

Border management and organised crime at south Africa's ports of entry: Challenges and strategies for effective control

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Abstract: Effective border control is crucial in protecting people and providing economic security and sovereignty among nations. Countries face a plethora of threats from organized crime such as human trafficking, terrorism, and smuggling of illicit goods, which are serious challenges to any country's security and independence, and hence the need to deal with such crimes. This paper seeks to examine border control and patrol in South Africa, focusing largely on the emerging issues of illegal migration and transnational crime. The paper utilized a qualitative desktop method and exploratory design by examining the existing literature on the topic. A comprehensive content analysis of twenty (20) peer-reviewed articles that were deemed pertinent to border security and organized crime within the framework of South African ports of entry was employed. A thematic analysis approach was adopted by categorizing the articles according to shared themes or techniques. The paper emphasized the significance of establishing adaptable border management systems that include high-tech technologies, joint initiatives of various authorities, and participation of surrounding populations to increase security assurances at the ports of entry. The paper outlines the need for policy reforms and measures that should be put in place to fight such issues as globalization presents more challenges that need to be tackled.

Keywords: Border management authority, Migration, Organised crime, Policing, South Africa.

1. Introduction

Effective border management is crucial for ensuring public safety, maintaining economic stability, and safeguarding national security [1]. Illegal activities such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism pose a significant threat to the safety and sovereignty of a country [2]. Furthermore, the upkeep of border checkpoints is essential for facilitating efficient trade and productive mobility. There is a clear correlation between border management and the enhancement of cross-border interactions, which is a crucial factor in economic activity [3]. Efficient implementation of border management protocols is essential to safeguard the well-being and security of the country. These measures are crucial for the well-being of the population in various aspects. The demand for effective border control administration has greatly risen due to the factors of national security, economic progress, and social safeguarding.

South Africa's border security is influenced by multiple elements, including its geography, economy, and politics [4]. South Africa's extensive land border is shared with six countries: Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho. This is owing to the irregular corners created by South Africa's huge surface area. Border crossings in South Africa are intolerable due to the prevalence of transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, smuggling, and arms trade in these areas [3]. The evaluation of these challenges and their solutions has been proposed by border academics as being part of the static centralist model of border protection and management [3]. The unemployment rates in South Africa have significantly increased, leading to a widening pay gap in society. This has had

a rippling effect not just inside South Africa but also among neighbouring countries [2, 3]. The apartheid policy created an atmosphere of distrust towards law enforcement agencies, rendering them unable to build effective collaboration for border security. Therefore, it was clarified that the establishment of the Border Management Authority (BMA) aims to enhance the coordination and consolidation of the border security mechanism.

The creation of the BMA aimed to enhance border management and law enforcement at South Africa's ports of entry [5] because it is essential to get an agreement among the individuals responsible for making decisions, as well as having a thorough comprehension of the present circumstances. Nevertheless, it has been determined that there are certain operational, technological, social, and political obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of border control [6]. This paper examines the most effective methods for enhancing border management and enforcement techniques, while also identifying other viable alternatives. The paper assesses the effects of different border control tactics on national security, economic well-being, and public confidence in the government.

2. Historical Background

With the country's history of oppressive apartheid rule, the workings of border policing in South Africa have substantially changed over the years [7]. For instance, in the apartheid era, policing at the ports of entry was first introduced for the limitations of the movement of black people to prevent them from escaping the country [8]. This was made possible by looking up at the state's level of brutality that sought to control people and the calculated policies intended to separate people from each other because of their race. This could be attributed to the fact that the armed forces kept manning the borders to locate and keep track of potential threats to the apartheid regime. Apart from the presence of electric fencing, several other security systems such as checkpoints were also implemented [7]. Rigid defence mechanisms began emerging at this point. Instead of easing up on the legal movement of people and trade, the regime empowered itself in the relationship instead of seeking control for once. Post-apartheid South African borders and their dynamics changed quite a lot in the years that followed the end of the apartheid regime [9].

Adepoju [10] states that people from various African countries moved to South Africa because of the new democracy and also because of the many ethnic wars, poverty, bad politics, and economic depression back home. This was at the time when the new democratic administration of South Africa was trying to reconnect with the rest of the world and promote economic development. The formation of the Border Management Authority [5], was a remarkable progressive step in enhancing and improving the border control system. The establishment of the BMA was driven by the recognition of the urgent requirement for active engagement [5]. While commendable, directing attention just toward establishing the BMA is unlikely to effectively address the immigration issue and the related cross-border criminal activities in South Africa. To enhance and coordinate border control activities, all relevant departments have been consolidated under the authority of BMA [11]. These services encompass immigration, customs, and law enforcement. During this period, effective techniques and strategies for managing and controlling data were implemented. The primary objective of the BMA's establishment was to enhance border policing and management methodologies in South Africa. The main objective was to establish security systems, enhance trade, and facilitate the unrestricted flow of individuals and products [5]. The development of BMA was driven by the need to improve the efficacy and integration of border management, streamline administrative procedures, and be flexible in taking advantage of opportunities and addressing risks.

3. Literature Review

Although the study of physical borders has achieved its maximum potential, there is a growing need for scholars to focus on the concept of "borderlands". These areas experience significant impacts on the broader economic, social, and cultural interdependencies [12]. Consequently, significant advancements have been made in border research. Hoff, et al. [13] assert that there has been a trend where border

towns are not only seen as recipients of policy benefits but also as active participants who can influence political systems. In the past, border theories have primarily examined borders as physical entities rather than emphasising the state's control over access to these structures [12]. Conventional border studies have focused on the methods and timeframes necessary for implementing actions once borders have been established. They also examine the communication and interactions between politically organised entities, their leaders, and the economic, political, and military dimensions of their physical interactions [14].

The delays in generating immigration statistics for different African countries are caused by the inadequate infrastructure for documenting the residents of these countries [15]. The advent of modernity gives rise to a novel form of cultural hegemony that can be attributed to the phenomena of globalisation [7]. Border management refers to the measures used to safeguard a state's sovereignty and protect its national interests at its boundaries [16]. Regarding the importance of borders in achieving their national security goals, numerous countries acknowledge and value the necessity of having safe and protected borders. However, only a small number of countries put into practice measures to ensure border security [15]. The lack of attention to border security and inadequate border management in African nations has resulted in the rise of many risks, such as the widespread occurrence of cross-border criminal activities [17].

The lack of attention to border security and inadequate border management in Africa has significantly contributed to the emergence of many risks on the continent, such as cross-border crime. The issues presented by African border security differ significantly from those in other regions of the world [7]. The issue of poor border control in Africa can be traced back to the existence of ineffective systems, insufficient cooperation, and inadequate demarcation [18]. Enhancing the administration of these borders is therefore crucial in order to reinforce border security and facilitate the flow of individuals and commodities inside the economies of African Union member countries. This endeavour significantly contributes to the improvement of collaboration and integration throughout the continent.

One cannot overlook the role of illegal commerce when considering how to secure borders against illegal activity [19]. This pertains to the adherence to regulations of trade, namely the necessary paperwork for importing and exporting. This task includes identifying, categorising, and confiscating counterfeit merchandise, as well as ensuring that the appropriate import or excise taxes have been paid. Border security risks, such as human trafficking and unlawful importation of items, may also severely damage the South African economy [18]. According to Moodley [20] the annual market value of illegal products that enter South Africa through its borders amounts to billions of rand. Implementing cost-effective solutions for border security and control can help avoid such a significant expenditure. Moodley [20] highlights the fact that South Africa incurs significant expenses in the form of tax income, customs, and excise duties due to the ongoing occurrence of illicit commerce within its borders.

4. Research Methodology

The paper utilised a qualitative desktop method and exploratory design by examining the existing literature on the topic. The literature search encompassed topics such as border management, border policing, human trafficking, criminality, and police in the context of border management. Polit and Beck [21] define qualitative research as an approach that aims to investigate the various dimensions of human experiences and their evolution throughout time, to obtain a deeper understanding of the subjects under study. According to Bryman [22] exploratory research is a type of research that focuses on uncovering hidden ideas, generating new insights into difficulties, and expanding knowledge in areas where the problem is not yet fully understood. Thus, this study addresses the lack of theoretical research in the field of organised crime and border control in South Africa. The study employed a comprehensive content analysis of twenty (20) peer-reviewed articles that were deemed pertinent to border security and organised crime within the framework of South African ports of entry. The articles were obtained using a systematic literature study that followed certain inclusion criteria. These criteria included, among others, publications that focused on South Africa, articles that addressed border control

issues, and studies that provided solutions for preventing organised crime. The analysis utilised a thematic analysis approach, categorising the materials or articles according to shared themes or techniques. This facilitated a thorough examination of the coexistence of border management and organised crime, as well as the structure of responses to these matters.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Border Management and Policing Challenges

Border area length encompasses excessive distances and passes through inhospitable terrains which pose serious challenges to any organization entrusted with managing and controlling them [19]. Extensive coasts, woodlands, and rugged mountains pose physical obstacles to all land ports of entry, making it difficult to construct and maintain effective border security systems [23]. The enforcement of border control and security in South Africa is carried out by around eighteen departments and agencies, which operate within a defined policy and institutional framework and have distinct legal and policy objectives. The primary departments typically found in the land border environment encompass the South African Police Service (SAPS), Department of Home Affairs (DHA), South African National Defence Force (SANDF), South African Revenue Services (SARS), and Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) [19]. Regarding border administration and border policing, this work involves numerous intricacies. The factors encompass legal and institutional elements, insufficient collaboration and partnerships between agencies, limited resources, personnel issues, and working relationships.

5.2. Legal and Institutional Challenge

Since the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the management and enforcement of borders have become intricate due to the legal system and governing organizations involved. Since 1995, the South African Police Service (SAPS), responsible for border enforcement, has been methodically reorganising its powers and institutions related to border policing [19]. The Border Police was founded as one of the police components in August 1995 [24]. In 2004, there was a restructuring of the management and coordination of border policing operations. This restructuring involved centralising these operations at the national level under the Division of Protection and Security services [19]. However, in 2010, there was a change in the pattern when the authority of the Border Police was transferred to Provincial Commissioners as part of a process of devolution. In 2014, the South African Police Service consolidated all border policing operations under the authority of the Division Operational Response Services. The reform results in uncertainty and inefficiencies in policy direction, particularly during implementation, due to the evident failure of the current multi-agency system.

5.3. Coordination and Cooperation

Coordination and cooperation in border administration and policing presents significant challenges. The principal duties of the police include passport verification, apprehending fugitives, monitoring individuals of concern, and tracking the movement of stolen vehicles across national boundaries [5]. In order to fulfill their duties effectively, it is imperative for the police to maintain continuous communication with other branches of government. Mahlangu and Obioha [19] argue that the police cannot effectively carry out their duties using the Department of Home Affairs' Movement Control System. The police employ immigration officials at the border to scrutinise travel documents and ascertain individuals' legal status. If there is effective synergy and collaboration among these organs, border control and security will be implemented successfully. However, if there is insufficient synergy and cooperation, managing and policing the border posts becomes a challenging task.

Border	Direction	Fastest 5% Crossing Time	Medium Crossing Time	Slowest Crossing Time	Average Crossing Time	Standard Deviation
Beitbridge Border	SA - Zimbabwe	9 hrs 56 min	1 day 7 hrs	4 day 13 hrs	1 day 16 hrs	1 day 12 hrs
Beitbridge Border	Zimbabwe - SA	3 hrs 16 min	12 hrs 7 min	1 day 21 hrs	18 hrs 3 min	15 hrs 4 min
Total		4 hrs 2min	1 day 0hr	3 day 1 hr	1 day 8 hrs	1 day 8 hrs

Figure 1.

Beit bridge crossing timeframe (February 2024).

Source: Goodger [11]

Furthermore, the extensive geographical boundaries frequently pose challenges in terms of coordination and collaboration. The duration for crossing at the Beit bridge border station is depicted in Figure 1 as of February 2024. The figure implies that the border is functioning effectively, as there is a significant influx of individuals crossing. These issues arise since the entry point is considered one of the most heavily trafficked ports in South Africa for travel to the rest of the continent. Therefore, the effective administration of these borders would necessitate substantial support from various municipal and state entities in some capacity. If coordination and cooperation are not well addressed, it can result in inefficiency and unmet objectives. The attention is dispersed and the actions are scattered due to intense traffic and frequent crossings, making it nearly difficult to effectively manage or address every aspect. As a result, illegal activities such as illegal migration and smuggling become more accessible and pose significant risks. Therefore, in order to effectively address such challenges, the utilisation of advanced technological equipment by law enforcement agencies and border control authorities would be the most optimal choice.

5.3.1. Technology Problem

The BMA seeks to deploy drones in conducting a comprehensive and strategic assessment of the entire 255km long border between South Africa and Zimbabwe [5]. Such equipment may be classified as part of a wider approach geared toward solving problems associated with illegal immigration and smuggling. Integrating these mechanical devices enables the operatives to obtain an overhead view for fast observation and action against any questionable movements along the South Africa/Zimbabwe border. This technology is anticipated to improve policies and initiatives aimed at avoiding illicit border crossings and reinforcing border security [25]. The implantation of surveillance drones into the ambit of South African history and the Department of Home Affairs is reflective of a forward-thinking approach towards safeguarding the country's borders. The adoption of drones has significantly modernised border operations control, enhancing the authorities' ability to swiftly respond to security threats and effectively address any adverse incidents [25]. In addition to fulfilling beneficial goals, the implementation of technology poses obstacles, particularly in the areas of border management and law enforcement. Consequently, the Department of Home Affairs will need to allocate more funds for the BMA in order to streamline the implementation of sophisticated procedures. A notable difficulty in managing and policing the Beitbridge border post is the presence of various and widely dispersed lines, which requires border security and police personnel to make extra efforts to assist.

5.3.2. Smuggling and Human Trafficking.

Criminal activities like smuggling and human trafficking lie at the very high level of state terrorism and the people's security [26]. The Port of Entry has a lot of illegal smuggling activities going on including outsiders with, drugs, guns, counterfeit items, or endangered animals. The border police face various challenges in trying to grab any moving drugs since most drug smuggling operations are very sophisticated and involve well-thought-out methods and tools. It is even harder for the well-being of those working on the border since these activities are likely connected to larger organized crime syndicates [2]. Human traffickers are frequently unsuccessfully apprehended as a result of the

ineffective border control and the extensive undetected distance. Human trafficking is a crime that is both a form of slavery and a crime for financial gain. It is a prevalent practice in supply and demand networks, which include but are not limited to acts of terrorism financing and money laundering [27]. Border management is a shared responsibility among various line agencies in numerous countries, each with its own objectives, methodologies, and obligations [7]. This is due to the fact that certain areas will result in a duplication of efforts, while others will be a lacuna.

5.3.3. Corruption

Corruption has emerged as one of the most prevalent obstacles at any border crossing. Approaching the issue of border management becomes problematic when the primary objective is to establish border guardianship, which is achieved through the actions of individuals who transgress boundaries [7]. Border control personnel may also be corrupt, offering bribes or utilising threats of force to facilitate the crossing of unlawful items or individuals. These strategies may exacerbate the vulnerability of borders while simultaneously fortifying the upper echelons of criminal syndicates. Okunade [28] observes that the prevalence of illicit routes is on the rise, which exposes borders to trans-border crimes such as smuggling and cross-boundary crime, which pose a threat to human life. These acts of dishonesty result in a negative perception of government institutions among citizens, rendering them susceptible to terrorist and organised criminal activities.

5.4. Measures for Effective Border Security

5.4.1. Complex Surveillance and Information Management Systems

Another area that has remarkably improved border enforcement has been the use of complex surveillance and information management systems and this represents one of the opportunities that the advent of modern technology has presented. It was further observed by Mahlangu and Obioha [19] that the infrastructural design of most land borders in South Africa is still shaped by the previous paradigm where border security and control were a priority. It hinders productivity in terms processing of goods and people effectively and efficiently but at the same time provides safety and security. It was recommended by Mahlangu and Obioha [19] from a practice perspective that ‘without such infrastructure, the Integrated Border Management Strategy may not achieve the desired result while it should be an integral part of border control strategy within offices of several agencies. Protective measures are effective only in a limited manner, and therefore borders are to be equipped with modern devices, and surveillance, reconnaissance. Technologies such as drones, satellites, and sensors are very important tools to promote the capacity of BMA to perform their tasks. In essence, new technologies can provide officials with current information that will allow them to quickly respond to security threats.

5.4.2. Regular Update of Regulations and Laws

The Home Affairs and BMA Department should explicitly state in their policies that policies and laws will be routinely updated and strengthened to ensure the effective management of border control activity. Enhancing and modernising existing legislation and regulations can enhance their efficacy. This enables governments to address the increasing security threats and enhance the border control process. Similarly, it is crucial to train and equip border control and law enforcement personnel to enhance security and border control. An individual must be proficient and knowledgeable in the performance of border patrol, border security, unlawful activity detection, or any border-related risk response when they are assigned these responsibilities. This is accomplished by creating suitable training programs that are comprehensive. Furthermore, the provision of employees with contemporary technologies could facilitate the improvement of processes, thereby simplifying their work. Enhancing one of the objectives of skill development, professionalism, and integrity will be achieved through enthusiastic action. The reason for this is that the individuals employed by border and law enforcement agencies prioritise respect for human rights in their interactions with the public. The development of a

productive workforce can enhance the capacity of countries to improve the efficient control of borders, strengthen the bonds between border populations, and further enhance measures for the protection of the public and the nation as a whole.

Furthermore, border posts are a magnet for a diverse array of criminal organisations, such as human traffickers and narcotic couriers. The arrest of taxi drivers only after they have crossed the bridge and are en route to Gauteng is a prime example of how the operations of border patrol officials are influenced. The Beitbridge case is a prime example of this which is a clear indication that the border officials are oblivious to the events that are occurring directly in front of them [19]. Some of the factors that contribute to the pervasive migration of individuals from their homelands are also responsible for manufacturing and service safaris. Furthermore, these circumstances exacerbate the problems associated with human trafficking [29]. Beitbridge demonstrates that this is a frontier that requires international collaboration in the areas of information sharing, enforcement, and harmonised customs regulations. By examining other border posts, border patrol personnel and legislators can acquire an understanding of the most effective and least effective practices. In order to implement effective management practices at Beitbridge, it is essential to establish relationships with the local residents and rely on accurate information.

5.4.3. Community Engagement

For any such border security efforts to be effective, the local people must be involved in the process. One reason for this is that the local people can play a vital role in the border management process. Looking at borders in general, it is important to note that the cooperation of border communities is very important in one way or another for border security and control. For this reason, this paper recommends the setting up of Border-Community Security Forums in the borderlands. Authorities can rely on the eyes and ears of the communities around the borders to detect and remove community criminals. It should be emphasized that the locals are often well aware of the workings of the border including the routes used for smuggling, cross-border sneaking, and other suspicious activities. Therefore, it becomes essential for BMA and the local population to cooperate in the fight against crime.

6. Conclusion

The challenges of border management emphasise the necessity of strategic and adaptable approaches to resolving them. In order to facilitate the successful crossing of borders and to improve border control, the study determined that the public must collaborate with authorities and rely on modern technology. In the same vein, the effective development of robust and comprehensive border management systems is contingent upon the implementation of appropriate strategies that are founded on the integration of improvements in economic development, human rights, and security. This is because the border post is predominantly intended for the use of citizens and foreign nationals, and as such, their rights must be considered. In doing so, the same individuals who require protection also exploit lax systems to commit crimes. Consequently, it is imperative to ensure that all border control strategies are effectively integrated. It is crucial to facilitate the movement of products, people, and ideas across borders. Simultaneously, one is confronted with a variety of traffic security dangers, including transnational crime, terrorism, and illegal migration. It is imperative to adopt a comprehensive perspective when formulating and implementing border control policies to resolve these issues. Such policies should encompass technological advancement, interagency cooperation, community engagement, and regional collaboration. By adopting a comprehensive strategy that addresses economic, human rights, and security concerns, border control officials will enhance security, facilitate legal crossings, and foster peace and prosperity in the region.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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