic activities such as fishing, trading, farming etc. Other development challenges include cultural challenges (10.5 percent), housing problems (8.5 percent), unemployment (8 percent), land problems between the migrants and indigenous people (6.75 percent), inadequate health facilities (5.75 percent), poor transportation network (5.25 percent), and violence (3 percent). The rate of unemployment also is a factor as the lack of jobs could also contribute to the level of insecurity in the area.

Figure 3: Development challenges faced by the border communities from the perspective of the member of the host communities

Source: - field work, 2019

The study also sought to examine the challenges faced by the border communities from the perspective of the members of the host communities and it was revealed that insecurity is the major challenge facing the area. The position of the host communities collaborates with the earlier position of the migrants. Other challenges in descending order include, poor road network, inadequate educational facilities, inadequate water supply, inadequate health facilities and unemployment. The figures

are an indicator that insecurity is a major challenge affecting border communities which could affect the economy of the area. Poor infrastructural facilities which is a panacea for job creation and unemployment were also factors affecting the border communities as lack of jobs and infrastructures also contributes to the level of insecurity in the area.

Focus group discussion and in-depth interview conducted with the community leaders further revealed other challenges faced by the border communities. For instance, it was revealed that certain immigrants in collaboration with some unscrupulous Nigerians use illegal routes in the community for drugs, arms and human trafficking to and from Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and other African countries. This constitute security risk to the area and the nation at large. Moreso, during the 2019 general election, immigrants enrolled and obtained Nigeria's voters card which enabled them to vote in the elections. This action is against the electoral act and the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The immigration personnel at border posts reported that majority of the cross-border migrants does not have valid travel documents as they enter the country through illegal routes. They attributed this problem to the vast and porous nature of our borders. They also attributed the free flow of migrants to the area to the extant ECOWAS protocol relating to free movement of persons, residence and establishment within the West African sub-region.

The result of this study aligns with the studies of Blum (2019) on the flows of people between Nigeria and Benin Republic which indicated that trans-national criminal activities are the main challenges of cross-border migration. 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. The result of the study also agreed to the study carried out by Popoola (2016) who opined that in Nigeria, rural border communities like many other rural communities lacks infrastructural facilities like roads, portable water, electricity, good communication network, education, and health care facilities among others. Table 5 show the barrier faced by cross-border migrants in border communities

Table 5: Barriers faced by migrants

Barrier	Number	Percentage
Religion	14	3
Tribalism	3	1
Ill health	35	9
Financial Problems	259	65
Cultural Problems	65	16
None	4	1
Others	20	5
Total	400	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

The result of the investigation indicates that the major barrier faced by migrants when they reach the destination area is financial barrier (65 percent). Most of the migrants were illegal migrants who came into the country through illegal means without sufficient fund, which is a strong condition for entrance into the country. This is an indication that, Nigeria borders are porous owing to poor implementation of immigration laws by relevant government agencies. This financial status of the migrants could also worsen the security situation in the area, as some of them could involve in criminal activities as a means of livelihood. Another problem was cultural

problems (16 percent), since the migrants were from other places; there are the tendencies to neglect cultural rules and taboos in the host communities to their own detriment. The culture of the host communities also affects the migrants in diverse ways. For example, during the *ekpo* cultural festivals, the migrants find it very difficult to go out for their different businesses. There is also a reduction in the number of migrants in the host communities during such festivities. Other barriers faced by migrants in the border communities were ill health (9 percent) caused by change in environment, religion (3 percent) and tribalism (1percent). Some of the migrants who have health challenges were not able to take care of themselves due to their poor financial status and others could not access health care because the health facilities in the study area were below standard.

For instance, some of migrants in Ibeno have to travel to Eket to access adequate health care facilities. Focus group discussion and in-depth interview revealed that the migrants also faced stiff barrier in engaging in certain job opportunities in the border communities. For instance, the female migrants were barred from fish trading in Ibeno community by the community leadership when it was observed that there was competition between the community women and female migrants in that line of business. The community women were scared of losing their major source of livelihood to the female migrants. The result of this study is backed up by the study of Zewdu (2014) in Ethiopia, where the author opined that given that individuals are culture bearing, immigrants do not immediately adjust sufficiently to the cultures they moved into. This has been a very serious problem to them especially on the style of living.

Conclusion

Overall, the study examined development challenges confronting border communities as centre of cross-border migration in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study notes clearly that the major challenge facing the area is insecurity. This is owing to a number of socio-economic activities occasioned by the movement of people into the area. However, the study found out that the major barrier faced by migrants at the destination region was financial problem. This is because most of the migrants enter the country through illegal route without evidence of sufficient fund which is a strong condition for entrance into Nigeria. This financial status of migrants has further contributed to the worsening security situation in the area as some of them were involved in criminal activities for survival. It was concluded therefore, that, insecurity being a major challenge to the border community has also affected the socio-economic development of the area as no development could thrive in an environment that is not secured.

Recommendations

From the forgoing, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. The use of mobile surveillance systems, video and thermal surveillance system to monitor the border to impede further unlawful entries into the country and to check criminality in the border communities.
2. There should be a deliberate attempt by government to provide infrastructural facilities to the area which is panacea for socio-economic development and also create employment opportunities to the teeming unemployed youths as this will go a long way to reduce security challenges facing the area.

3. Since the border residents are directly affected by border governance, they must be consulted about their priorities since they know the region more than anyone else.
4. There is also the need for integration programmes to be organized for the migrants on individual life style factors such as health education programmes and migrants' sensitive health risk enlightenment.
5. Attention should also be paid to the linguistic and cultural barriers, integration and under-achievement faced by migrant.

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