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# AN ASSESSMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN NIGERIA AND CAMEROON FROM 2002 - 2022

By

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## **Abstract**

This paper examined the assessment of bilateral relations between Nigeria and Cameroon since 2002 when the International Court of Justice, verdict that the sovereignty of the Bakassi Peninsula lay with Cameroon. In spite of the conflict and its eventual resolution, post-Bakassi conflict Nigeria-Cameroon relations have been cordial, peaceful and collaborative. The paper relied heavily on secondary sources of data such as articles in journals, conference proceedings, online materials and newspaper publications and it was analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that both countries have closely worked to improve trade relations, combat insurgencies, manage refugee crises, and other border disputes and sign agreements. It recommended that Nigeria and Cameroon should make more collaborative moves for regional stability in West Africa., both countries should create a more conducive environment for the inhabitants to do business. It concluded that post-Bakassi conflict Nigeria – Cameroon relations have been cordial in many areas.

**Keywords:** Regional Security, Insurgency, Trade, Bilateral Relations and Cooperation

## **Introduction**

Nigeria and Cameroon are important African countries geographically located in Central and West Africa. Both countries happen to be neighbours and have maintained cordial relations, not until the Bakassi Peninsula ownership tussle arose. Nigeria and Cameroon had over the years maintained cordial relations and even signed treaties, on 6 February 1963, they signed an "Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation", a trade agreement, and a memorandum of understanding on the cross-border movement of persons and goods, (Amin, 2020). Despite the various agreements reached between Nigeria and Cameroon, the latter has been hostile and belligerent against Nigeria. For example, the construction of the Lagdo Dam on upstream of River Benue by Cameroon affected fisheries, animal husbandry and other agricultural activities in the then Gongola State (Omole 2010). The effect of the dam persists till today as it affects the states of the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta region as evident in the 2012, 2020 and 2022 floods.

In 1981, Cameroon took over a few Nigerian villages and killed five members of the Nigerian naval patrol team. The public opinion expressed by Nigerians over the incident suggested that the country should go to war against Cameroon. Again, in 1987, Cameroonian gendarmes invaded some villages in Nigeria and replaced the Nigerian flag with theirs (Omole, 2010). Nevertheless, the worst action taken by Cameroon that caused strained relations between the two countries for so many years was in 1994 when Cameroon took Nigeria to the World Court at The Hague over who owns the oil-rich Rio del Rey region. The conflict over the Bakassi Peninsula deteriorated relations between hitherto friendly nations. By 2002, the International Court of Justice passed its judgment. The outcome of the court process has it that the sovereignty of the disputed area

belonged to Cameroon. This in practical terms ended the Bakassi conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon. It is against this background that this paper assesses Nigeria-Cameroon relations in the post-Bakassi conflict era.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In spite of the International Court of Justice's verdict that the sovereignty of the Bakassi Peninsula lies with Cameroon. The region and people have been able to settle and live peacefully, most persons displaced from their ancestral homes, and businesses closed down due to the insecurity that followed as a result of the verdict. Since the passing of the judgments, there have been reports of separatist groups agitating for self-determination. More so, other border disputes have surfaced especially in the northern part of Nigeria, and the floods in Nigeria were caused by the opening up of the Lagdo dam by Cameroon. Against this backdrop, the pertinent question is what is the nature of Nigeria – Cameroon relations in the post-Bakassi conflict given the issues identified?

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the paper are;

- i. Characterise post-Bakassi conflict Nigeria – Cameroon relations
- ii. Identify issues areas shaping Nigeria-Cameroon relations since 2002 and
- iii. Suggest a way forward on contemporary Nigeria – Cameroon relations.

### **Research Methodology**

Data for this paper was collected through secondary sources. Articles in journals, newspaper publications and other relevant internet materials were consulted to gather data for the study, and content analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

### **The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission 2002**

In the period following the resolution of the border contestation over Bakassi (2002 - 2020), Nigeria and Cameroon have sustained bilateral relations characterized by a generally cordial atmosphere. Despite historical strains, especially during the border dispute, both nations have largely maintained amicable relations, particularly at the upper echelons of leadership. Notably, leadership from both countries has refrained from making inflammatory statements that might incite their citizens towards physical violence, recognizing the potential for such actions to escalate into regional political issues.

Throughout this period, there has been a consistent effort from the leadership of Nigeria and Cameroon to collaborate in various forums, emphasizing unity and peace-building between the two nations. This alignment aims to strengthen their relationship and prevent tensions from reemerging. The historical backdrop of cooperation between the countries, even predating their independence, signifies a foundation of mutual understanding.

Moreover, the communities residing in the border regions share a deeply rooted cultural affinity, having a history of interconnectedness. The intertwining of these communities through cultural ties, intermarriages, and shared heritage, even during colonial times, presents a complex dynamic. Any potential physical conflict over the disputed territory would not only face significant challenges in achieving a meaningful outcome that serves the interests of both states but also risks negatively impacting the indigenous populations.

The establishment of the Mixed Commission was an imperative step, recognizing that solely relying on the Court's decision might not suffice to achieve a lasting agreement between Nigeria

and Cameroon. Despite both parties being prepared to acknowledge the Court's decision, neither had devised concrete proposals for implementing the ruling. Therefore, the pivotal role of the Mixed Commission was to navigate the process of implementing the Court's decision and advancing the entire reconciliation process. Kofi Annan's proposal to form this Commission, along with the selection of Mr. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah from Mauritania to chair it, garnered acceptance from both sides. This demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and engage in a cooperative dialogue. Within this environment of cooperation, both countries consented to identify a series of confidence-building measures.

The significance of the Mixed Commission lay in its ability to facilitate dialogue, bridge gaps, and chart a course toward implementing the Court's decision in a manner that was acceptable to both Nigeria and Cameroon. By creating a platform for dialogue and cooperation, it aimed to foster an atmosphere conducive to building trust and finding common ground between the nations involved.

The mandate of the Mixed Commission included:

- i. A demarcation of the land boundary'
- ii. Withdrawal of civil administration, military and police forces and the transfer of authority;
- iii. Eventual demilitarization of the Bakassi peninsula;
- iv. Protection of the rights of the affected population;
- v. Promotion of joint economic ventures; and
- vi. The reactivation of the Lake Chad Basin Commission

The inaugural session of the Mixed Commission took place on December 1, 2002, in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital. To effectively address the diverse aspects of its mandate, the Commission established two sub-commissions and five working groups. In order to ensure the smooth operations of the Mixed Commission, the United Nations instituted a support team of experts headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. This team played a pivotal role by offering technical expertise, logistical support, and substantial assistance to both the sub-commissions and working groups. (UNOWA, 2014).

Meetings of the Commission were scheduled to convene once every month, alternating between Yaoundé and Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The Commission initiated its fieldwork by deploying the Personnel Observer Group, comprised of members from both countries, to the land boundary for a duration of one year. Tasked with conducting observations and assessments, the Observer Group was mandated to produce a comprehensive report within a month following the conclusion of their assignment (Bekker, 2004). This early groundwork laid the foundation for the Commission's comprehensive engagement with the intricacies of the border dispute and its eventual resolution.

In tandem with the Mixed Commission, the United Nations deployed a team of civilian observers to oversee the region, tasked with monitoring the transfer of authority in compliance with the Court's ruling and ensuring the protection of the affected populations' rights. By mid-2004, a mere two and a half years following the Court's decision, significant progress had been achieved, marking a series of pivotal milestones for the UN and both countries involved.

President Obasanjo's visit to Yaoundé in July 2004 and the appointment of new ambassadors to both countries were deemed crucial turning points in their relationship. Nigeria signalled its readiness to transfer the Bakassi Peninsula back to Cameroon, a move viewed as highly significant. Early suspicions that had characterized the initial stages of the Mixed Commission's

work gradually dissipated, giving way to a sense of trust and cooperation between the nations (Aghemelo, 2006).

During the eleventh meeting held in Yaoundé (18-19 August, 2004), the Commission reached a breakthrough with the adoption of a pivotal document outlining the withdrawal and transfer of authority along the land boundary. This gathering also showcased progress in deliberations concerning the maritime border. The successes achieved in the Cameroon-Nigeria border relations through the Mixed Commission model garnered substantial attention. Observers of African political dynamics viewed this approach as a groundbreaking method in preventive diplomacy, offering a potential new model for resolving conflicts between states (Olumide, 2006). This success spotlighted the efficacy of collaborative mechanisms in resolving contentious international disputes.

Nigeria encountered difficulties in meeting the prescribed deadline of complete withdrawal from Bakassi by September 15, 2004, attributing the delay to unforeseen "technical" challenges. This setback led to a sense of disappointment for both the United Nations and Cameroon. However, Cameroon's composed response in light of this situation underscored its confidence in the Mixed Commission's efforts, the burgeoning friendship between the two nations, and the transformed dynamics on the ground across military, diplomatic, and political realms. Notably, the tireless efforts of Mr. Ould-Abdallah, who maintained constant communication through shuttle diplomacy between the two capitals, played a crucial role in preventing a breakdown of the entire process (Mbuh, 2004).

Despite the setback, the Federal Government of Nigeria expressed resolute determination to fulfil its obligations in due course. This commitment was emphasized by the leader of the Nigerian delegation, Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, SAN, during the thirty-fourth session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) held in Abuja. This pledge signified Nigeria's unwavering commitment to addressing the outstanding issues within the scope of the Mixed Commission's mandate.

According to Malami;

Nigeria is committed to the quick and successful execution of the mandates of the Mixed Commission, noting that areas of disagreement have been reduced to just three, embrace pragmatism in order to reach consensus in all the three areas of disagreement, amicable solutions would be found as soon as possible to enable the work to be completed.

During the session, both Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon demonstrated a strong commitment to collaborating closely to identify and promote trans-border infrastructural projects. These initiatives aimed to enhance economic cooperation and bolster the integration of the two countries within the West African sub-region. Notably, the Mixed Commission recommended the finalization of an agreement for the joint exploitation of hydrocarbons along the maritime border. Additionally, a joint statement was released at the conclusion of the session, highlighting disparities in the parties' interpretations of the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) judgment regarding the boundary in localities such as Rhoumski, Pillar 8, and Koja. To address this divergence, both nations agreed to convene a roundtable discussion aimed at establishing

modalities for resolving the matter, potentially seeking clarification from the ICJ on its decision.

Acknowledging the efforts of the sub-commission on Demarcation and the Joint Technical Team, both countries praised the agreement reached regarding the boundary in Mabas village. Furthermore, they lauded the achievements of the project steering committee and the technical monitoring team in successfully constructing an additional 327 pillars in the Alantika Mountains. These milestones received endorsement from the Mixed Commission, signifying progress in the demarcation process.

The establishment of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission stemmed from the Joint Communique adopted during a summit in Geneva on November 15, 2002. The collaborative mechanism remains crucial in addressing border-related issues and fostering mutual understanding between the two nations.

### **The Greentree Agreement 2006**

The Greentree Agreement stands as a significant formal treaty that conclusively resolved the enduring dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula. Nigeria and Cameroon had engaged in a prolonged contest over the ownership of this oil-rich region. The dispute, rooted in historical disagreements, witnessed various events from as early as 1913, with escalating tensions marked by armed clashes between the two nations, albeit not of severe intensity.

The culmination of this dispute led to its referral to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which rendered a verdict in favor of Cameroon on October 10, 2002. Subsequently, on June 12, 2006, the Greentree Agreement was signed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan alongside Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Cameroonian President Paul Biya. This agreement delineated the specific modalities and a timeframe for Nigeria to withdraw its troops from the Bakassi Peninsula and oversee the transfer of authority in the region.

Regarding the terms of the agreement, the withdrawal of Nigerian troops was slated within 60 days, with an allowance for a potential 30-day extension if required. Furthermore, Nigeria retained the provision to maintain its civil administration and police presence in Bakassi for an additional two years. Complying with the ruling of the International Court of Justice, Nigeria executed the withdrawal of its troops. This compliance was largely motivated by concerns regarding the potential loss of foreign aid.

The Greentree Agreement's signing and subsequent implementation represented a significant step towards the resolution of a long-standing dispute, ultimately settling the issue of sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula. The aftermath of the Greentree Agreement led to the establishment of a follow-up committee comprising representatives from Cameroon, Nigeria, the UN, Germany, the US, France, and the UK. This committee's primary objective was to oversee and monitor the implementation of the agreement (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014).

Nigeria eventually relinquished the territory in 2008 during President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua tenure, a move that sparked widespread protests among the indigenous Nigerians in the area. These protests persisted and continue to echo dissent against the decision to cede the Bakassi Peninsula. On August 13, 2013, the United Nations Security Council issued a statement welcoming the peaceful conclusion of the special transitional regime in the Bakassi Peninsula that had been in place until two days earlier. This signified an acknowledgement of the conclusion of a particular phase or arrangement in the region (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014).

### **Nigeria-Cameroon Cooperation Against Terrorism (The Boko Haram)**

“Distrust between Nigeria and neighboring Cameroon, coupled with disagreements on deploying troops against Boko Haram, has halted efforts to establish a regional force to combat the Islamist militants. The failure to launch the planned 2,800-strong mission in November 2014 allowed the insurgents to maintain control over significant parts of Nigeria's northeast, from where they continue to launch attacks (Bate, 2015).

This group, planning to establish an Islamist emirate in northern Nigeria, conducted a devastating raid in January 2015 on Baga, a town on Lake Chad's shores meant to be the headquarters for the regional force. The fall of Baga and reports of the killing of around 2,000 residents highlight the grave risks when Nigeria and Cameroon fail to collaborate. With growing international concern, John Mahama, Ghana's president and Chairman of the West African bloc ECOWAS, stated that leaders would push the African Union to establish a multinational force. It's expected that countries in the Lake Chad region will form the core of such a mission."

Defence and foreign ministers from the four nations gathered in Niamey in January 2015, yet the meeting failed to yield a breakthrough in deployment. Experts and diplomats noted that for joint military action to succeed, these countries must set aside their differences and unify troops and intelligence under a single command. Imad Mesaloua, an analyst from the London-based Africa Matters Consultancy, emphasized, "The primary obstacle hindering the formation of the multinational force has been historical distrust and underlying tensions, particularly between Nigeria and Cameroon" (Mpoke, 2014).

The four Lake Chad Basin nations—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—pledged to unite their forces against Boko Haram in October 2014, accompanied by a contingent from Benin, Nigeria's western neighbor. However, disagreements arose concerning troop deployment. Cameroon contended that Boko Haram was Nigeria's internal issue, opposing the deployment of foreign troops into Nigeria. Additionally, Cameroon was apprehensive about allowing Nigeria's army to pursue Boko Haram into Cameroonian territory, citing concerns over the poor human rights record of Nigerian soldiers.

Conversely, Nigeria accused Cameroon of passivity in combating insurgents, alleging that Boko Haram was utilizing Cameroonian territory as a rear base and supply route. Recent developments indicate a shift in Cameroon's approach, with its elite Rapid Intervention Brigade engaging in frequent clashes with the insurgents (Mpoke, 2014). President Mahama of Ghana remarked, "Mistrust poses a significant obstacle, but the imminent threat of Boko Haram has brought these nations to a juncture where cooperation seems more feasible."

Nevertheless, neighboring countries hold Nigeria's military inadequacies responsible. A significant development in October 2014 involved the agreement for regional troops stationed in Baga to maintain a defensive position at the border while Nigerian forces would confront Boko Haram within Nigerian territory. However, Niamey withdrew its troops from Baga when Boko Haram approached, citing concerns for their soldiers' safety. A senior military officer from Niamey commented, "It became evident that Nigerian troops were avoiding direct engagement with Boko Haram, prompting Chad and Niger to withdraw their troops from Baga, unwilling to face the brunt of the conflict" (Mpoke, 2014).



As a result of increased firepower, Boko Haram intensified attacks in Cameroon, leading officials in Yaounde to accuse Nigeria of neglecting the fight against the group. Colonel Didier Badjeck, the spokesman for the Cameroon army, expressed frustration, stating, "We are growing weary of the situation. Nigeria needs to take responsibility. We cannot continue to bear the burden of a war for which we lack understanding." Badjeck alleged that Nigerian forces were withdrawing from combat, leaving behind weapons that were later used by militants to launch cross-border attacks. Cameroon sought international assistance, prompting Chad to deploy several hundred troops to the country in response to Boko Haram attacks (Mortah, 2014). Additionally, Washington pledged support to Cameroon and neighboring nations, offering military equipment and training.

### **Contemporary Diplomatic Relations**

"Despite the conflict revolving around the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula, Nigeria and Cameroon have upheld robust diplomatic ties, collaborating extensively in matters concerning security, trade, and national interests. Recent internal security challenges within both countries, such as the threats posed by groups like Boko Haram, Unknown Gunmen, bandits, and IPOB, have had reverberating international implications. There are indications that these groups might be receiving external support, using territories beyond borders as launching pads for attacks or to acquire guerrilla warfare expertise. Consequently, both nations have engaged in joint efforts to quell these insurgent activities that directly threaten their sovereignty.

The primary transnational security concerns loom with the presence of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram Terrorists (BHTs). These groups exploit porous border areas, causing disruptions and turmoil in nearby communities. Nigeria and Cameroon have shown unwavering dedication in their collaborative counter-terrorism efforts, significantly curtailing terrorist activities and other criminal behaviors. Their steadfastness, resilience, and commitment to fostering peace and stability along shared border regions are consistently evident. Underscoring the collective responsibility in safeguarding territorial borders, it's imperative to highlight the paramount significance of sideline meetings involving Governors of adjoining States/Regions. The synergy between Nigeria and Cameroon profoundly bolsters cross-border security and developmental initiatives."

### **Managing Refugees' Problems**

The Bakassi conflict, despite being resolved in the early 2000s regarding the ownership of the Peninsula, continues to present persistent challenges in the form of refugee crises. Ongoing attacks by the Boko Haram sect and other criminal elements have resulted in the displacement of families from their ancestral homes, leaving people homeless and parents without children. Consequently, this issue has become a significant impediment for both countries.

The insecurity in the border areas has rendered inhabitants homeless, prompting the realization that a collaborative effort is imperative to address the problem. Both nations acknowledge the need to join forces to aid the affected population and region, averting further displacement and suffering. The continuous influx of refugees poses a threat to national security, prompting the understanding that managing refugee issues requires a collective approach. Recognizing their inability to independently address the refugee problem, both countries are inclined to collaborate. Their focus is on providing adequate aid to manage the refugee crisis affecting them, aiming to alleviate the suffering of those involved while enhancing the security of their respective nations.

"Cameroonian officials, led by the Minister for Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji,

repatriated and handed over the first batch of 5,000 Nigerian refugees to Borno State Governor, Professor Babagana Umara Zulum. The handover occurred at a brief ceremony in Amchiide, a border community between Nigeria and Cameroon near Banki in the Bama Local Government Area of Borno Central.

These returnees were among thousands of Nigerians, primarily from Borno, who sought refuge in Minawao Camp situated in Mokolo, in Cameroon's far North Region, fleeing the atrocities of Boko Haram since 2014. Initially, an uncertain number, estimated to be over 60,000 by some sources, sought safety in the camp from parts of Borno and Adamawa States. Over time, this number gradually decreased due to sporadic returns. The handover ceremony was attended by high-ranking officials from Cameroon, including the governor of the far North Region, Midjiyawa Bakary, and representatives from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Cameroonian Minister for Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji, announced that President Paul Biya had approved a substantial relief package. This package includes food items, mattresses, blankets, and other essential non-food items to be distributed among all 5,000 returnees as part of support and aid."

The minister praised Governor Zulum for constructing homes for the resettled refugees. Additionally, Governor Zulum authorized funds and supervised the ongoing construction of over 6,000 urban and low-cost resettlement houses situated in Banki, Gwoza, Kondugu, Kaga, and various other locations, with a significant number already finished. Most of these houses are designated for the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons. The repatriation followed the outcomes of a tripartite commission meeting held in Marwa, Cameroon, on February 10, 2021. The meeting was attended by officials from Cameroon, the UNHCR, and a Nigerian delegation consisting of Governor Zulum and high-ranking officials from federal ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and IDPs. Also present was Zulum's Special Adviser on Monitoring and Evaluation, Engr. Lawan Abba Wakilbe, who chairs the technical committee overseeing the repatriation.

After receiving the refugees, Governor Zulum in Banki town launched the distribution of food and non-food items to the 5,000 Nigerian returnees. Male heads of families were each provided with N30,000, while each woman received N10,000 and a fabric. The governor empathized with their refugee experience and assured them of his government's commitment to their security, welfare, and the creation of a conducive environment for their return to normal life. Among Zulum's delegation were the state's Commissioners for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Engr. Mustapha Gubio; Local Government and Emirate Affairs, Sugun Mai Mele, and former Commissioner for Housing and Energy, Babagana Tijjani Banki.

Nigeria and Cameroon have agreed to seek clarification from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding certain ambiguities in its judgment on the Bakassi Peninsula ownership dispute. The ICJ, in its ruling on October 10, 2002, upheld Cameroon's claim to the area. However, during the 24th session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) held in Abuja between August 25 and 26, 2022, both countries seemed to have differing interpretations of the ICJ judgment regarding the boundaries in localities such as Rhoumski, Pillar 8, and Koja. As a result, they agreed to refer this matter to the ICJ for clarification on its decision. The session yielded several key resolutions, as outlined in a communiqué released by the Nigerian government. Both Nigeria and Cameroon emphasized their commitment to close collaboration aimed at identifying and promoting trans-border infrastructure projects. The objective is to bolster economic cooperation not only between the two nations but also within the broader West African sub-

region. Additionally, the Mixed Commission recommended finalizing an agreement concerning the joint exploitation of hydrocarbons along the maritime border.

Furthermore, the communiqué highlighted commendations for various successful initiatives. Specifically, it acknowledged the sub-commission on Demarcation and the Joint Technical Team for their agreement on the boundary course in Mabas village. It also lauded the project steering committee and the technical monitoring team for the successful erection of an additional 327 pillars in the Alantika Mountains. These accomplishments were endorsed by the Mixed Commission. The Nigerian delegation, headed by the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, was deeply engaged in these discussions. Dr. Umar Jibrilu Gwandu, Malami's spokesman, emphasized Nigeria's unwavering commitment to resolving any remaining border disagreements with Cameroon in an amicable manner. This dedication underscores Nigeria's determination to ensure peace and stability along their shared border:

Nigeria is committed to the quick and successful execution of the mandates of the Mixed Commission, and areas of disagreement have been reduced to just three. Embrace pragmatism in order to reach a consensus in all three areas of disagreement, amicable solutions would be found as soon as possible to enable the work to be completed. (Thisday, 2022).

### **Trade Collaborations**

Despite the Bakassi conflict, Nigeria and Cameroon have surprisingly managed to maintain collaborative efforts, particularly in trade relations. The cordiality between these neighboring countries dates back to their political independence, fostering a generally positive relationship. Even amidst the conflict, their trade ties have continued to thrive.

The then Minister of Works and Housing for the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Babatunde Fashola, highlighted this trend when discussing the construction of a new double-lane bridge at the Nigeria-Cameroon border. He emphasized the enduring commitment to cooperation between the two nations. This not only reflects their resilience in maintaining ties but also signifies their shared efforts in infrastructure development, aiming to facilitate smoother cross-border trade and connectivity.

The double-lane bridge will facilitate free trade between the two countries. The two countries are Aware of the significance of trade on the survival of the people living in the area and the end implication trade would have on both countries. The construction of the bridge will also strengthen relations between both countries and improve cross-border security.

It's worth noting that the construction of the bridge commenced in April 2017 and was successfully completed by March 2021, with an estimated cost of \$35.9 billion (The News Agency of Nigeria, 2022). This achievement marks the initial success of several proposed projects as the administration enters the second phase of its final term. In the view of Fashola the administration's plan to renew and expand old infrastructure would take the two countries to the

future for many more decades and strengthen the relationship between them. In his words;

We have had a strong relationship with the Republic of Cameroon in terms of trade and business. If you go to Aba, Enugu, and Abakaliki for example, I can tell you that they are on the route that facilitates trade in agro-produce, merchandise, and manufactured goods from Aba in Abia state. You can only expect that this will improve joint border patrol, ensure security, more efficiency which you see from the first buildings formed out of the integration of ECOWAS and sister nations of what the continent should look like. "Nigeria is now a signatory to the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement. So, this is infrastructure that positions both nations to take the benefit of the trade that the agreement holds. It is really exciting. Looking into the future you can only see more business, more trade, and employment meant for people.

On revenue generation, Fashola was of the opinion that the bridge was a social asset and that the happiness and prosperity of Nigerians was enough payment.

These are social assets and we must understand that, the recoupment is the happiness and the prosperity of the people of Nigeria. For as long as our people are happy, they can travel easily, they can reduce their journey, save time on the road because if you save time you save money and am sure the President is delighted.

Similarly, Henry Etuk, Chairman, Etung Local Government Area said the people of the area are pleased with what Nigeria's Federal Government has done by constructing a new bridge in the area. Etuk reiterated that;

The new bridge would bring about better trade among the people of Nigeria and Cameroon. That the ease of movement and trade would go a long way to improve relationships and foster development in the area. Emphasizing the importance of expanding trade and investment in order to create a more viable and stable economy for 'our people.

From the point of the NSA,

"Nigeria is one of Cameroon's largest trading partners despite the security concerns along some of the trading routes such as from Maiduguri to Kousseri or Maroua; Jabbi Lamba to Garoua; as well as from Enugu to Bamenda amongst others. Our two Presidents have earlier called for the development of these transboundary trade corridors which would no doubt serve as veritable platforms for the integration of ECOWAS and ECCAS sub-regions. However, to effectively achieve this feat, we must collectively address the smuggling of prohibited items and

irregular migration amongst other transnational organized crimes. Meanwhile, it is necessary to state that this trade relationship is further reinforced by the recent conferment on Aliko Dangote, a Nigerian businessman with Cameroon's top civilian award – Commander of the National Order of Valour for his outstanding contribution to the infrastructural development of Cameroon through his cement plants.

In addition, the newly constructed 1.5km, two-lane bridge between Nigeria and Cameroon in Ekot-Mfum border area of Cross River State is designed to ease movement, facilitate trade, improve cross border security as well as strengthen relations between both countries.

The construction of a transboundary road linking both countries, an electricity interconnection project and cultural exchange not only portray the will and determination of the two heads of state but also pave the ways for citizens to strengthen their unity.

He elaborated on the agreement as a demonstration of the shared faith and confidence both countries have in the future. They were convinced that officials and experts would collaborate closely to implement the agreement effectively. Their primary focus was ensuring that the beneficiaries, who were the principal victims of insecurity, fully complied with its enforcement.

### **Border Security**

Nigeria and Cameroon have engaged in collaborative efforts to enhance security in both countries. Recently, the Chiefs of Defence Staff from Nigeria and Cameroon joined forces for the Cameroon-Nigeria trans-border Military Operations Coordinating Conference. The primary goal was to devise a joint military strategy to combat the escalating threat of the Boko Haram insurgency, which has posed significant security challenges. The activities of the Boko Haram sect have caused mounting concern among not just statesmen but also the general population. Their actions have resulted in the destruction of homes, including churches, the displacement of families, a decline in trade, and a particularly distressing hindrance to humanitarian aid in the most affected regions of Northeast Nigeria and the border areas with Cameroon. In discussing the significance of the conference, Chief of Defence Staff Marshal Alex Badeh remarked that it was a pivotal moment aimed at refining the approach to address this pressing issue:

Part of the ongoing efforts at engaging relevant stakeholders in our collective determination to address the challenges of terrorism and other acts of criminality which our two countries in particular and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) countries in general are currently being confronted with. Overall efforts are to contain terrorism in the sub-region as agreed in a previous meeting where it was agreed among other things, to conduct at the bilateral level, coordinated patrols along our common borders in order to crack down on Boko Haram, locate and save all abducted persons.

Badeh then recalled the series of meetings held in Paris, Yaoundé and Niamey, which were aimed at articulating a common approach towards addressing the threats posed by Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon as well as the Lake Chad Basin.

According to him;

Specifically, the Yaoundé meeting highlighted the need to enhance the fight against terrorism by operationalizing the LCBC Multi-National Task Force (MNTF). We agreed to set up an information-sharing mechanism to support our joint operations against terrorists, as well as the importance of setting up an information-sharing mechanism on gun smuggling and strengthening measures to protect all military hardware and armouries in our two countries.

With a draft resolution yet to be finalized, Badeh's emphasis on the need to work together and agree on the operational details that will guide the conduct of troops at the joint operations against terrorism, as well as advocating for a robust strategy that would lead to the defeat of terrorism within the sub-region.

He added that;

While the resolution is being drafted, it is imperative that we work out and agree on the operational details that will guide the conduct of our troops as we jointly conduct operations against terrorists.

The Nigerian counterpart, the Cameroonian Chief of Defence, Rene Claude Meka expressed optimism that the mutual cooperation and the need to strengthen the same would be beneficial to the two countries, as both countries need each other. As part of the activities of the event, he presented the souvenir of a Lion to the CDS of Nigeria, saying it indicated that with Nigeria and Cameroon working together, they will finish off Boko Haram in no distant time. Present at the coordinating Conference were the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General KJT Minimah; CNS, Vice Admiral Usman Jibrin, Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Adesola Amosu and the Chief of Defence Intelligence, Rear Admiral Okoi.

Insecurity in the Nigeria-Cameroon border has a far-reaching implications, a lot person's are living in fear every day of their lives. Not sure of what will happen to them in the next moment because of the consistent attacks by rebel groups and insurgents. The bilateral agreement Nigeria signed with the Republic of Cameroon is to establish a joint trans-border security committee as part of measures to further deny insurgents and criminal elements easy access through the nation's land border. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Olugbenga Ashiru, who signed for the Nigerian government in Abuja, said thus that the;

Agreement came at a time the world was fighting against the scourge of terrorism and pirates, which pose threat to international peace and stability. There is no region that is immune to the heinous activities of terrorist groups and pirates on the coast. The UN and the AU have led international and regional initiatives to combat these security challenges

Signing on behalf of the Cameroonian government, Vice Prime Minister and Minister Delegate at the Presidency of Cameroon, Amadou Ali, while commenting on the agreement said that the agreement showed that confidence had been restored through permanent dialogue, consultation and reinforcement of cooperation between both countries.

### **Conclusion**

The Bakassi conflict which was a territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon was resolved by the International Court of Justice. One would have expected that relations between the two neighboring states would be strained forever, because, Nigeria for instance lost not only territory but people and resources. Against popular opinion, the conflict did not have any serious adverse effect on their official relations. As evident above, both countries have instead collaborated on different fronts, cutting across military, economic, social and environmental collaborations.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the paper, below are some of the recommendations;

1. The activities of separatists and terrorists has caused serious social and economic inconvenience for both countries, therefore, Nigeria and Cameroon should make more collaborative moves for regional stability in West Africa.
2. As an impact of the Bakassi conflict, trade activities in the Bakassi Peninsula reduced significantly, hence, both countries should create a more conducive environment for the inhabitants to do business.
3. Nigeria and Cameroon should look beyond national interest and address the crisis in the Bakassi Peninsula.

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