Transborder smuggling and youth participation in agriculture in Badagry local government area of Lagos state

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on assessment of trans-border smuggling and youth participation in agriculture in Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State. One hundred and six youth smugglers were selected using simple random sampling technique. Data were collected on respondents' socioeconomic characteristics, factors that enabled their involvement in smuggling, level of involvement in smuggling, agricultural activities available and level of participation in agricultural activities using structured questionnaire. Results revealed that 50.9% of the respondents were male, 69.8% were married, 32.1% were Yoruba, while 64.2% had between 7 and 12 years of formal education. Poverty (71.7%) was the most dominant factor responsible for the respondents' engagement in smuggling. Level of involvement in smuggling was high (77.4%) among respondents in the study area. Cultivation of crops ($\bar{x}$=2.62) was the most prominent agricultural activity in the study area in which they participated mostly ($\bar{x}$=2.32). Years of formal schooling ($\beta = 0.024$, $p = 0.012$), Poverty ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.00$) and Level of involvement in smuggling ($\beta = -0.022$, $p = 0.001$) were significant determinants of respondents' involvement in agriculture**.** The study concluded there was a low participation of respondents in agricultural activities in the study area. The study recommended the need for targeted interventions, including economic empowerment programmes, improved access to agricultural resources and policy measures that discourage smuggling while promoting sustainable youth involvement in agriculture.

Keywords: Youth, Smuggling, Agricultural activities, Border trading

INTRODUCTION

Transborder smuggling, illicit movement of goods across national boundaries, presents significant challenges to economic development, trade regulation and security in Nigeria (Golub, 2015). Due to the country's extensive land and maritime borders, smuggling remains a persistent issue, undermining government revenue, disrupting local markets and affecting national economic stability (Fagge and Ibrahim, 2021). Youth play a crucial role in socioeconomic and political development. However, adverse social conditions have rendered some of them unproductive in nation-building (Ojo and Okunola, 2014). The persistent economic challenges in Nigeria, particularly widespread unemployment and underemployment, have compelled many youths to seek alternative means of survival outside the conventional pathways. One of such alternatives is engagement in criminal activities, notably economic crimes such as smuggling, which exploits the porous and less-secured national borders (Barau *et al.,* 2024).

In many border communities, the pervasive nature of transborder smuggling presents a significant structural barrier to youth engagement in agricultural livelihoods (Wasima, 2025). Smuggling introduces a flood of illegally imported agricultural commodities; such as rice, maize, and poultry products into local markets, often at prices well below the cost of locally produced equivalents (Soon and Manning, 2018). This influx destabilizes market equilibrium and undermines local producers' capacity to compete fairly, creating a disincentive for investment in agricultural activities. Young farmers, who typically lack substantial capital and are more risk-averse due to limited asset ownership, are disproportionately affected. The devaluation of their produce due to the price advantage held by smuggled goods leads to reduced income, heightened market unpredictability, and a general loss of trust in the agricultural value chain (Swinnen, Olper, Vandevelde, 2021). As a consequence, many youths perceive agriculture as an economically insecure vocation, prompting them to disengage or abstain altogether from entering the sector. The long-term implications include not only a dwindling agricultural labour force but also the erosion of rural food systems, increased dependency on foreign imports, and the weakening of national food sovereignty. This situation is particularly acute in under-governed border areas, where regulatory enforcement is weak and smuggling flourishes with minimal deterrence, further deepening the crisis of agricultural underperformance and youth marginalization.

The allure of smuggling-related activities in border communities extends beyond economic disruption, presenting socio-developmental threats that redirect youth energy from agricultural engagement to illicit economies (Andreas, 2023). In contexts where poverty, unemployment, and weak state presence prevail, youths are particularly susceptible to recruitment into smuggling networks (Ojo and Okunola, 2014). These networks often serve as

conduits for broader criminal enterprises, including narcotics, arms, and human trafficking, and they offer short-term financial incentives that appear more lucrative than subsistence or commercial farming (Anagnostou and Doberstein, 2022). Participation in smuggling, however, alienates youth from the formal agricultural economy, not only by occupying their labour hours but also by reshaping their aspirations and socio-political affiliations. Over time, this shift contributes to the normalization of informal and illegal livelihoods, diminishing the perceived legitimacy and profitability of agricultural work. Furthermore, the attendant risks; such as exposure to violence, arrest, or death, impose psychological and physical costs that further deter reintegration into agricultural activities (Ninson and Brobbey, 2023). The systemic effects include deteriorating rural security, the breakdown of intergenerational knowledge transmission in farming communities, and increased volatility in borderland economies. Ultimately, youth involvement in smuggling accelerates the de-agrarianization of border regions, reinforcing cycles of insecurity, poverty, and underdevelopment (Bryceson, 2024). It becomes not merely a matter of lost labour, but of compromised rural futures

Trans-border communities serve as critical transit points for smuggled goods, including small arms, positioning them as strategic areas in national security considerations (Kehinde, 2019). Given their role as entry points for illicit goods, these regions attract individuals from diverse backgrounds and intentions, posing potential security risks. Despite the significance of this issue, existing research predominantly examines the economic impact of smuggling on the national economy (Gallien and Weigand, 2022) and the security threats posed by smuggling activities across the Nigeria borders (Bello *et al.*, 2025). These studies have largely overlooked the specific demographic groups involved in smuggling and the extent to which this illicit trade has stifled other viable and legitimate sources of livelihood like agriculture. Hence, this study addressed transborder smuggling and youth participation in agriculture in Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos state. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to;

1. describe the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents in the study area,
2. identify the factors that led respondents into smuggling in the study area,
3. ascertain the level of involvement of respondents in smuggling in the study area,
4. identify the agricultural activities available for respondents in the study area,
5. ascertain the level of participation of respondents in agricultural activities in the study area.

It is hypothesised that there is no significant contribution of independent variables to the level of participation in agriculture among respondents in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Badagry local government area, Lagos State, Nigeria. Badagry is a coastal town located on latitude 6.4316^{o}N and longitude 2.8876^{o}E. It is situated between Metropolitan Lagos and the border of the Republic of Benin at Seme. As of the preliminary 2006 census results, the municipality had a population of 241,093. The area is led by a traditional king, Akran De Wheno Aholu Menu – Toyi. The primary occupations of the people include fishing and farming, with some engaging in office work in the township areas of Badagry (Olusegun-Joseph, *et al*, 2024). The target population of the study consisted of all the youth smugglers in Badagry Local Government. A snow-ball (non-probability) sampling technique was deployed to generate a sample frame of 157 youths who were actively involved in smuggling in the study area, 67.5% of the respondents were randomly selected from the sample frame, giving rise to one hundred and six (106) respondents for the study. The dependent variable of the study, level of participation of the respondents in agricultural activities was measured using a 9-point items comprising crop cultivation, piggery, fishery/aquaculture, horticulture, poultry production, snail rearing, cattle rearing, rearing of small ruminants and marketing of agricultural produce. Response options were on a 3-point scale of High, Moderate and Low with scores of 3, 2,1 assigned respectively. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations while the stated hypothesis of the study was tested using regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

Results in Table 1, indicates a near-equal representation, with male respondents comprising 50.9% and female respondents 49.1%. This finding suggests that smuggling activities in the study area are not gender-specific, as both males and females actively participated in the trade. This result agreed with Van Liempt (2011) who reported gender balancing in trafficking and smugglings acts. Majority (69.8%) of respondents were married, while 69.8% identified as Christians, reflecting the predominant religious affiliation within the study area. In terms of ethnic composition, a substantial proportion of respondents were Yoruba (32.1%), aligning with the geographical context of the study conducted in south western Nigeria. Additionally, individuals from the

Ogu (26.4%) and Igbo (20.8%) ethnic groups were also involved in trans-border smuggling, highlighting the multi-ethnic nature of smuggling activities in the region.

The mean number of years of formal schooling among respondents was 10.36 years, indicating relatively low educational attainment among the respondents. This finding aligns with the finding of Meinzen-Dick, *et al* (2011), who asserted that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa experience low levels of education. Vocational training as alternative form of education emerged as a dominant form of skill acquisition, with 66.0% of respondents having undergone vocational training, whereas only 1.9% received adult education. The mean household size was approximately 6 individuals per household, indicating a moderately large family structure, which may influence economic decisions, including engagement in smuggling activities as a means of livelihood.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents' socioeconomic characteristics (n=106)

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Sex				
Male	54	50.9		
Female	52	49.1		
Marital status				
Single	24	22.6		
Married	74	69.8		
Widowed	8	7.5		
Religion				
Christianity	74	69.8		
Islam	28	26.4		
Traditional	4	3.8		
Tribe/ethnic group				
Hausa	6	5.7		
Igbo	22	20.8		
Yoruba	34	32.1		
Egun	10	9.4		
Ogu	28	26.4		
Togolese	6	5.7		
Number of years of formal schooling			10.36	3.77
≤ 6.00	24	22.6		
7.00 - 12.00	68	64.2		
13.00+	14	13.2		
Other forms of education				
Islamic	12	11.3		
Vocational	70	66		
Nomadic	16	15.1		
Adult	2	1.9		
Household size			5.87	1.66
<= 4.00	22	20.8		
5.00 - 7.00	66	62.2		
8.00+	18	17.0		
Total	**106**	**100**		

Factors that led respondents into smuggling

From the results in Figure 1, leading factors that drove respondents into smuggling were poverty and the pursuit of high profits. The data reveals that 71.7% of the respondent's indicated poverty as the primary motivator, while 67.9% were driven by the potential for high profits. These results reveal the significant influence of economic desperation and the allure of financial gain in the decision to engage in smuggling. The high percentage of respondents driven by poverty points to broader issues of socioeconomic inequality and lack of economic opportunities. The lure of high profits indicates that smuggling can be a highly lucrative enterprise compared to other available economic activities. This significant profit potential acts as a strong incentive for individuals to engage in smuggling, despite the risks involved. This finding aligns with that of Ojo and Okunola (2014) who reported poverty and unemployment as push factors for youth participation in smuggling.

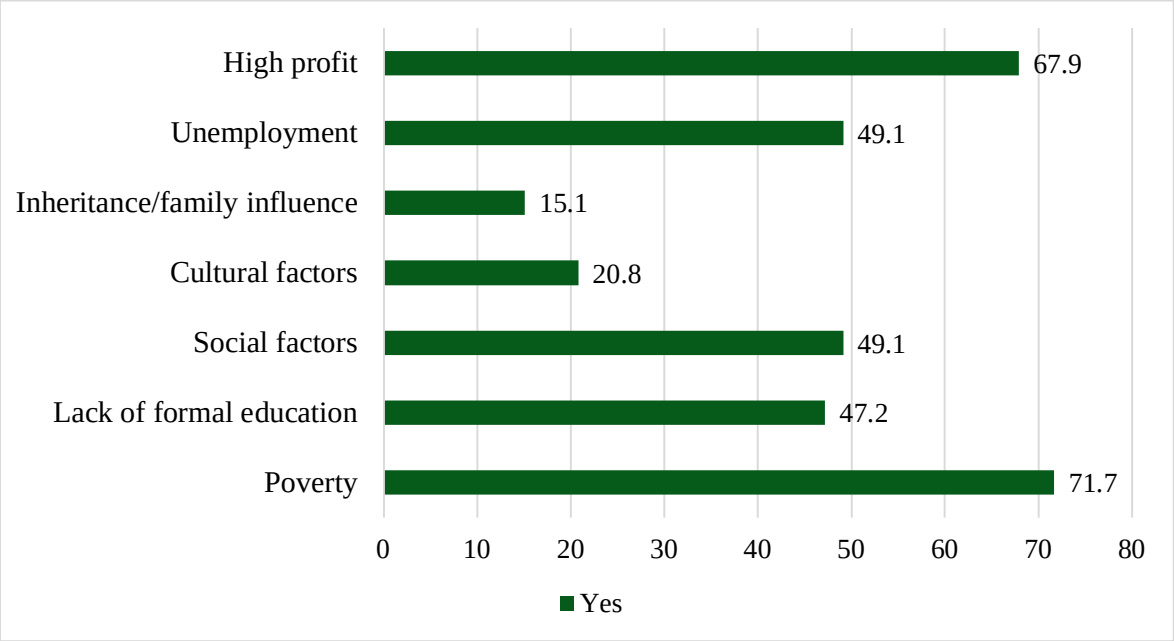

Figure 1: Factors that led Respondents into Smuggling

Respondents' involvement in smuggling in the study area

Results in Table 2 indicate that the highest levels of involvement in smuggling among respondents were in bags of rice ($\bar{x}$ = 3.00), vegetable oil ($\bar{x}$ = 2.87), and poultry products ($\bar{x}$= 2.36), suggesting these are the most commonly smuggled items, likely due to their high demand and profitability. Moderate participation was observed in clothing materials ($\bar{x}$ = 2.21), fruits ($\bar{x}$ = 2.19), manufactured canned food ($\bar{x}$ = 2.09), and palm oil ($\bar{x}$ = 2.08), which may reflect occasional or situational smuggling based on market needs. Lower participation levels were seen in wine ($\bar{x}$ = 1.89) and shoes ($\bar{x}$= 1.64), indicating they are less prioritized for smuggling, possibly due to lesser demand. The implication is that smuggling is driven by economic incentives and the need to meet local consumption demands, especially for staple and perishable goods, highlighting the need for improved border monitoring and local production support for essential commodities. This finding is in tandem with Golub (2015), who reported that shortage of staple foods encouraged involvement in smuggling in border communities. Table 3 revealed that there was high level (77.4%) of involvement in smuggling among respondents in the study area. This suggests that smuggling is a widespread and prevalent activity among the respondents, reflecting deep-rooted economic and social factors driving such behaviour

Table 2: **Respondents' involvement in Smuggling in the Study Area**

Items	High	Moderate	Low	Mean	SD
Bags of rice	80(75.5)	16(15.1)	10(9.4)	3.00	1.28
Vegetable oil	76(71.7)	19(17.9)	11(10.4)	2.87	1.31
Poultry products (e.g. chicken, turkey, etc.)	90(84.9)	11(10.4)	05(4.7)	2.36	1.25
Clothing Materials	50(47.2)	20(18.9)	36(33.9)	2.21	1.18
Wine	66(62.2)	14(13.2)	26(24.5)	1.89	1.13
Manufactured can food	45(42.5)	40(37.7)	21(19.8)	2.09	1.07
Fruits	87(82.1)	17(16.0)	02(1.9)	2.19	1.05
Shoes	65(61.3)	28(26.4)	13(12.3)	1.64	0.96
Palm oil	30(28.3)	31(29.2)	45(42.5)	2.08	1.18

Table 3: Categorisation of Respondents based on Level of Involvement in Smuggling

Level of participation in smuggling	Frequency	Percentage	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Low (0.00 - 1.65)	24	22.6	0.00	3.30	1.73	0.83
High (1.66 – 3.30)	82	77.4				
Total	106	100.0				

Agricultural activities available to respondents

Against the grand mean (1.89), the agricultural activities mostly available to respondents were cultivation of crops (2.62), piggery (2.08), sheep and goat rearing (2.02) and poultry production (1.98). The higher mean score for crop cultivation (2.62) reflects its prominence in the local economy. This suggests that a significant portion of the population relies on agriculture, particularly crop farming. The mean scores for piggery (2.08), sheep and goat rearing (2.02), and poultry farming indicate these activities are also integral to the local economy. Prominence of these agricultural activities suggests opportunities for diversification and value chain development. Processing of agricultural products, such as poultry processing, dairy products and meat processing, could create additional income streams and reduce dependency on smuggling. This finding is consistent with that of Auta *et al* (2010) who listed crop and animal enterprises among agricultural prospects for rural youth engagement.

Table 4: Distribution based on Agricultural Activities Available to the Respondents

Agricultural activities	Readily available	Moderately available	Not available	Mean	Std. d
Cultivation of crops	70(66)	32(30.2)	4(3.8)	2.62	0.56
Piggery	46(43.4)	22(20.8)	38(35.8)	2.08	0.89
Fishery/aquaculture	24(22.6)	42(39.6)	40(37.7)	1.85	0.77
Horticulture	22(20.8)	26(24.5)	58(54.7)	1.66	0.80
Poultry production	16(15.1)	72(67.9)	18(17)	1.98	0.57
Rearing of snails	10(9.4)	30(28.3)	66(62.3)	1.47	0.66
Cattle rearing	16(15.1)	28(26.4)	62(58.5)	1.57	0.74
Rearing of small ruminant (sheep and goat)	24(22.6)	60(56.6)	22(20.8)	2.02	0.66
Marketing /selling of agricultural produce	18(17)	46(43.4)	42(39.6)	1.77	0.72

Grand Mean = 1.89

Level of participation of respondents in agricultural activities

Results in Table 5 show the level of participation of the respondents in agricultural activities, the respondents participated mostly in cultivation of crops ($\bar{x}$=2.32), poultry production ($\bar{x}$=1.85) and piggery ($\bar{x}$=1.79). There was moderate involvement in marketing/Selling of agricultural produce ($\bar{x}$=1.74) and rearing of small ruminants ($\bar{x}$=1.70), while horticulture ($\bar{x}$=1.49) had least participation among the respondents. This result suggests that respondents preferred crop cultivation, poultry and piggery, probably due to their economic viability. That fewer participation in horticulture demonstrates the fact that aesthetics is not a priority in the study area. However, result in Table 6 shows categorisation of respondents' level of participation in agriculture, majority (62.9%) of the respondents had a low level of participation in agricultural activities. This affirms youths in the study area are not interested in agriculture.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents based on their level of participation in agricultural activities

Agricultural activities	High	Moderate	Low	Mean	SD
Cultivation of crops	46(43.4)	48(45.3)	12(11.3)	2.32	0.67
Piggery	22(20.8)	40(37.7)	44(41.5)	1.79	0.76
Fishery/aquaculture	14(13.2)	28(26.4)	64(60.4)	1.53	0.72
Horticulture	10(9.4)	32(30.2)	64(60.4)	1.49	0.67
Poultry production	12(11.3)	66(62.3)	28(26.4)	1.85	0.60
Rearing of snails	12(11.3)	24(22.6)	70(66.1)	1.64	1.47
Cattle rearing	22(20.8)	18(17)	66(62.3)	1.58	0.81
Rearing of small ruminant (sheep and goat)	22(20.8)	30(28.3)	54(50.9)	1.70	0.79
Marketing /selling of agricultural produce	24(22.6)	30(28.3)	52(49.1)	1.74	0.81

Table 6: Categorisation of Respondents based on Level of Participation in Agricultural Activities

Level of participation	Frequency	Percentage	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Low (0.0 - 2.0)	67	62.9	0.00	4.00	1.83	0.71
High (2.1- 4.0)	39	37.1				
Total	106	100.0				

Contribution of independent variables on their participation in agricultural activities

Results in Table 7 reveal that years of formal schooling (β = 0.024, p = 0.012) has a positive and significant effect on participation in agricultural activities. This implies that individuals with more education are more likely to be involved in agriculture, possibly due to better awareness of consequences of smuggling on individual and the national economy, skills, or the ability to adopt modern farming methods. Poverty (β = 0.16, p = 0.00) significantly increases participation in agriculture. This suggests that poor individuals in the study area engaged in agriculture out of necessity, using it as a livelihood strategy. Level of involvement in Smuggling (β = -0.022, p = 0.001) has a significant but negative relationship with agricultural participation. This means that as the level of participation in smuggling increases, participation in agriculture tends to decrease. It may imply that involvement in smuggling activities diverts attention or resources away from agriculture. This finding agrees with Allen and Clawson (2018), who posited that increasing access to formal education may enhance participation in agriculture by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for modern farming and discouraging engagement in smuggling and other economic sabotaging endeavours. Additionally, addressing poverty and reducing incentives for smuggling could shift.

Table 7: Regression contribution of independent variables on their participation in agricultural activities

Variables	β	Std. Error	T	p-value	Decision
(Constant)	0.806	0.481	13.440	0.000	
Years of formal schooling	0.024	0.011	1.532	0.012	S
Household size	0.006	0.009	0.632	0.264	NS
High profit	0.112	0.010	1.888	0.121	NS
Unemployment	0.022	0.130	0.155	0.152	NS
Inheritance/family influence	-0.053	0.100	-0.230	0.431	NS
Cultural factors	0.082	0.012	2.044	0.113	NS
Social factors	-0.015	0.042	-0.484	0.427	NS
Lack of formal education	0.030	0.020	0.553	0.204	NS
Poverty	0.168	0.033	2.328	0.002	S
Involvement in smuggling	-0.022	0.003	3.151	0.001	S
Agricultural activities	0.033	0.026	1.429	0.140	NS
R square	0.147				
Adjusted R square	0.174				

S=Significant; NS= Not Significant Level of Significance = 0.05

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that, there was a low participation in agricultural activities in the study area, while the level of involvement in smuggling was high. Poverty was the major factor that led respondents into smuggling, while cultivation of crops was the major agricultural activity available to the respondents in the study area. The study therefore recommended that there is need for targeted interventions, including economic empowerment programmes, improved access to agricultural resources and policy measures that discourage smuggling while promoting sustainable youth involvement in agriculture.

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