

Crossing the Borderline: Policy Awareness, Implementation Gaps and TFMS along the Cameroon-Nigeria Border in DMD

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Abstract

The effective management of trans-frontier movements depends largely on the implementation of border management policies, bilateral agreements, immigration regulations, customs procedures, and security cooperation between neighbouring states. This study seeks evaluate the implication of border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in Donga-Mantung Division. It assesses the level of awareness and effectiveness of existing border management policies, and implications of policy implementation gaps. Questionnaires was the key instrument of data collection. The study used data on primary and secondary data sources with descriptive and analytical models. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the border settlements and with 520 participants. These stakeholders were the different categories of migrants and border officials from the different border agencies. The study was lensed through “the bottom-top and top-bottom theory”. In summarizing the data into frequencies and percentages, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) was also used. Tables, figures were used in presenting the data. The paper found that (39.4%) of migration stakeholders have low level of awareness of border management policies and 58.6% of respondents opined low level of implementation of existing along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD. The findings indicate that irregular/unauthorized border crossing is the most prominent implication of low level of border management policies awareness and implementation, reported by 259 respondents (49.8%). This is followed by smuggling and illicit cross-border trade, with 121 respondents (23.3%), and cross-border insecurity/crime, reported by 92 respondents (17.7%). Only 47 respondents (9.2%) identified loss of government revenue and constraints on local development. The paper recommended among others improving institutional coordination, enhancing public awareness of border regulations, modernizing customs and immigration procedures, deploy more border officials, improve on border infrastructures, and promoting secure and orderly cross-border mobility.

Keywords: Trans-frontier movements, Border management policies, Borderlands.

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INTRODUCTION

International borders are not merely lines separating sovereign states; they are dynamic spaces of economic, social, cultural and political interaction through which people, goods, services and information circulate. In Africa, this is particularly evident because colonial boundaries often divided communities with longstanding social and economic ties (Asiwaju, 1985; Nugent & Asiwaju, 1996). Consequently, trans-frontier movements contribute to livelihoods, trade and regional integration, while simultaneously creating challenges relating to migration control, smuggling, insecurity and border governance.

The Cameroon-Nigeria border illustrates these complex dynamics. Historically, communities on both sides of the border have maintained economic, social and

cultural relationships involving trade, labour, agriculture and other forms of mobility (Bombey, 2022). To regulate these interactions, the governments of Cameroon and Nigeria have established various legal and institutional frameworks or bilateral cooperation designed to facilitate legitimate cross-border trade and migration while combating transnational crime and protecting national security. These frameworks include immigration legislation, customs regulations, bilateral border commissions, joint security patrols, information-sharing mechanisms, and cooperation within regional organizations such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the Gulf of Guinea Commission, and the African Union. In addition, the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents new opportunities for strengthening trade

facilitation, harmonizing customs procedures, and enhancing regional economic integration through more efficient border governance (African Union, 2018). Despite the existence of these institutional and policy frameworks displayed in table 1, the implementation of border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border remains constrained by numerous structural and operational challenges. These challenges include; limited institutional capacity of border management agencies and weak coordination among institutions responsible for border governance.

Such an implementation gap has significant implications for trans-frontier movements. It contributes to irregular border crossings, smuggling and illicit trade, cross-border insecurity and crime, and loss of government revenue. At the same time, excessive or poorly implemented restrictions negatively affect legitimate traders and communities whose livelihoods depend on cross-border mobility. Research on informal cross-border trade along the Cameroon-Nigeria border demonstrates its importance to livelihoods, particularly among women, highlighting the need to balance border security with the facilitation of legitimate economic activities (Sheneyeh *et al.*, 2021).

Against this background, the study examines the relationship between awareness of border-management policies, their implementation and trans-frontier movements. It seeks to establish the level of policy awareness, assess implementation effectiveness and identify the consequences of implementation gaps for cross-border mobility. The study argues that effective border governance should go beyond controlling movement to promote security, regulatory compliance, legitimate mobility, livelihood protection and sustainable local development (ECOWAS, 2020; OECD, 2025).

STUDY AREA

This study is focused on border policy implementations along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in Donga-Mantung Division (DMD). DMD is one of the seven (7) Divisions in the North West Region of Cameroon. It directly borders Nigeria. The Division was created by a presidential Decree No 68/DF/509, in 1968. DMD is made up five (5) sub-divisions; Nwa, Nkambe, Ako, Ndu and Mesaje Sub-divisions. DMD lies between latitude 5°00' and 6°34' North of the Equator, as well as longitude 9°30' and 10°42' East of the Greenwich Meridian. The Division is almost rectangular in shape. Its Northern and Eastern boundaries are bounded by the Yola local government (Taraba State) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is also bordered by the Gashaka portion of the Adamawa region. Its south-western boundaries are bordered by Bui, Boyo and Menchum Divisions. The Division covers a surface area of 4279km² and has a total population of about 337,533 inhabitants as of 2005, and projected to 396,258 in 2023.

This gives a population density of about 62 per/sqkm² (Figure 1).

METHODS AND TOOLS

Different stages were used to facilitate the process of the study. They are; identification of problem, review the literature, developed research question, collection of data, conduct analysis and present the findings. Data was collected through the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitatively, data was obtained through interviews with border officials and qualitatively data was obtained through the administration of questionnaires to migrants. From the population of the Division which stands at about 337,533 (BUCREP) as of 2011, a sample size of at least 384 is ideal. However, a total of 512 questionnaires were administered and 500 responded, given 98%. The chi square test was used to test and validate the hypothesis. It was used to evaluate the association between dependent and independent variables. Secondary data were extracted from journal articles, official document among others.

Theoretical Framework

The findings were lensed through the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation theory by Paul, S (1986). This theory holds that effective policy implementation depends on both the direction provided by the central policymakers and the active participation of local implementers. Sabatier's theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining the implementation of border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD. From the top-down perspective, the theory argues that successful policy implementation depends on clearly defined policy objectives, effective communication of policy directives, adequate financial and human resources, strong institutional coordination, and sustained political commitment. From the bottom-up perspective, Sabatier (1986) emphasizes that policy implementation is shaped not only by central government directives but also by the actions, discretion, and participation of local implementers and target groups.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of border management policies is directly relevant to assessing both the level of awareness and the effectiveness of policy implementation along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in Donga-Mantung Division. Border management policies constitute the legal, institutional and operational framework through which Cameroon and Nigeria regulate and facilitate the movement of persons, goods and vehicles across their common international boundary. These policies encompass immigration regulations, customs procedures, documentation requirements, border surveillance, information sharing, joint security arrangements, border-control procedures and bilateral cooperation mechanisms. Their effectiveness depends

not only on the existence of appropriate laws and agreements but also on the extent to which these policies are known, understood and applied by border officials, traders, transporters, migrants and communities living along the border. Within Donga-Mantung Division, the level of awareness and implementation of border management policies are low due to structural and

institutional lapses. This results vises such as irregular unauthorized border crossing, cross-border insecurity, smuggling and illicit cross-border trade, loss of government revenue and human trafficking. This therefore suggest the need for intensified sensitization and institutional strengthening.

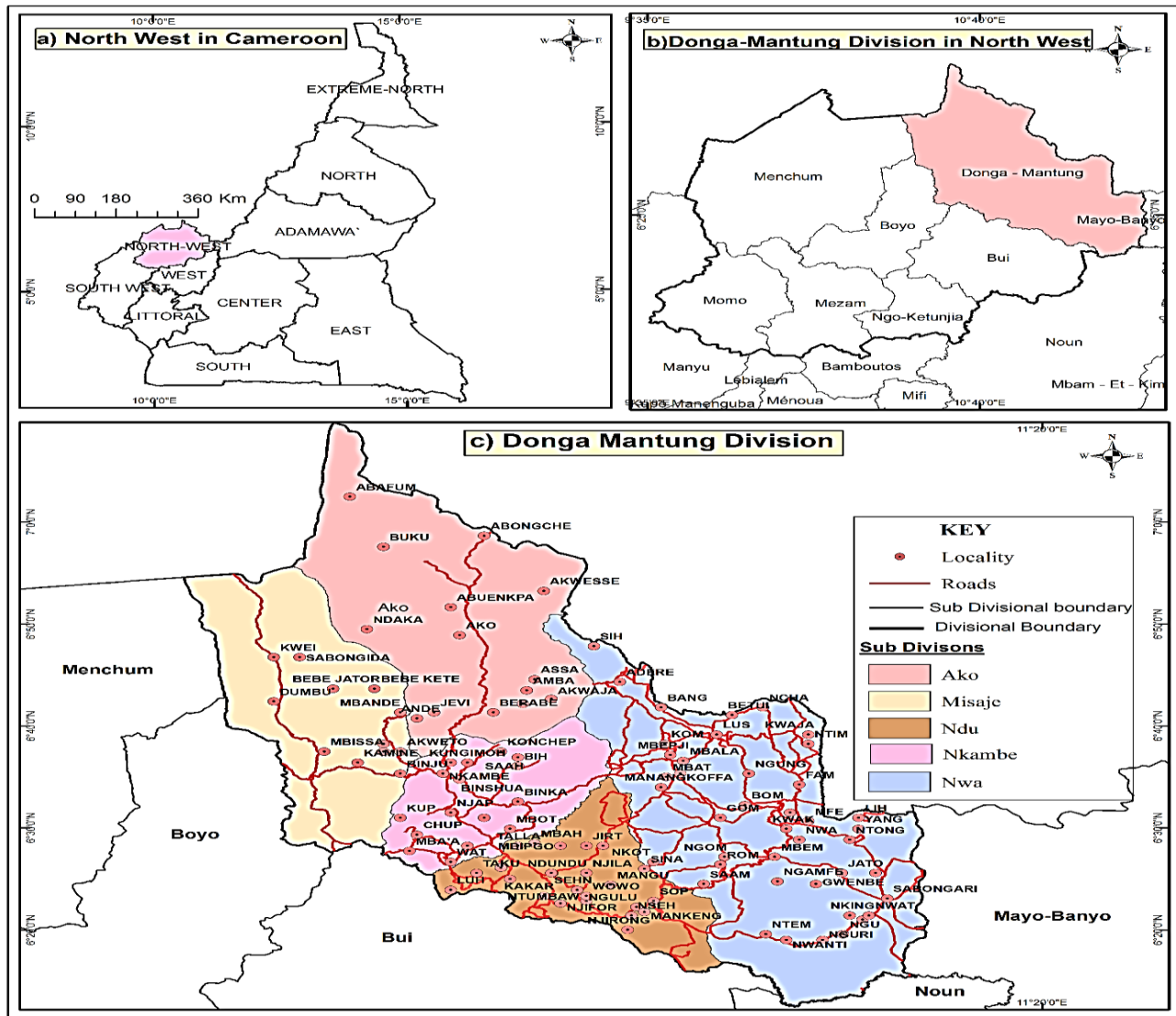


Figure 1: Location of study site
Source: NIC database and digital globe map, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of awareness of border management policies and TFMs

Along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD, cross-border interactions are driven by long-standing historical, socio-cultural, and economic ties that facilitate the frequent movement of people, goods, and services (Bombey, 2022). These interactions are regulated through national border management policies aimed at ensuring secure and orderly movements. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks largely

depends on the extent to which stakeholders are aware of their provisions and understand their responsibilities in complying with them. Assessing the level of awareness of existing border management policies is therefore essential for identifying knowledge gaps that may hinder policy implementation and for informing strategies to strengthen border governance, promote legal cross-border movements, and enhance cooperation between Cameroon and Nigeria (African Union Commission, 2020; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). Field data from respondents' level of awareness of the existing border

policies in the study area varied, based on the different variables; highly aware, moderately aware, slightly

aware and not aware. Table 1 shows the frequency of the different categories.

Table 1: Level of awareness of border management policies

Level of awareness of border management policies	Frequency	Relative frequency (%)	Cumulative frequency
Highly aware	47	9.4	9.4
Moderately aware	168	33.6	43
Slightly aware	197	39.4	82.4
Not aware	88	17.6	100.0
Total (N)	500	100.0	

Source: Field work, 2024.

Table 1 presents the respondents' level of awareness of existing border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD. Out of the 500 respondents surveyed, 197 respondents (39.4%) indicated that they were slightly aware of the existing border management policies, making this the most common response. This was followed by 168 respondents (33.6%) who reported being moderately aware, while 88 respondents (17.6%) indicated that they were not aware of the policies. Only 47 respondents (9.4%) stated that they were highly aware of the existing border management policies. The cumulative frequency further reveals that 82.4% of the respondents were either slightly or moderately aware of the policies, whereas only 9.4% possessed a high level of awareness. Furthermore, the fact that 17.6% of the respondents were completely unaware of the existence of these policies indicates a considerable knowledge gap among border stakeholders. Overall, the distribution of responses demonstrates that awareness of border management policies is generally low, with the majority of respondents possessing only limited knowledge rather than a comprehensive understanding of the legal and institutional frameworks governing trans-frontier movements.

These findings imply that inadequate dissemination of information, limited public sensitization, and insufficient stakeholder engagement have constrained awareness of border management

policies within the study area. This low awareness of border management policies is due to the level of education of migrants (table 6), whereby 36% of the total respondents' have attended just primary school. It is also due to the category of migrants; farmers, herdsman, builders and carpenters who on most cases do not pass through BCPs while on transit. Moreso, most inhabitants of straddling settlements such as Ntim, Lus, Awaja, Abeunshie and Sabongida are just aware of the political divide that separates them and criss-cross it on daily bases out of ignorance of the policies that govern TFMs. Finally, there is lack of community inclusive border management programs in the study area. This creates a vacuum in the level of awareness of border management policies and the level of implementation of these policies. The 9.4% of those that stated that they are highly aware of the border-management policies are those that pass through BCPs and traders in particular who are usually affected by occasional border closure policies implemented by the SDO.

The limited awareness of these border management policies is not restricted to the migrants, but to BOs (custom and security agents). Field data also shows variations in the level of awareness from the different categories, though a greater proportion of the respondents are moderately aware of these policies. Figure 2 presents the weighing of the level of awareness by 20 BOs from the main BCPs along the Cameroon-Nigeria corridor in the study area.

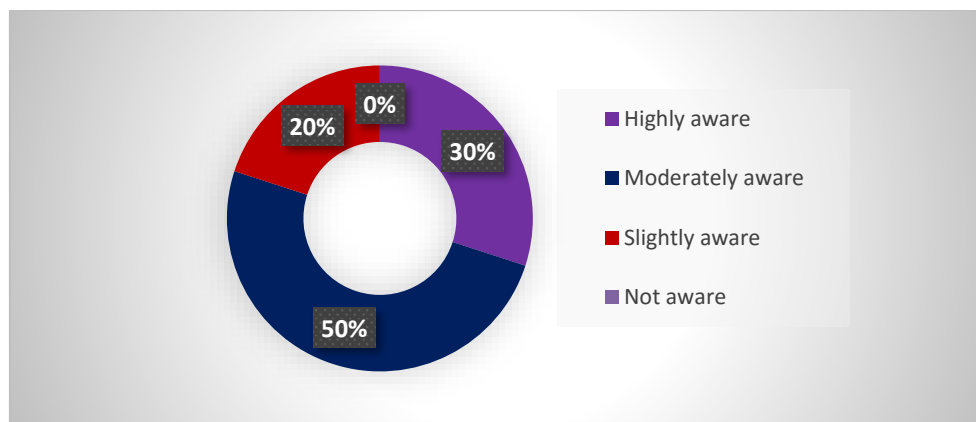


Figure 2: Level of awareness of border management policies

Source: Fieldwork, July 2024

Figure 2 presents the distribution of border officials' responses regarding their level of awareness of existing border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD. The findings indicate that 10 (50%) of the respondents reported being moderately aware of border management policies, representing the largest proportion of respondents. This was followed by 6 (30%) who indicated they were highly aware, while 4 (20%) reported being slightly aware. Notably, none (0%) of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of border management policies.

Figure 2 suggest that awareness of border management policies among border officials is generally high, with 80% of respondents reporting either moderate or high awareness. The absence of respondents in the "not aware" category implies that all border officials possess at least some knowledge of the existing policy framework governing border management. This level of awareness is expected because border officials receive formal training and are directly responsible for implementing immigration, customs, and security regulations at border crossing points. The predominance of moderate awareness (50%), however, indicates that while officials are familiar with existing policies, many may not possess comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of border governance. The 20% that indicated slightly aware showed their ignorance in some bilateral accords

such as the "agreement of friendship" between Cameroon and Nigeria. Likewise, Alemika (2013) observed that the effectiveness of border management institutions in Africa largely depends on the knowledge, competence, and policy awareness of frontline officers responsible for enforcement.

The effectiveness of border management policies

This limited awareness by migrants reduce compliance with immigration, customs, and security regulations and consequently weaken the effective implementation of bilateral border accords. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019), awareness and understanding of border management regulations among border officials and local communities are fundamental prerequisites for effective border governance and orderly migration management. Similarly, the African Union Commission (2020) emphasizes that successful implementation of Integrated Border Management (IBM) depends largely on the knowledge and participation of border stakeholders, while the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) notes that poor awareness of border regulations contributes to irregular border crossings, smuggling, and other forms of transnational crime. Table 3 denotes respondents' perception on the level of implementation of border of border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in DMD.

Table 2: Level implementation of bilateral border accords and policies implementations

Border accords and policies are implemented in DMD	Sub-Divisions					Effective respondents	%
	Ako	Misaje	Nkambe	Ndu	Nwa		
Agree	19	6	4	3	17	49	9.8
Neutral	60	19	14	11	54	158	31.6
Disagree	111	35	26	21	99	293	58.6
Total	190	60	45	35	170	500	100

Source: Field work, 2024.

Table 2 presents respondents' assessment of the implementation of bilateral Cameroon-Nigeria border accords and policies in DMD. Out of the 500 respondents, 293 (58.6%) disagreed that bilateral border accords and policies are effectively implemented, 158 (31.6%) remained neutral, while only 49 (9.8%) agreed that these policies are adequately implemented. Across all five sub-divisions, the pattern is consistent, with the majority expressing disagreement: Ako recorded 111 of 190 respondents (58.4%), Misaje 35 of 60 (58.3%), Nkambe 26 of 45 (57.8%), Ndu 21 of 35 (60.0%), and Nwa 99 of 170 (58.2%) disagreeing that border accords and policies are effectively implemented. The close similarity in these percentages indicates a strong consensus among respondents irrespective of location. Overall, the findings demonstrate that perceptions of poor implementation are widespread throughout the study area, suggesting that existing bilateral agreements have not been translated into effective operational practices at the local border level.

The findings on the level of policy implementation in the study area reveal a generally negative perception of the implementation of Cameroon-Nigeria bilateral border accords and policies. With 58.6% of respondents disagreeing that these agreements are effectively implemented and fewer than 10% expressing agreement, the results indicate a substantial gap between the formulation of bilateral border policies and their practical application on the ground. This pattern suggests that although Cameroon and Nigeria have adopted several bilateral and regional frameworks to strengthen border security, facilitate legitimate cross-border trade, and promote regional integration, implementation remains constrained by weak institutional coordination, inadequate logistics, insufficient funding, limited monitoring mechanisms, and inconsistent cooperation among border management agencies (Gerald *et al.*, 2011). The relatively high proportion of neutral responses (31.6%) also suggests uncertainty among residents regarding the actual effectiveness of policy implementation, which reflect

limited visibility of government interventions or inconsistent policy enforcement across border communities.

Policy implementation gaps on TFMs

The evaluation is done by comparing what border management policies require (expected implementation) with what is actually implemented or observed. The larger the difference between the expected

and observed levels of implementation, the greater the implementation gap. Table 3 shows a summary of the policy evaluation based on field data from border officials. A Likert scale of 5, with variables of; 5-Fully implemented, 4-mostly implemented, 3-moderately implemented, 2-Poorly implemented and 1-Not implemented was used to establish the gap in policy implementation.

Table 3: Summary assessment of border management policies

Expected policy requirement	Actual situation	Gap	Interpretation
Regular joint border patrols	Patrols are irregular	66%	High gap
Public awareness campaigns	Few residents know the policy	91%	High gap
Adequate staffing	Shortage of personnels	51%	Moderate
Full custom inspection	Many informal crossing escape inspection	40%	Low gap
Inter-agency coordination	Rare meetings	46%	Moderate gap

Source: Fieldwork, August 2025.

The findings on table 3 reveal substantial implementation gaps across nearly all policy areas. Regular joint border patrols, which are expected to occur consistently, are reported to be irregular, indicating a high implementation gap (66%). Public awareness campaigns are also poorly implemented, as few residents are aware of existing border management policies, reflecting another high gap (91%). Adequate staffing remains a challenge due to shortages of border personnel, resulting in a moderate implementation gap (51%). Insufficient staffing consequently produces delays, incomplete inspections and inadequate surveillance of unofficial crossing points. This is consistent with the broader policy-implementation perspective of Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983), which emphasizes that the availability of adequate administrative resources and the capacity of implementing agencies are important determinants of effective policy implementation. Full customs inspection is not effectively enforced because many informal border crossings bypass official inspection, creating a low implementation gap (40%). However, this indicates that custom inspection functions comparatively better than the other policy dimensions, while remaining constrained by the existence of informal crossing routes. Likewise, inter-agency coordination among border management institutions is weak (46%), with only rare coordination meetings taking place, leading to a moderate implementation gap. Weak coordination results to fragmented information, duplication of responsibilities and delays in responding to emerging security or migration challenges. Therefore, effective border management depends not simply on the presence of individual agencies but also on their capacity to operate as an integrated institutional system. Overall,

the evidence suggests that border management policies are not being implemented as intended in the study area. Three out of the five assessed policy dimensions exhibit high implementation gaps, while only staffing shows a moderate gap. These findings point to weaknesses in policy enforcement, institutional capacity, public awareness, and coordination mechanisms. These implementation gaps have negative implications on cross-border dynamics, such as irregular unauthorized border crossing, cross-border insecurity and smuggling, as examined in 6.4.

Implication of level of awareness and implementation of border policy awareness on TFMs

The low level of awareness of border management policies constitutes a knowledge/compliance gap, while low effectiveness constitutes an institutional/enforcement gap. Together, they produce a policy implementation gap that is manifested through irregular unauthorized border-crossing, smuggling and informal trade, revenue losses and reduced developmental benefits from TFMs. From the results, 49.8% of the respondents opined that policy implementation gap leads to irregular unauthorized border crossing, 17.7% for cross-border insecurity/crime, 23.3 for smuggling and illicit cross-border trade, and just 9.2% for loss of revenue and constraint development. (Table 4). Thus, 90.8% of respondents associated the policy implementation gap with either irregular crossings, cross-border insecurity/crime, or illicit trade, suggesting that weaknesses in border-policy implementation have predominantly manifested in governance, security and regulatory challenges.

Table 4: Implication of policy implementation gap on TFMs

Policy implementation gap on TFMs	Frequency	Relative frequency (%)	Cumulative frequency
Irregular unauthorized border crossing	259	49.8	49.8
Cross-border insecurity/crime	92	17.7	67.5
Smuggling and illicit cross-border trade	121	23.3	90.8
Loss of revenue and constraint local development	47	9.2	100.0
Total (N)	520	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2024.

The dominance of irregular border crossing is consistent with the broader understanding that effective border management requires adequate policy implementation, trained personnel, information systems and cooperation among border stakeholders. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) emphasizes that effective border-management structures can facilitate regular movement while preventing irregular migration and organized cross-border crime (IOM, 2025). Similarly, OECD (2025) identifies inadequate policy implementation capacity, poor border management and irregular migration as interconnected challenges affecting mobility governance in West Africa. The relatively high proportion (23.3%) reporting smuggling and illicit trade further suggest that inadequate implementation of customs and border-control measures may facilitate the circumvention of formal procedures. This finding supports the argument of Papademetriou and Collett (2011) that contemporary border management requires information-driven controls, risk assessment and effective cooperation to balance mobility facilitation with the management of cross-border risks. The 17.7% reporting insecurity and crime also highlight the security consequences of weak border governance, particularly where information sharing and inter-agency coordination are inadequate (INTERPOL, n.d.). Overall, the findings demonstrate a substantial policy implementation gap: although border management policies may formally exist, their limited effectiveness at the local level appears to undermine their intended objectives. This interpretation is consistent with Sabatier's (1986) policy implementation perspective, which stresses the importance of both policy design and the actors, institutions and conditions through which policies are implemented.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The level of awareness and implementation of border management policies along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in Donga-Mantung Division is generally low. The findings reveals that 57% of the migrant respondents are either not aware of slightly aware of existing border management policies that governs trans-frontier movement along the Cameroon-Nigeria border in Donga-Mantung Division. Just 9% of the surveyed migrants affirm their proficiency of these bilateral agreements. However, 80% of border officials approved on their awareness of the border management policies. This shows an absence of community inclusive border management programs through which border officials

and local administrative authorities can educate the migrants on these policies. The findings also revealed 293 (58.6%) of the sampled migrants disagreed that bilateral border accords and policies are not effectively implemented in the study area, while 158 (31.6%) remained neutral and only 49 (9.8%) agreed that these policies are adequately implemented. The low level of policy implementation is dues to the extremely porous nature of the border, characterized by rugged topography, inadequate border infrastructure and limited border personnels to navigate the 2036km border in the study area and security vulnerabilities now associated with the "Anglophone crisis". These are associated with irregular border crossings, illicit trade and insecurity, thereby weakening effective control of TFMs and limiting the developmental benefits of legitimate cross-border mobility. There is therefore the need to improve on border infrastructures in Donga-Mantung, deploy more border officials in the region, organize capacity building programs for border officials, ensure regular joint-border patrols, organize community inclusive border management programs and ensure and end to the Anglophones crisis which as triggered the proliferation of cross-border kidnappings in the region.

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