



AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA IMMIGRATION SERVICE IN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTATION: THE WAYS FORWARD

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Abstract

The porosity of Nigeria's border coupled with manpower deficiency that can appropriately address the effective control of people at the border, has proved exigent for officers and by extension affects information management for proper documentation of immigrants. Thus, this paper mainly explored the ways forward on the challenges faced by immigration officers in information management for effective documentation at the border. Specifically, it identified the challenges, implications of the challenges and the measures to confront the obstacles for effective documentation of immigrants. Data were gathered from secondary sources which include articles in journals, conference papers, report of the Nigeria Immigration Service on National Migration Data Management Strategy and other internet materials. The data were presented and analysed. The paper revealed among other findings that the immigration officers at the Nigeria's border have been confronted with the challenges of infrastructural facilities, inadequate sophisticated gadgets and diversity of document formats among others. This undermined the effective documentation of immigrants. Based on the findings, it is recommended among others on the need by the government to provide modern infrastructural facilities, adequate sophisticated gadgets, improved welfare and regular training and re-training of the immigration officers to enhancing effective documentation of immigrants. The paper concluded that achieving national security requires efforts to ensuring effective border security through robust information management for seamless documentation. Therefore, information management for effective documentation is a very sacrosanct measure and prerequisite for national security.

Keyword: *Challenges, Nigeria immigration service, information management, documentation,*

Introduction

Generally, data generated from effective information management constitutes a critical indicator in socio-economic and demographic discourses in any nation and as well a major bane to development in many developing countries in particular. Migration data is one of such critical demographic data that is important not only for national issues, but also for international agreements and treaties.

In the case of Nigeria, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) is a paramilitary outfit designed as an international gatekeeper for the Nation and the first security check at any point of entry (Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council, 2018). Since its extraction from the Nigeria Police Force in 1958, the NIS has witnessed series of changes in terms of organisation, functions and innovations, particularly the automation of the system (Isiyaku, 2018; Jibrin, 2019).

Nigeria Immigration Service is one of the early adopters of information technology in the country through the introduction of e-passport in 2007 (Ogunkanmi, 2020). NIS is an important source of administrative migration data. The agency therefore is central to collecting and producing relevant data for other agencies. There is the need therefore, to synchronise data collection template and instrument of the NIS to accommodate key data requirements of other agencies (National Migration Data Management Strategy, 2013). The NIS collects basic information on arrivals and departures at the Nigeria borders as well as on refugees, irregular migrants and trafficked persons among others. Data is included in the internal NIS annual report to management, but is neither published nor shared (Fadayomi, 2013).

The basic function of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) is the issuance of visas and resident permit, but the function of the NIS involves more than that as captured by the Immigration Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015) which includes the control of persons entering or leaving Nigeria, border surveillance and patrol, and performance of paramilitary duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required of officers under the authority of the act.

Furthermore, information management for the effective documentation of immigrants is a critical issue for many countries, including Nigeria. The Borders in major entry points for immigrants, and immigration officers at this border play a vital role in ensuring that the immigrants are properly documented.

Statement of the Research Problem

The NIS is an important source of administrative migration data. The agency is central to collecting and producing relevant data for other relevant agencies. Therefore,

synchronisation of data collection template and instrument of the NIS to accommodate key data requirements of other agencies is very imperative (National Migration Data Management Strategy, 2013).

However, there are a number of challenges that immigration officers face in managing information, which include lack of training, inadequate resources, and out-dated systems among others. The historical narrative of Nigeria's border intertwines with broader geopolitical shifts, economic dynamics, and societal changes. As a strategic point for trade and cultural exchange, the borders have been witnessing the flow of migration, reflecting regional and global trends. These historical layers contribute to the unique challenges faced by immigration officers in the contemporary context. Moreover, the country also reflects high volatility to migration forces with a net migration rate of -0.4, a stock of emigrants as percentage of population estimated at 0.6%, and stock of immigrants as percentage of population estimated at 0.7% (National Migration Data Management Strategy, 2013).

Furthermore, the porosity of Nigerian borders coupled with manpower deficiency that can appropriately address the effective control of people at the border, has proved exigent for officers. Also, the unabated entry of illegal immigrants with proliferation of light weapons and influx of contraband goods through criminal activities has greatly put pressure in assessing the skills of immigration of officers in combating these challenges (Musali, Harun & Zainnudin, 2015). Thus, there is a need for adequate databases in the agency in the management of migration data (Fadayomi, 2013). Failure of systematic data sharing agreement exists between all MDAs (Ministries, Departments, and Agencies) involved (Fadayomi, 2013).

According to Olayemi (n.d) the NIS has challenge of reliable data of International Migration activities. This information can trigger socio- economic development and security if only the correct information can be gotten for dedicative and effective use. This information of migrants can be a source of direction on what the nation state needs (most especially in expertise and skill) revealing how it can be derived, the necessary "pull" factors to introduce and the awareness of the "push" factors that hinders the right immigrants from coming in also not just knowing, but consciously knowing who comes into the nation-state this data on migrants can also help the Nigerian security agencies in dealing with Nigerian security issues (Isiyaku, Mohammed, Mohammed, & Dangani, 2020).

Research Objectives

The main research objective is to explore the ways forward on the challenges of NIS In information management for effective documentation at the border, Katsina state. The specific research objectives are to:

1. Determine the challenges of NIS in information management and documentation in Nigeria;

2. examine the implications of the challenges on effective documentation for national security; and
3. proffer the ways forward on the challenges as they relate to information management and documentation of the immigration officers at the borders.

Literature Review

This section focuses on conceptual and empirical review. First, attempt is made to conceptually review the key concepts of information management and documentation as related to the immigration before dwelling into the review of empirical studies.

The concept of information management is looked upon in different perspective. It is that field of management responsible for the orderly control of creation, maintenance, use and disposition of information or records. In other words, it is the planning, controlling, directing, organising, training, promoting, and other managerial activities that involved in records creation, maintenance and use, and disposition in order to achieve adequate and proper documentation of the policies and transactions of the government of a country. It is difficult to achieve organisational objectives without effective information or records management. The common strategies in information management includes: assigning unique identifiers to individual records, protecting the records from unauthorised changes, and maintaining audit trails which show how current records have evolved and the changes that have been effected (Bigirimana, Jagero & Chizema, 2015). According to Kaur (2012), information management (IM) is the collection and management of information from one or more sources and the distribution of that information to one or more audiences. According to Abdulsalami, Nwachukwu and Paulina (2015), Information management includes the organization of wide information, policy planning, development and maintenance of integrated systems and services, the optimization of information flows and harnessing of leading edge technologies to the functional requirements of end –users, whatever their status or role in the organization. Therefore, in this study, information management refers to the process of collecting, organising, storing, and retrieving information. Information management is essential for effective documentation of immigrants, as it allows immigration officers especially at the borders of Nigeria to access the information to be documented in order to make informed decisions about immigration status with reference.

In addition, documentation is the process of collecting, recording, preserving, utilising, and disposing of the official document in a systematic manner. It is the creation, distribution, maintenance, retention, preservation, retrieval and disposal of written materials. It aids in fulfilling the legal formalities by retaining important records for planning, decision making, controlling, evaluating and reporting. The documentation process has to be concise, accurate, up-to-date, and meaningful. Documentation of records may exist in contracts, memos, paper files, electronic files, reports, emails, videos, instant message logs or database records. Paper records may be stored in physical boxes on-premises or at a storage facility (Enterprise Records Management Trend Guide, 2014). According to Holmes, Tuin and Turner (2021), the objectives in

managing public records or documentations are to make the records serve the purposes for which they were created as cheaply and effectively as possible, and to make a proper disposition of them after they have served those purposes. The documentation is done in case files, log books and softcopy database among others. In this paper, documentation refers to the process of recording, storing and disposing of information related to the immigrants along the borders of Nigeria.

The concept of immigration as used in this study refers to an agency coined out of Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in 1958 to monitor and regulate Emigrants and immigrants in to Nigeria. NIS is specifically referred to the officers or members of staff that operate along the Nigeria's borders. Immigrants refer to persons who come to live permanently in Nigeria through the borders. The immigrants may come to a country for a variety of reasons, including economic opportunity, family reunification, or political asylum especially through the designated borders Nigeria.

However, based on the review of related empirical studies, Jones, Smith and Williams (2019) investigated on The Role of Communication in Effective Immigration Management. Data were mainly gathered from secondary sources. According to the study, ineffective communication of the immigration officers thwart effective documentation of immigrants and immigration officers who can communicate well with immigrants are more likely to be able to acquire the data they require and make conclusions regarding immigration status that are well-informed. The study also discovered that by using communication to foster trust between immigration agents and immigrants, immigration management might become more successful and efficient. The study recommended that excellent communication is crucial for managing immigration.

Isiyaku, Mohammed, Mohammed and Dangani (2020) investigated Adoption of Migration Information and Data Analysis System for Border Control and Security (MIDAS) by the Nigerian Immigration Service of Nigeria. The study adopted quantitative research methods and cross-sectional, survey research design. Descriptive statistic was used for data analysis. Findings revealed that, the major reason for using MIDAS by the Nigeria Immigration Service was to facilitate border security and control in the country and ability to scan a document happens to be the most common technological skills possessed by Nigeria Immigration Service for the adoption of MIDAS. The study recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria and Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy in collaboration with Nigeria Immigration Service Commission should provide a sensitisation program (training) for the personnel using the MIDAS on exploring all the potentials of MIDAS to better border security and control in the country among others.

Ifeanyi-Aneke, Ifedi and Aga (2021) examined Nigeria immigration Service and the Challenge of Cross Border Human Trafficking in Nigeria between 2011 and 2019. Data generated from secondary sources through the interrogation of the hypothesis, the study

discovered that there are about 1400 footpaths unknown by security agencies the borders are not manned and unprotected. Moreover, inadequate personnel have equally contributed to poor border management. However, the researcher recommended that: Nigeria immigration service cannot be solely responsible for the prevention of cross border human trafficking it should liaise and network with other sister departments. Ugochukwu and Lawrence (2015) conducted a study on e-Governance, its implementation and challenges in the Nigerian Public Service. It is based on this, that this article identifies some of the challenges to e-governance implementation in Nigerian public service. The article relied on archival analysis of relevant literature on the subject matter and inferences drawn from it. Based on its findings, it was concluded that e-governance remains the best in encouraging transparency and accountability in government business. The paper therefore recommended that government should be more committed to the implementation of e-governance and embarking on adequate enlightenment about the concept.

Ogunkanmi (2020) assessed the Impact of Information Technology on Recruitment and Training: A Case of Nigeria Immigration Service. The study used a sample of one hundred officers and men of Nigeria Immigration Service using the instrument of questionnaire. The response rate was 100%. Data collected were analysed using ANOVA method. The research results revealed that there were significant relationships between information technology, training and recruitment. It was recommended based on the research findings that Nigeria Immigration Service should invest more in information technology to take advantage of it and have good workforce that can compete with its counterpart anywhere in the world.

Amadioha and Achonwa (2022) investigated on the Assessment of Social Skills among Immigration Officers in Rivers State Command. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design a sample of 115 immigration officers drawn using convenience sampling technique. Data analysis was done using frequency count, mean, standard deviation and result was illustrated using bar chart. Generally, the result showed that there is a high prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State command. Based on the results, it was recommended that specialised training and course should be integrated into the orientation programme provided for new recruits into the immigration service.

This study on the ways forward of the challenges of immigration officers in information management for effective documentation at the border, is timely and relevant to providing suggestions for seamless management and documentation of immigrants' data as prerequisite for overall national security.

Research Methodology

This study which is an overview adopts secondary method of data collection which implies qualitative method of data gathering. Therefore, the study gathered the relevant

data from various articles, magazines, newspapers and other related published and unpublished documents related to the challenges of NIS in the border. In addition, relevant materials from National Migration Data Management Strategy, articles in journals, conference papers and the internet were also utilised. The data are presented based on the objectives of the study and were analysed qualitatively.

Results and Discussions

Attempt is made in this section to discuss the challenges of NIS in information management for effective documentation at the borders.

Challenges of NIS in Effective Documentation at the Border

The operational landscapes at the Nigerian borders are confronted with a complex array of challenges that significantly impact the efficacy of immigration officers. These challenges include the following:

- i. Insufficient Technological Infrastructure:** The existing technological infrastructure at the borders face limitations in terms of its capacity to handle the influx of data associated with immigration processes. The lack of modern systems and software can hinder the efficient collection, storage, and retrieval of information. Therefore, effective information management for proper documentation of the immigrants is undermined due to use of manual approach as against a well sophisticated technology that is faster, more accurate and versatile. The failure in using modern technology thwarts effective interagency collaboration.
- ii. Inadequate Training and Capacity Building:** The dynamic nature of immigration processes necessitates a continuous cycle of training and capacity building for immigration officers. The lack of adequate training programs and opportunities for skill development may impede officers' ability to adapt to evolving trends and technologies.
This will mainly affect those officers in charge of information management and documentation of the immigrants. The failure to keep them up to date in terms of handling new software and gadgets will affect their efficiency in data management.
- iii. Diversity of Documents Formats:** The diversity of document formats and the prevalence of counterfeit documentation present formidable challenges in the verification and authentication of immigrants' records. This raises concerns regarding the accuracy and legitimacy of the information stored. Therefore, this will continue to be challenge to the immigration officers due to lack of uniformity in the documents to be tendered by the immigrants that come from different countries.
- iv. Incomplete or Inaccurate Data:** Incomplete or inaccurate data within immigration records poses a significant hurdle. Mistakes in personal details, missing information, or outdated records may compromise the overall effectiveness of the documentation process, leading to potential security risks.

Raw data is collected at border crossing points and delivered monthly to the Planning, Research and Statistics Division at NIS Headquarters in Abuja for processing. Data is inputted manually and stored using MS Excel in the NIS database, with a back-up. Data is analysed using Excel. The international airports and two land borders have electronic passport reading devices to register travellers' information directly into the NIS database. This had until the introduction of MIDAS remained a major threat to the Nigeria Immigration Service. The challenges have been significantly reduced with the introduction and utilisation of MIDAS which is a flexible and user friendly gadget.

- v. **Complex Socio-Political Factors:** Navigating the intricate web of socio-political factors, including regional tensions and diplomatic considerations, adds layers of complexity to immigration management. These factors influence decision-making and require a delicate balance between diplomatic sensitivities and operational needs.
- vi. **Poor Interagency Collaboration:** Agencies collecting migration-related data are involved in some data sharing. However, no systematic data sharing agreement exists between all MDAs involved. NIS and NPopC do officially and regularly share data on immigration and emigration, which is sent from NIS to NPOpC for analysis.
- vii. **Community Engagement Challenge:** Effective communication and collaboration with local communities are integral components of successful immigration management. However, challenges may arise due to linguistic diversity, cultural nuances, or historical grievances, impacting officers' ability to establish trust and cooperation. Unless there is synergy or collaboration between the NIS and the neighbouring communities, the efforts towards seamless information management for effective documentation will continue to elude us. Sometimes some members of the communities can serve as informers to people with nefarious activities, harbor criminal elements and undermine the efforts of the NIS.

Implications of the Challenges

From the foregoing, it is imperative to stress that inadequate information management for effective documentation practices may result in vulnerabilities that pose threats to national security. The inability to identify and track individuals with potential security risks could compromise the overall safety and well-being of the nation.

For instance, this affects the extent to which accurate information is collected, recorded, stored and disposed through interagency collaboration of the government services with the responsibilities of ensuring security is maintained. Additionally, the challenges in information management directly impact the formulation of immigration policies. Inaccurate or incomplete data may lead to suboptimal policy decisions, hindering the development and implementation of effective strategies for border control and immigration management (Ifeanyi-Aneke, Ifedi & Aga, 2021).

Summarily, the comprehensive analysis of the challenges underscores the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by immigration officers at the borders. Visual representations provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding information management, documentation practices, socio-political dynamics, and national security implications within the context of immigration processes specifically at the border. Addressing these challenges is paramount for fortifying the efficiency and effectiveness of immigration operations and ensuring the security and well-being of the nation.

The Ways Forward

In order to bring lasting solutions to the aforementioned challenges, the following solutions are proposed.

- i. **Provision of Basic Infrastructures and Modern Border Control Posts:** The provision of basic infrastructures and constructing border control posts with the requisite security and communication gadgets is a modern best practice of border management the world over. This goes a long way in discouraging illicit cross-border activities over time and encourages and motivates the border guards to be committed to their job by effectively and efficiently carrying out their duties, as the presence of sophisticated control posts will boost their sense of respect and dignity.

On-the-spot assessment of visited control posts showed that many of them are situated under trees, shades and huts. An important role that border guards play entails carrying out checks on individuals. This involves verifying the authenticity of their documents including travel passports (Small Arms Survey, 2009).

Carrying out these functions under trees isn't an encouraging task to engage in. If the control posts are built and equipped with the necessary and needed operational facilities to function well, the morale of the officers will naturally increase, and this will have a positive impact on their job performance.

- ii. **Training and Re-training of Officers:** Training and retraining of officers are highly essential for efficient border management. Globalisation which came into being because of improved technology harms the borders by mounting pressure on them through the illicit activities of transnational criminals making border control a daunting task for officers. Interviewed border guards explained that trans-border criminals outsmart them in their operations frequently.

This has therefore made it imperative for constant training and retraining of officers. This training focuses on themes/strategies which are essential for building capacities and competencies of border guards, so that, they can effectively tackle the menace of porous and illegal routes by engaging in improved technological means.

- iii. **Robust Information Management System:** The introduction of MIDAS by the Nigeria Immigration Service is imperative in facilitating border security and

control in the country and ability to scan a document which is the most common technological skills possessed by Nigeria Immigration Service. Therefore, the Federal Government of Nigeria should provide an avenue for comprehensive sensitisation programme (training) for the personnel using the MIDAS on exploring all the potentials of MIDAS to better border security and control in the country among others.

By implication, as trans-border criminals improve and increase their skills in carrying out trans-border crimes so also is the capacity building of border guards increased which guarantees effective and efficient management of the borders. As Walsh (2007) and Gerstein, et al. (2018) suggest, technology transfers should be adapted to the absorption capacity of the actors involved in border management. What should be considered also entails the level of training and existing infrastructure.

- iv. **Provision of Adequate Patrol Equipment:** This is one of the modern best practices of border management that still eludes Nigeria, thus giving space for illegal activities along border areas to fester. Since trans-border criminals are aware that border security guards are not adequately equipped with patrol kits including patrol vans, motorcycles, boats and helicopters, they carefully plan and execute their nefarious activities notably smuggling, trafficking and the opening up of illegal routes to complement existing porous borders which are friendly to their activities.

The adequate provision of these patrol equipment will greatly aid the immigration officers in constantly patrolling the vast terrain, to effectively and ward off attempts of incursion by illegal migrants, smuggling of arms and ammunition as well as other cross-border criminalities. This will also assist in improving land and maritime border surveillance.

- v. **Improved Welfare:** While making provisions for the physical infrastructure required for border management in modern times, it is pertinent to review the position of the human factor involved in securing the borders as critical stakeholders in national security. It has been established that poor welfare packages for border security officers have contributed in no small measure to the rottenness and anomalies prevalent along the borders (Fall, 2003; Hills, 2002). For instance, Fall (2003) identified low salaries as a factor that contributes to the discouragement and frustration of border agents. And because Border guards are positioned to prevent the movement of illegal goods into the country, they are tempted to receive bribes from smugglers (Jancsics, 2019).

If the government can prioritise officers' welfare by paying them what they are due as at when due, this will naturally motivate them to do their jobs effectively and reject whatever spoils and bribes that are being offered them by cross-border criminals, and if properly checked, it will go a long way in discouraging cross-border crimes.

- vi. **Interagency Collaboration and Cooperation among States:** Modern security management is deeply rooted in inter and intra-agency/state collaboration. This

calls for internal cooperation among security institutions within a state. However, internal wrangling and artificial contests for superiority among security agencies in Nigeria have hampered such efforts. Such worrisome institutional frictions should be avoided in the interest of the nation since border management constitutes an issue of national concern.

Also, there should be external cooperation among security apparatuses/institutions of states sharing boundaries. Despite a state having the sole responsibility to man/guard its borders, there is the need to partner/collaborate with neighboring states by putting aside differences and developing policies and decisions of mutual or collective benefits. It should be noted that laxity from one side will have a spillover effect on the other side and that is the more reason why there should be a synergy from both sides. This cooperation ensures and allows for intelligence/ information sharing between security apparatuses of states to forestall any illegal activity along the borders and serve as early warning systems which will guide operational strategies.

I am in support of the view by Marenin (2010), who opined that states could implement a series of upstream and downstream controls such as issuing licenses for merchandise, passports, and information sharing with neighbouring states as part of their border management strategy, solely for support and backup as when necessary. Hills (2002) equally stressed the importance of inter-state cooperation through information sharing, the setting up of shared risk. There should be joint collaboration. When states collaborate, it enables them to synchronise their operational methods such that traffickers don't have any loophole otherwise called 'empty spaces' to operate because of improved inter-operational coordination which ensures surveillance at all times along the borders. This will lead to what Gerstein, et al. (2018) refer to as a 'joint intelligence fusion Centre' which would, in turn, enhance border security (understanding, 2021).

- vii. **Community Engagement:** There should be collaboration between the NIS and the communities. Community engagement in immigration related activities has to be fairly effective to helping in the immigration activities. Therefore, border communities and traditional rulers along border axis are to be highly engaged for their cooperating with the security agencies.

Conclusion

It is concluded that information management for effective documentation is essential for comprehensive decision making by the NIS and other related agencies. Also, achieving national security requires efforts to ensuring effective border security through robust information management for seamless documentation by the immigration officers. Therefore, information management for effective documentation is sacrosanct measure and prerequisite for national security. Therefore, border security is a very essential for the actualisation of consolidated statehood, enhancement of sovereignty and national

security. Nigeria has been experiencing the problem of how to effectively secure its borders from all sorts of transnational crimes that serve as a threat to national security.

It is also concluded that despite certain efforts put in place to strengthen Nigerian borders, certain factors have contributed to serious challenges to border security. These include: poor infrastructural facilities and modern gadgets, inadequate training, diverse data documents formats and poor interagency collaboration and community engagement among others.

If the challenges examined in the preceding sections are surmounted, there will be seamless information management for effective documentation by the immigration officers especially at the Nigerian border.

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