Stakeholders' Roles in Preventing the Flow of Contraband Goods along Borders: Empirical Evidence from the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor of Cameroon

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Abstract: Borders have become a central issue in the contemporary global arena. However, earlier studies on border issues show current gaps as far as stakeholders' roles in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda corridor of Cameroon is concerned. Through the exploratory (qualitative) and case study research approaches, primary data sources from non-participant observations, Key Informant Interviews (N=25), administration of 400 copies of questionnaires to ten purposively selected border communities, information gathered from secondary sources and qualitative and thematic analysis of collected data, this study sets out to investigate stakeholders' roles in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda corridor of Cameroon. The results revealed that multiple stakeholders are involved in contrabands goods flow prevention in the area. They are categorised into three constituting of local, national and international stakeholders including government agencies like customs officers and law enforcement agents including police, armed forces, gendarmes, private sector such as business persons, importers, exporters and transporters, and the local inhabitants residing border communities and the civil society involving local community leaders and NGOs/CIGs. They witness variations in their rate of involvement in preventing contraband goods flow with the main and most important stakeholders being customs officers and security forces. Also, the various stakeholders' perform different roles and responsibilities in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the corridor directly and/or indirectly, including sealing of shops trading in contraband goods, seizure of contraband goods and tracking and controlling smuggling activities or illegal transactions along the corridor. The study concludes that the porosity of the Ekok-Bamenda border corridor of Cameroon has favoured the increasing flow of contraband goods flooding markets in the area from neighbouring Nigeria. It provides baseline information to policy makers and the concerned administrative structures crucial in developing anti-contraband strategies in order to safeguard the economy, health and security situation of the inhabitants and the economy.

Keywords: Border, contraband goods, stakeholders, Ekok-Bamenda corridor, Cameroon.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has led to increasing flows of people, goods and services across regional borders and increase in the worldwide trade interconnections of regions and the overall volume of foreign trade, leading to border insecurity which severely affects borders worldwide through insecurity (Jolly and Muazu, 2024; Osimen et al., 2017; Musalli, 2016 ; Llorca-Jaña, 2014). Border insecurity leads to border mismanagement which has become a central issue in the contemporary global arena (Osimen et al., 2017; Musalli, 2016). National borders are important as they represent the geographic boundaries of a nation and define the territory where government exercise legal jurisdiction over the structures, actions and people that reside within the boundary (Gerstein et al., 2018). They control, and in some cases, prevent the flow of people, goods, and services into a country. As a result, borders are frequently associated with establishing a security perimeter for controlling entry into the territory of a sovereign nation (Ibid). If not well managed therefore, borders become a source of Informal Cross Border Trade especially in contraband goods, an exemplar of informal entrepreneurship (Kahiya, 2025).

Informal cross border trade of contrband good is perceived as a mixed blessing. While it provides livelihoods especially for traders and is a fundamental exchange system for building resilience and food security with products like fish, grain and livestock, it deprives governments of import duties and taxes and often intersects with smuggling in goods like medicines and medical equipments, cosmetics, hygiene items, food items, natural remedies, drinks and amunition (Kahiya, 2025; Meymand et al., 2022).

The security of borders depends solely on the stakeholders who could be public or private such as government agencies, community leaders and private sectors (Jolly and Muazu, 2024). Despite the interventions of stakeholders, the challenge of border insecurity persist due to the diversity of thought emanating from different disciplines, possibly been biased towards their own objectives (Kahiya, 2025; Jolly and Muazu, 2024). Consequently, the prevention of contraband goods flow often requires the involvement of stakeholders from various sectors, including the executive, judicial, and legislative bodies (Meymand et al., 2022). One of the world's organisations that plays a critical role in combating counterfeit goods is INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organisation). For instance, in March 2020, INTERPOL seized over 34,000 contraband medical items during a global operation named 'Pangea XIII'. It collaborates with health regulators, customs office, police, and experts to fight against illegal activities in pharmaceutical trade, across its 194 member countries (Meymand et al., 2022; Ziavrou et al., 2022).

In the developing countries in general, the rate of contraband goods flow is high. In Iran for instance, the volume of contraband goods is estimated to be around $20 to $25 billion annually due to factors such as rise in exchange rates in unofficial markets, currency policies, import restrictions and bans, increased customs tariffs, unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran, the prevalence of consumerism, and weak international relations (Meymand et al., 2022).

In Africa, porous borders and corrupt practices of border security officials have significantly promoted ICBT especially in contraband goods. This activity, which often involves the undocumented movement of legal goods by small-scale traders, is a complex issue driven by a combination of historical, economic, and institutional factors. In most cases, African borders are an institutional vacuum where individuals and group of persons appropriate and negotiate vital choices (Kimeu, 2018). The Sahelian region of Africa for example have always evolved as special areas of laissez-faire borders, artificially designed creating space for mosaic ethnic ties which can hardly be separated by different political control (Kristof, 2012). In West Africa also, the porous nature borders owes its origin to the hasty way the colonialists carved up the African continent as well as the nature of their management by post-colonial states, which has become serious issue in human trafficking, money laundering and other related crimes (Akinyemi, 2009).

In sub-Saharan Africa, informal cross-border trade (including contraband goods) represents 7-16% of intra-African trade and between 30 and 72% of two-way trade between neighbouring countries, contributing more to employment and Gross Domestic Product than in any other region of the world (Kahiya, 2025). Many West African countries for example have been characterized by the flow of contraband goods, intense corruption, poor leadership, burning ethnic and tribal conflicts, severe poverty and social marginalization with very large unemployment and few opportunities for social advancement (Pritchard and Van den Boogaard, 2023). In Nigeria for instance, borders are poorly patrolled leading to porosity and the massive influx of illegal immigrant and many other form of organized border criminal activities especially in north-eastern regions of the country (Onuoha, 2013).

In Cameroon, both natural and human geographical considerations are the basis of border porosity that greatly influences the blooming of flow of contraband goods flow especially in the North West (NW) and South West (SW) regions of the country. The political margins of these former British Southern Cameroon and the Eastern region of Nigeria are so vast, porous and poorly controlled, which give opportunities for people to create communities along the margins of the state that subsists on underground border transactions for it shares a long uninterrupted border with Nigeria, notably, in such Divisions as Menchum and Donga-Mantung in the NW and Manyu Division in the SW regions. These areas remain one of the surest and most accessible ways by which contraband goods flow into the country (Budi, 2019). Routine customs, police and gendarmerie patrols in the 'bush' (forested areas) to track and crack down commercial networks have yielded very little success because the smugglers beat their vigilance or simply buy their way. The bulk of dangerous contraband goods such as firearms have been intercepted by the NW sector customs department in Bamenda since 2017. The economic crisis witnessed in Cameroon in the 1990s and the cogent political instability have caused border communities here vulnerable and pushed them to proxy economies beyond the lens of the state one, including underground and contraband goods trade (Herrera, 1992).

The Ekok-Bamenda corridor which is a border area in Cameroon constitutes a veritable hotspot for the flow of contraband goods (which constitutes security, economic and health risks) to the population and economy. To prevent this, customs and other security check points along this corridor exist at Bamenda "Up

Station" (Bamendankwe), Okoyong-Mamfe, Ayukaba, Eyumojock and Ekok. Despite these many control check points, contraband goods flow is on a steady increase (Ndip, 2018). Yet, the roles of the multiple stakeholders involved in preventing the flow of contraband goods along this corridor presently remains unclear and has been neglected in scientific research. The roles played by stakeholders in preventing the flow of contraband goods along this corridor is crucial in developing anti-contraband strategies in the area and safeguard the economy, health and security situation of the inhabitants and the economy. Faced with the above problem, the following four specific research questions are investigated by the study; (1) Who are the stakeholders involved in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor? (2) What are their spatial involvement rates? (3) What specific roles do these stakeholders play in the process? (4) What suggestions can be put forth to enhance stakeholders' effectiveness in preventing contraband goods flow in the area?

While borders represent the physical manifestation of a nation's sovereignty, border communities are vibrant areas where a mix of people lives and work and flows of trade in goods and services transit on a regular basis. They highly rely on commerce that flows across international boundaries and the informal networks that have developed as a result (Gerstein et al., 2018). This study is not the first to be carried out on borders. From the existant literature, several studies have been conducted on border areas including role of stakeholders in border security management and actor-network and stakeholder analysis in preventing health goods smuggling (Jolly and Muazu, 2024; Meyman et al., 2022), border management practices to prevent illicit flow of contraband goods/trafficking/smuggling (Gerstein et al. 2018), governance of trade in border areas (Cantens and Raballand, 2017) and the effectiveness of border control measures in preventing contraband goods flow (Siavhundu and Nyabunze, 2020). Other existing studies on borders have been conducted on porosity of borders and arms smuggling operations by terrorist groups like Boko Haram (Onuoha, 2013), borderless-border and internal security challenges (Osimen et al., 2017), barriers to prevent the smuggling of health goods (Meyman et al., 2024), performance of border management personnel and its security implications (Musalli et al., 2015) and the paradoxical tension emanating from informal cross border trade (Kahiya, 2025).

In the Gurin-Fufore Local Government Area of Adamawa State (Nigeria) for instance, Jolly and Muazu (2024) evaluated of the role of stakeholders on border insecurity management. They observed in their study that routine patrol on borders is the most effective tool for border security monitoring, while effective guard and patrol by local hunters is ranked as the least effective measure for border security monitoring. Their conclusion was that all stakeholders should put their hands on deck to manage border insecurity, most especially the government should provide all the necessary modern gadget and the bordering communities should commit themselves fully in securing the border and lives of its

citizen. In their study, Gerstein et al. (2018) came to the conclusion that developing professional 21st-century border management capabilities requires establishing a balance between security and the licit flow of people and trade. As a result, national goals and objectives and the threats and risks the nation perceives must translate into the policies and programs that undergird a nation's border management system. Cantens and Raballand (2017) on their part reflected on the governance of trade in border regions in six countries in the African Sahel (Chad, Mali, Sudan, Tunisia, Libya and the Central African Republic), exploring the practices and strategies of customs officers operating at insecure borders. Furthermore, Siavhundu and Nyabunze (2020) investigated the effectiveness of border control methods in safeguarding revenue by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority. Results of the survey method employed indicated that seven of the ten border control methods evaluated are fairly effective; two as effective and only cargo monitoring was evaluated as being ineffective in safeguarding the state revenue.

From the existant literature, it is clear that earlier studies exist on borders. However, such studies show current gaps as far as stakeholders' roles in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda corridor of Cameroon is concerned. This novel study therefore makes an important scientific contribution on the subject of border studies by provided empirical evidence of the Ekok-Bamenda border corridor of Cameroon, which till now has been neglected in previous scientific research on border studies in sub-Saharan Africa. If this border area has to be effectively managed to prevent the flow of contraband goods, then the role of the multiple stakeholders in preventing the flow of contraband goods have to be investigated and made known to policy makers and the concerned administrative structures for prompt action. This is crucial in developing anti-contraband strategies in the area in order to safeguard the economy, health and security situation of the inhabitants and the economy.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study Area

The study area is the Ekok-Bamenda corridor which is a border area in Cameroon, located at the geographical coordinates of Latitude 4o9'N to 6oN of the Equator and between Longitudes 8o57'E to 10o15'E of the Greenwich Meridian. In the North West Region, it is covers three villages; Bamendakwe, Mankon and Nkwen (Bamenda city) extending westwards towards Bali Sub-Division (Mezam Division) and Widikum Sub-division (Momo Division). In the South-West region, it continues from Upper Bayang Sub-Division, through Mamfe-Central Sub-division and Eyumojok Sub-division. This area to the north is bordered by Akwaya Sub Division and Momo Division, to the west by Nigeria and to the south by Ndian, Kupe Manengouba and libialem Divisions. The location of the Ekok-Bamenda corridor and the delimitation of the study area is presented on Figure 1.

Fig 1. Location of Ekok-Bamenda corridor of the Cameroon borderline
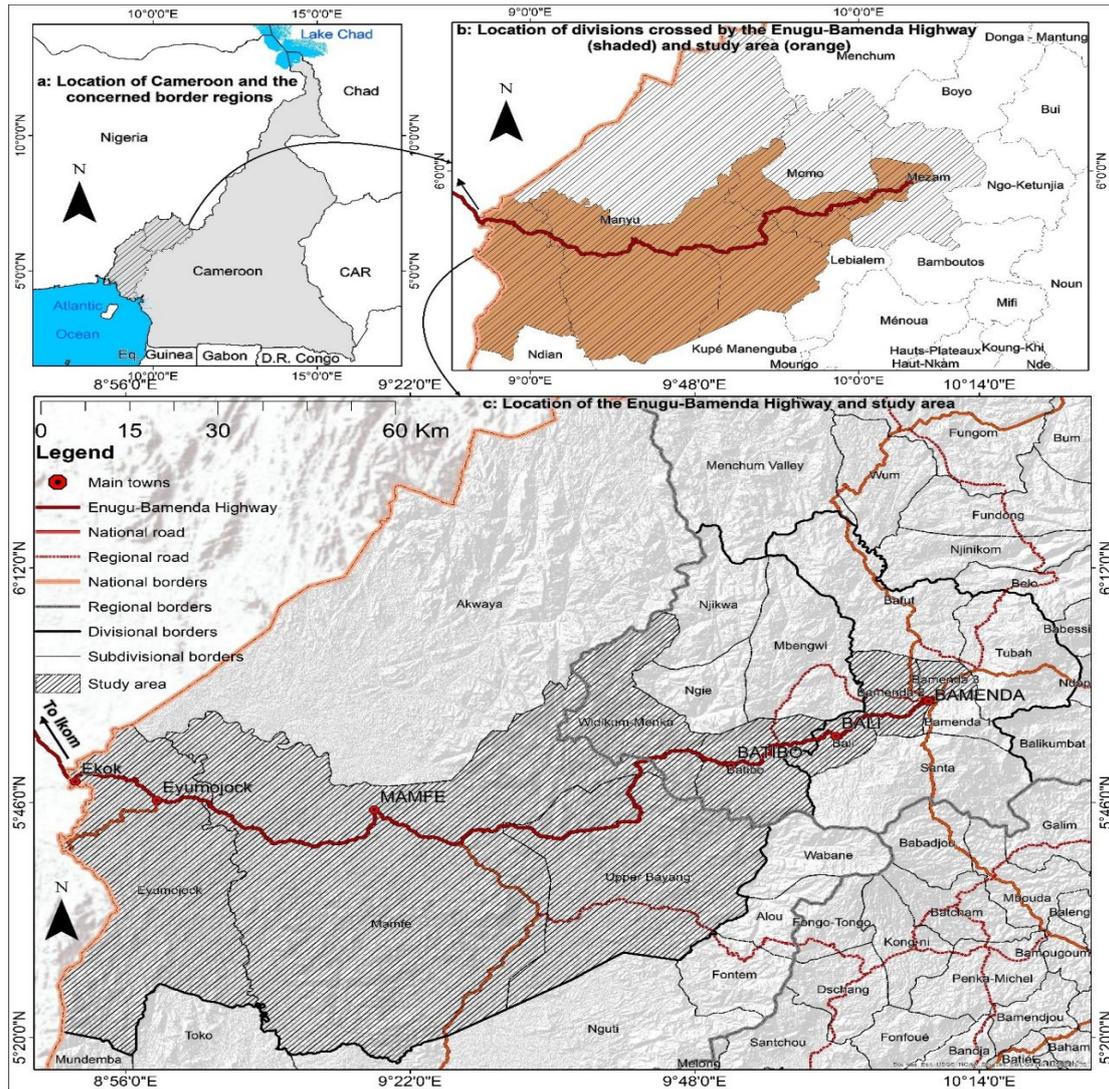
Source: Modified from the National Cartographic Institute (NCI) (2025)

The choice of this area for the present study is justified by the fact the corridor is a hotspot for the flow of contraband goods into the country. Also, there are increasing numbers of informal actors who enter the illegal trade as the years go by. Besides all these, no scientific study has been conducted on these stakeholders and their roles in preventing contraband goods flow and its nefarious effects locally and globally. These calls for increasing attention because if not studied the current situation can become uncontrollable negatively affecting the health of the population, the economy and state revenue. This study therefore intends to scientifically provide a basis of the much needed solution towards anti-contraband goods flow in the area in order to safeguard the health of the population, the economy and increase government revenue.

2.2 Research Methods

The study adopted both a case study and exploratory (qualitative) research approach to gain in-depth information on the roles of stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow in the area. This research design helped in the collection and evaluation of non-numerical data on the subject. The exploratory research design through field observations, qualitative surveys and the granting of key informant interviews helped in identifying the concerned stakeholders and their spatial involvement rates and the roles currently played by each stakeholder in preventing the flow of contraband goods in the area.

The total population involved in the study includes the entire population of Bamenda I, Bamenda II and Bamenda III in the NWR and the population of Mamfe in the SWR, numerically corresponding to a total of 508,871 inhabitants as of 2024 projections (Table 1).

Table 1: Total population of the study

Municipality	Population (2024 Projection)
Bamenda I	31,850
Bamenda II	274,570
Bamenda III	158,406
Mamfe	44,045
Total	**508,871**

Source: Projections from the National institute of Statistics (2024)

From the total population, the targeted population was determined constituting of government agencies (customs officers and law enforcement agents including police, armed forces and gendarmes and administrative authorities), private sector (business persons, importers, exporters and transporters) and some local inhabitants residing border communities and the civil society involving local community leaders and NGOs/CIGs.

The sample size was determined for the study using the Miller and Brewer (2003) method from the total population of 508,871 inhabitants at a marginal error of 0.05 household levels. For true representation of the study area, all the inhabitants of the study area were selected as they were observed to be directly or indirectly involved in contraband trading activities resulting from the porous borders and diverse stakeholders. Using the Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, the sample size for the study was gotten as follows:

$$n = N/(1+N(e)$$

Where;

n = Sample size

N = population size

e = marginal error of 0.05

Therefore, with a total population of 508,871 inhabitants along this border area, the sample size was calculated as follows;

$n = 508871/1+508871 (0.05)^2$

$= 508871/[1+508871 (0.0025)]$

$= 399.7$ inhabitants.

According to the applied formula, the sample size (n) for the population arrived at was approximated to 400 (from 399.7), constituting the sample size for which the copies of the questionnaires were administered in the area reflecting the different border areas as presented in Table 2.

The purposive sampling method was used in the selection of participants for the study based on their knowledge of contraband gods flow along this corridor and mastery of the study. Using this sampling method, the following stakeholders were selected for the study, including, customs officers and law enforcement agents including police, armed forces, gendarmes, business persons, importers, exporters and transporters, some local inhabitants residing in border communities, local community leaders and NGOs/CIGs.

Concerning data collection, both primary and secondary sources were collectively used in the study. Primary data was collected using observation, key Informant Interviews and questionnaire administration. Following their different activities during the process of contraband goods flow, the various stakeholders involved were observed by help of the non-participation technique. Field observation was carried out in two phases. The first phase

took place in the month of September 2023 and the second phase from June 2024. During the observation process, geo-referenced photos of some pertinent issues like the presence of customs posts controlling contraband goods flow and contraband goods confiscated by border security forces in the Ekok locality were taken using digital camera, programmed to automatically record the dates and geographical coordinates (XYZ) of the photos.

To complement field observation, Key Informant Interviews (KII) (N=25) were granted with some key stakeholders according to an elaborated interview guide in line with the study objectives. The choices of the stakeholders were based on the activities they carry out in preventing the flow of contraband goods along this corridor. Key stakeholders' interviewed included customs officers, law enforcement agents including police, armed forces and gendarmes, business persons, importers, exporters, civil society leaders, administrative authorities like the SDO (Senior Divisional Officer), Dos (Divisional Officeers), mayors and the Regional, Divisional and Sub-divisional Delegations of Transport, Trade and Commerce as well as transporters of contraband goods. These interviews were done with the help of the research authorization issued by the Department of Geography and Planning, Faculty of Arts, The University of Bamenda authorising the research to be carried out. Various dates were taken for interviews with the different stakeholders, with each interview lasting between 5-15 minutes.

Also, questionnaires were another major primary instruments used to collect quantitative data for this study from inhabitants of these border communities. The questionnaire was built with both open-ended and closed-ended questions in the English language which is the official language spoken in the area. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaires were printed and administered in ten municipalities along this corridor (seven in the Ekok-Mamfe border area and three in Bamenda) as seen in Table 2. This number was derived based on the calculation of the sample size to obtain the representative number of the total population using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula. These questionnaires were distributed through the face-to-face method. They were successfully administered with the help of two field assistants who were inhabitants well known in their communities and have a mastery of the terrain, recruited and trained for 4 days on the purpose, techniques and sensitivity of the topic. They were also vest with the topic under study and were literate, with all of them haven completed first university (Bachelor's) degree before their recruitment. The questionnaires were printed and administered physically by the researcher and two field assistants. Some of them were filled on the spot with the aid of the field assistants while others were distributed only to be returned later on. The 400 copies of the questionnaires were unevenly distributed according to the concerned population each of the selected localities using the formula:

$$\frac{\textit{Population of each strata (Zone)}}{\textit{Total population of the zones}} \times \frac{\textit{Sample size}}{1}$$

Following the above formula, the 400 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the concerned population as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire Administration along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor

Area	Spatial units	Total Population	No of questionnaire administered
Ekok-Mamfe	Egbekaw	3,071	3
	Eshobi	1,957	2
	Eyangntui	1,429	2
	Small Mamfe	23,786	18
	Bessongabang	5,549	4
	Bachou-Ntai	5,166	4
	Nchang	3,087	3
Bamenda area	Bamenda I	3,1850	25
	Bamenda II	27,4570	215
	Bamenda III	158,406	124
Total		**508,871**	**400**

To further complement the primary sources, published documents were derived from the internet using Google search engine, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and many other search engines. Textbooks, journal, reports and dissertations/thesis were all consulted from libraries like that of The University of Bamenda and some of the municipal councils consulted. Other secondary information was acquired from the Regional, Divisional and Sub-divisional Delegations of Transport, Trade and Commerce for Bamenda and Mamfe concerning the theme under study.

Of the 400 copies of the questionnaires printed and administered, 351 copies were successfully retrieved from the population given a retrieval rate of 87.8% (Table 3). This formed the basis of the descriptive data analysis for this study with the help of tables, frequencies and percentages for easy understanding using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and Microsoft Word and Excel 2016. Information obtained from KKIs and field observations undertaken were equally analysed and presented using thematic analysis to identify patterns and make meaning of field realities captured. The 40 questionnaires not received was because the respondents could not be traced after several checks on them.

Table 3: Questionnaire Retrieval Rate

Area	Spatial units	No of questionnaire retrieved	% of questionnaires administered
Mamfe area	Egbekaw	3	100
	Eshobi	2	100
	Eyangntui	2	100
	Small Mamfe	16	88.9
	Bessongabang	3	75
	Bachou-Ntai	4	100
	Nchang	3	100
Bamenda area	Bamenda I	25	100
	Bamenda II	185	86.04
	Bamenda III	108	87.1
Total		**351**	**87.8**

3. Results

3.1 Stakeholders involved in preventing contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor

There are multiple stakeholders involved in controlling contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor, categorised as local, state/national and international stakeholders. The local stakeholders are those originating from within the corridor. The state/national ones are those that intervene outside of the study area but within the national territory or country. The international ones are those emanating from outside the national territory or from overseas. Table 4 categorises the typology of stakeholders involved in controlling contraband goods flow and along the Ekok-Bamenda of Cameroon.

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Table 4: Typology of stakeholders involved in preventing contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor of Cameroon

Category	Stakeholders	Examples
Local	Resident (local) populations	Households and individuals
		Indigenous authorities
		Traditional institutions
	Civil Society Organizations	VDAs/CBOs (e.g Vigilante groups)
		Local NGOs
		Transporters Unions
		Traders Union
State	State institutions	MINFI, MINDEF, MINEDEP, MINOF, MINCOMMERCE
		State Agencies and Parastatal
		Municipal Councils (Mamfe and Bamenda Councils)
		Security and military forces
		Civil administration (DOs in Mamfe and Bamenda)
International	External organizations	Mixed border control teams
		World Bank
		African Development Bank

Source: NIS (2021); Fieldwork (2025)

Irrespective of their typology, the above stakeholders have different domains and scopes of operations and variations in the rate of involvement in preventing contraband goods flow in the area. Table 5 shows variation in the rate of involvement of the different stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow in Bamenda and Mamfe.

Table 5: Spatial variation in the rate of involvement of the different stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow in Bamenda and Mamfe

Stakeholders	Rate of Involvement (%)							
	Bamenda I		Bamenda II		Bamenda III		Mamfe area	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Customs and Security Forces	4	16	23	12.4	41	8.3	17	51.5
Municipal Councils	7	28	46	24.9	9	38.0	2	6.1
Regional/Divisional Delegations of SME's	6	24	47	25.4	23	21.3	3	9.1
Regional /Divisional Delegations of Trade and Commerce	2	8	69	37.3	8	7.4	8	24.2
Taxation institutions	4	16	39	21.1	00	00	2	6.1
Civil Administrators (DOs/SDOs)	2	8	30	16.2	27	25.0	1	3.0
Total	**25**	**100**	**185**	**100**	**108**	**100**	**33**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Based on Table 5, there exist spatial variations in the involvement of the different stakeholders charged with preventing contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda corridor, specifically in Bamenda and Mamfe. For instance in Bamenda I Sub-division, the stakeholders mostly involved in preventing contraband goods flow are Bamenda I Municipal Council (28%) and the Regional/Divisional Delegations of SME's (24%). This is seen from the fact that these are the state departments that are highly functional in this area. The council, for example, is involved in the collection of taxes and sealing of illegal business premises. Also, the delegation of SMEs is involved in the issuing of business licenses and authorizations to individuals and groups that are interested in trans-border trade activities.

In Bamenda II Sub-division, the most active stakeholders are the Regional/Divisional Delegations of Trade and Commerce (37.3%), Regional/Divisional Delegations of SME's (25.4%) and the Bamenda II Council (24.9%). They are all involved with checking trade licenses and collecting taxes from business operators, including trans-border ones. Unlike as was expected, the reduced activities of taxation institutions (21.1%) in this area is due to insecurity orchestrated by armed separatist fighters along this corridor since 2016 and the inability of state officials to effectively collect taxes from the different business operators/premises.

In Bamenda III Sub-division, the involvement of the Bamenda III Council and the Divisional Officer is most significant. The 38% and 25% respective rates of involvement of this institutions is accounted for by the fact these are the only state institutions that are very functional in the area. Security officials also assist the activities of these institutions in preventing contraband goods smuggling in the urban and peri-urban areas of this sub-division.

The Mamfe area is the epicenter of the flow of contraband goods due to her proximity to neighbouring Nigeria where the contraband goods originate before flowing along this corridor (Mamfe to Bamenda). The locality of Ekok (Cameroon) is the last settlement before reaching Ikom (Nigeria) across the border. Here, the most significant stakeholder in preventing the flow of contraband goods are customs officers and security forces (51.5%). Customs have four fixed posts (Plate 1) in various areas along this corridor, together with six other official mixed-control security check points.

Plate 1. Custom Posts for the Control of Contraband Goods in the Ekok Locality

Photo A: Custom control post around Mamfe Hospital

Photo B: Custom/Police/Gendermarie control post, Mile One Mamfe

Photos C&D: Main Custom clearing house at Ekok

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The customs posts are commonly composed of custom officers and mixed police, gendarme and army (soldiers) who collectively carryout checks on a regular basis in an attempt to control contraband goods flow along the corridor.

3.2 Role of Stakeholders' in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor

The various stakeholders' perform different roles and responsibilities in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the corridor directly and/or indirectly, including sealing of shops dealing with contraband goods, organisation of seminars and workshops for small businesses on contraband goods awareness raising, seizure of contraband goods, tracking and controlling smuggling activities or illegal transactions along the corridor, implementation of legal framework for the flow of goods and trading activities along the corridor, amongst others (Table 6).

Table 6: Role of Stakeholders in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor

Stakeholders	Role played in preventing contraband goods
Municipal Councils and taxation departments of the state	-Construction of markets to monitor sale of contraband goods
	-Controlling sealing of shops dealing with contraband goods
	-Collection of taxes from traders
	-Construction of motor parks to control the circulation of contraband goods
	-Construction of roads to monitor the flow of contraband goods
Regional and Divisional Delegations of Small and Medium Size Enterprises	-Implementation of policies for the operation of businesses in the area
	-Provision of loans for traders in Bamenda
	-Organization of seminars and workshops for small businesses including trans-border traders
Regional/Divisional Delegations of Trade and Commerce	-Organize festive activities where traders participate
	-Involve with checks and seizure of contraband goods
	-Seal shops of price non-compliant traders
	-Organization of promotional sale of goods to reduce the monopoly of smugglers
	Indulge in price control
Financial institutions and groups	-Provision of loans for traders
	-Safeguarding the finances of trans-border traders and smugglers
Custom and security personnel	-Controlling the flow of contraband goods across the border
	-Tracking and preventing illegal transactions along the corridor
	-Levying custom duties on traders
	-Seizure of contraband goods
	-Imposition of penalties to traders who violet the laws
	-Arrest and detention of smugglers
	-Securing the borders against illegal trading activities
Civil Administrators (DOs/SDOs) and the Judiciary	-Implementation of legal framework for the flow of goods and trading activities along the corridor

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

The specific role(s) of some of these stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow along the corridor is detailed below.

3.2.1 Role of Municipal Councils

The municipal councils of Mamfe, Bamenda I, Bamenda II and Bamenda III operating along this corridor are involved in preventing contraband goods flow through the construction of markets, construction of motor parks and the construction of roads and road junctions. These are premises or spaces where items being transported and sold can be monitored. The construction of markets has enhanced the strict control of the flow of contraband goods by the municipal authorities due to concrete taxing of goods moving into and out of the different municipalities. At the various constructed markets, the nature of goods (contraband vs legitimate/lawful trade items) is easily detected as the constructed structures are easily visited by control teams. Table 7 shows some of the constructed markets in the Bamendas I, II, III and Mamfe municipalities where contraband goods are easily monitored and controlled.

Table 7: Markets constructed to monitor and control the flow of contraband goods in Bamenda and Mamfe

Sub-Division	Markets	Types of goods sold
Bamenda I	Avenir Park	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, household products, electrical products, cultural products, electronic products, clothing, Pharmaceuticals products
Bamenda II	Ntarinkon Market	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, household products, electrical products, cultural products, electronic products, clothing, Pharmaceuticals products
	Food Market	Mostly food items
	Bamenda Main Market	Contraband drinks, household products, electrical appliances, cultural products , electronical/electronic appliance, clothing, Pharmaceuticals products
	Nchomba Market	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, clothing
	Nsongwa Market	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, clothing, electrical products, Pharmaceuticals products
Bamenda III	Nkwen Market	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, household products, cultural products , electronic/electronic appliance, clothing, Pharmaceuticals products
	Nzah Market	Contraband fuels, Food items, clothing and electronic products
	Mile Four Market	Contraband fuels, contraband drinks, household products, electrical products, cultural products, electronic products, clothing, Pharmaceuticals products
Mamfe	Mamfe Central Market	Contraband fuel, whiskeys from doubtful sources, electronic/electronic appliance, pharmaceutical products
	Bessongabang Market	
	Bachou Akagbe Market	
	Okoyong Market	

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

In some of these markets, the types of goods that are sold originate from smuggling activities causing them contraband goods. This is mostly common in markets in Mamfe (including Mamfe Central Market, Bessongabang Market, Bachou Akagbe Market and Okoyong Market). Notable examples of such markets in Bamenda include the Ntarikon market, Bamenda Main Market and Mile Four market where illegally imported goods from Ikom in Nigeria (contraband) flood the markets. The council officials have for the past years been involved in routine checks to prevent the sale of these goods in the markets. In some cases, the contraband goods have been seized and destroyed like contraband fuels, drugs and plastic papers.

Besides formal markets, there has also been the emergence of travel agencies (inter-urban motor parks) where the in and out movement of contraband goods are also monitored and prevented. All the municipal councils have constructed motor parks (Table 8) including Bamendas I, II and III and Mamfe councils in their respective areas of jurisdiction to ensure movement of persons and goods.

Table 8: Municipal travel agencies with security checks on contraband goods movements in Bamenda and Mamfe

Municipality	Travel agency	Location
Bamenda I	Avanir and Mazi	Mile One Upstation
Bamenda II	Vatican Express	City Chemist Round About
	Gurantee Express	City Chemist Round About
	Nso Boyz	City Chemist Round About
	Moghamo	Sonac Street
	Oasis Travels	City Chemist Round About
Bamenda III	Nso Boyz Agency	Mile 4 Nkwen/Bambui
	Amour Mezam	Mile 2 Nkwen
	Vatican	Mile 4 Nkwen
	Oasis Travels	Mile 4 Nkwen
Mamfe	Manyu Express	Mile One p
	Africom	Mile One
	Guarantee Express	Mile One
	Vatican Express	Mile One

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

3.2.2 Role of Government Ministerial Departments

The regional and divisional representatives of ministerial departments such as MINAT, MINFI, MINCOMMERCE, MINDEF and MINSANTE operating along this corridor has as a responsibility to ensure the effective prevention of contraband goods flow in the area. The various activities carried out by these institutions in this direction are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9: Roles of ministerial delegations in preventing contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Implementation of policies on trading activities	106	30.2
Provision of subsidies for cross-border traders	98	27.9
Organization of seminars and workshops for small businesses and trans-border traders	63	17.9
Seizure and destruction of smuggled (contraband) goods	84	23.9
Total	**351**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

The roles played by the ministerial departments cut across the municipalities. Field survey indicated that 30.2% of the population opined that these institutions play crucial roles in implementation of polices related to trade known to businessmen and trans-border traders in Ekok and Bamenda. In the same light, 27.9% of the population indicated that the primary role of these institutions is to provide subsidies for actors involved in Small and Medium Size Enterprises, which represents the spring board of the diverse hawking activities in in the area aimed at promoting the legalization of businesses and encouraging legitimate trade across the area. Similarly, 17.9% of the population was of the opinion that the delegations are charged with the organization of seminars and workshops for businessmen which also encapsulates smugglers, raising awareness on the dangers of contraband goods to the population and economy. Another significant role of these delegations is to control, confiscate (Plate 2) and destroy contraband products (23.9%). This is achieved in collaboration with the security forces and the Judiciary.

Plate 2. Contraband goods confiscated by border security forces along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor of Cameroon

Photo A: Stocked contraband fuel confiscated by authorities in Bamenda

Photo B: Seize drinks and trucks stopped for security checks

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Once confiscated, the contraband goods are mostly destroyed publicly. For instance, 171,000 tons of tramadol tablets worth the sum of 171,000,000FCFA was seized at Ekok in 2024 and burnt in the presence of the SDO of Manyu Division (Mamfe). Again on the 12th of August 2025, some 800 cartons of medicine (tablets, injections, capsules) was intercepted by the custom services at Ekok-Eyumojock area and destroyed in the presence of the SDO of Manyu. In some cases, the goods are released to the owners upon official clearance and payment of levied fines to the appropriate authorities. Nevertheless, these fines hardly completely reach the appropriate quarters due to corrupt practices.

3.3.3 Role of Custom Officers and Security Personnel

Customs officers are the primary and most important stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow along this corridor. Once traders (or their agents) clear their goods at the border, they encounter various types of behind the border customs control activities. For instance, traders passing through Ekok have to again

clear their goods in Mamfe. Customs officers work in collaboration with security forces as in preventing the flow of contraband goods in the area including the presence of police, gendarmerie and local government checkpoints. Some of these control points are permanent and are legitimate while others are temporary and makeshift. As such, customs officers and security personnel along this corridor remain play a key role in preventing contraband goods flow through collection of custom duties and taxes on goods importation from Ikom in neighbouring Nigeria (Table 10). However, customs officers fail to use contemporary techniques such as e-Customs platforms to enhance effectiveness in contraband goods flow prevention.

Table 10: Minimum import tax implemented by custom officers along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor Vehicle Tax and custom duties assessment

Vehicle	Tax and custom duties assessment	
	General Merchandise, not heavily taxed	Goods made of plastics
22-ton truck	2.80 million CFAF	1.50 million CFAF
20-ton truck	2.50 million CFAF	1.20 million CFAF
15-ton truck	1.40 million CFAF	850,000 CFAF
10-ton truck	900,000 CFAF	500,000 CFAF
7-ton truck	700,000 CFAF	300,000 CFAF
3-ton truck	500,000 CFAF	200,000 CFAF

Source: MINFI (2024)

4. Discussion

The focus of this study was to investigate stakeholders' roles in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the Ekok-Bamenda corridor of Cameroon as a border case study from sub-Saharan Africa. Results of specific objective one revealed that multiple stakeholders are involved in controlling contraband goods flow, categorised as local, state/national and international stakeholders. The local stakeholders are those originating from within the corridor. The state/national ones are those that intervene outside of the study area but within the national territory or country while the international ones are those emanating from outside the national territory or from overseas. More specifically, these stakeholders include government agencies (customs officers and law enforcement agents including police, armed forces and gendarmes and administrative authorities), private sector (business persons, importers, exporters and transporters), some local inhabitants residing border communities and civil society involving local community leaders and NGOs/CIGs. Several of the key informant interviewed shared similar opinion that "Many different stakeholders are involved in the flow of contraband goods in the area". This result corroborates that of an earlier study elsewhere by Meymand et al. (2025) that "the prevention of health goods smuggling requires the involvement of stakeholders from various sectors, including the executive, judicial, and legislative bodies." Also, Jolly and Muazu (2024) and Okumu (2011) in their respective studies equally arrived at the conclusion that the security of borders (and consequently, contraband goods flow) depends solely on stakeholders which are key government agencies such as

customs, immigration, police, armed forces and Ministry of Agriculture for quarantine purposes. Airlines, shipping companies, border local authorities, international business companies and individuals (residents of the borders or travelers across boundaries e.g. traders, relatives, tourists or terrorists) are also involved.

It was also found that irrespective of their typology, the concerned stakeholders have different domains and scopes of operations and variations in the rate of involvement in preventing contraband goods flow in the area. The result highlighted that customs and security forces are the primary and most important stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow along this corridor, aligning with previous studies in Iran by Meymand et al. (2025) who researched that the most powerful and supportive actors in preventing health goods smuggling were the security and judicial institutions and the Central Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency (CHCSGC). Again, Jolly and Muazu (2024) have equally mentioned that participation of the stakeholders (in this case in the prevention of contraband goods flow) varies in intensity and approach where the degree of participation may be of three types, namely, non-participation, partial participation or genuine participation. More so, results on the role of customs officers showed that they fail to use modern techniques such as e-Customs platforms to enhance effectiveness in contraband goods flow prevention in contradiction to earlier research by Urciuoli et al., (2013) who showed that e-Customs platforms adoption simultaneously ensure regulatory compliance and trade facilitate which is a major strategic issue for governments and customs administrations worldwide. It also helps ensure a more cost-efficient usage of resources while preserving a smooth flow of goods across international borders.

Results further showed that the various stakeholders' perform different roles and responsibilities in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the corridor directly and/or indirectly, including sealing of shops dealing with contraband goods, organisation of seminars and workshops for small businesses on contraband goods awareness raising, seizure of contraband goods, tracking and controlling smuggling activities or illegal transactions along the corridor, implementation of legal framework for the flow of goods and trading activities along the corridor. The result highlighting the role of confiscation of contraband goods by customs officers supports an earlier research elsewhere by Kahiya (2025) that Women Informal Cross Border Traders (WICBTs) face the challenge of confiscation of illegal goods by customs officers.

5. Conclusion

The porosity of the Ekok-Bamenda border corridor of Cameroon has favoured the increasing flow of contraband goods flooding markets in the area from neighbouring Nigeria. Analysis carried out in the study revealed that multiple stakeholders are involved in controlling contraband goods flow along the Ekok-Bamenda Corridor, categorised as local, state/national and international stakeholders. The local stakeholders are those originating from within the corridor. The state/national ones are those that intervene outside of the study area but within the national territory or country while the international ones are those emanating from outside the national territory or from overseas. These stakeholders include government agencies (customs officers and law enforcement agents including police, armed forces and gendarmes and local administrative authorities), private sector (business persons,

importers, exporters and transporters), some local inhabitants residing border communities and civil society involving local community leaders and NGOs/CIGs. Also, the concerned stakeholders have different domains and scopes of operations and variations in the rate of involvement in preventing contraband goods flow in the area, with customs and security forces representing the primary and most important stakeholders in preventing contraband goods flow along this corridor. Furthermore, it was found that the various stakeholders' perform different roles and responsibilities in preventing the flow of contraband goods along the corridor directly and/or indirectly, including sealing of shops dealing with contraband goods, organisation of seminars and workshops for small businesses on contraband goods awareness raising, seizure of contraband goods, tracking and controlling smuggling activities or illegal transactions along the corridor, implementation of legal framework for the flow of goods and trading activities along the corridor. Despite the challenges witnessed in carrying out this study like its sensitive nature, lack of available secondary data and suspicion of the researchers interests throughout the study, the study attempts ways towards effective management of borders to prevent the flow of contraband goods by investigating the current role of the multiple stakeholders in preventing the flow of contraband goods in the area and making salient recommendations known to policy makers and concerned administrative structures for concrete action. This is crucial in developing anti-contraband strategies in the area which can be replicated in other border areas facing similar challenge of increasing contraband goods flow in order to safeguard the economy, health and security situation of the inhabitants and the economy. While the study recommends further scientific insights on the subject on the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies and trends and patterns of contraband goods flow over time, it practically recommends the following;

1) More collaboration is encouraged between the different stakeholders through integrated management systems, risk assessment and technological adoption which are a panacea for effective prevention of contraband goods flow. In the same vein, the private sector stakeholders like importers and exporters should ensure to collaborate with customs officers and security forces for a better outcome.

2) Also, the customs sector should adopt e-customs platforms which are currently poorly used.

3) Again, in an attempt to prevent contraband goods flow, policy makers and the concerned administrative structures should take cognizance of the all actors' diversity, roles/responsibilities played and interactions between them.

4) The government should also explore public-private partnerships (PPPs) as governance mechanisms to include international organisations like INTERPOL.

5) Finally, the government should seek the assistance of developed countries like the USA to build effective border security management strategies like was the case with Jordan since 2008 building surveillance towers along a30-mile stretch of the border with Syria.

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