

# An Exploratory Assessment of Interstate Boundary Disputes in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The introduction of western model of boundary demarcation by Britain during the colonial era and its sustenance by successive governments in post-colonial Nigeria appears to have made interstate boundary dispute rampant in Nigeria. Successive post-colonial administrations have continued to create more administrative units which in turn implied reinforcing colonial boundaries or demarcating new one. This paper examines the nature/status (disputed or otherwise) of the various interstate boundaries in Nigeria as well as investigates the strategies adopted by National Boundary Commission (NBC) in managing interstate boundary disputes in Nigeria. This study revealed that out of eighty six (86) interstate boundaries in Nigeria, forty six (46) of these boundaries are disputed; the study further revealed that the NBC's Interstate Boundaries Technical Committee manages boundary disputes between states in Nigeria through Joint Meeting of Officials (JMO), Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) and Joint Field Team (JFT).

**Keywords:** Boundary, Dispute, Demarcation, Interstate, National Boundary Commission

## Introduction

The scramble and partition of Africa by some European countries was basically aimed at 'sharing' the continent amongst themselves. The process of the partitioning involved creating territorial boundaries demarcating the area of influence of each colonial power. This process gave rise to the creation of boundaries in Africa. Boundaries in Africa were deliberately determined by rival colonial powers following intensive struggles and competitions for territories all over the continent. Although boundaries everywhere are artificial and largely arbitrary and forcefully imposed, the magnitude, duration as well as the process of boundary making in Africa make its case more dramatic and problematic (Anene, 1970; Asiwaju, cited in Anderson, 1996). However, boundaries in Africa was hurriedly demarcated unlike in Europe where the evolution of boundaries was gradual and evolved overtime. The emergent post colonial boundaries in Africa could be grouped into international and internal boundaries. The international boundaries are those that separated one African country from the other while internal boundaries are those which separated the land space of one ethnic group from the other within a country.

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate birthed the nation Nigeria. The nation was aligned into Northern and Southern Nigeria. The British colonizers created boundaries according to political exigencies that favored it without recourse to the colonial people. Consequently, overtime Nigeria was divided into regions. However, the introduction of federal system and creation of states seem to have heralded increased awareness on boundary lines in Nigeria. Individuals and ethnic groups, who hitherto spoke the same language, lived and communed together where suddenly thrown apart by the creation of states. Before the advent of colonialism, present-day Nigeria existed in the form of communities, kingdoms and empires whose boundaries were agreed upon landmarks such as distinct trees, or anti-hills or rivers, valleys, mountains, and so on. Because these pre-colonial boundaries were not regarded as sacrosanct, although they had the potential for conflict, their cooperative features were more prominent. Rather, they enabled the geographical definition of kinship groups; their major utility in pre-colonial society was to promote inter-group harmony.

According to Rezek (1995), boundary is a line that establishes where the sovereignty of one state ends and that of another state begins. The word 'boundary' implies natural or artificial divisions between two areas. One of the most important rules for the conduct of interstate system is that nations must respect internationally recognised boundaries. Kristof (1959) observed that "boundary is a term appropriate to the present day concept of the state, that is, the state as a sovereign or autonomous spatial unit, one among many". In the context of this study, inter-state boundary means artificial/natural lines, markings, pillars etc used to delimit the sphere of influence of each federating state in Nigeria.

They European imposed boundaries were alien to the traditional organization of the Nigerian people as it separated related ethnic groups, culturally coherent areas, and common ecological zones. The colonial boundaries were meant to isolate these groups for purposes of administrative and jurisdictional convenience. Emphasizing the role of Nigeria's colonial master in creating internal boundaries in the country, Asiwaju (2001a) noted "as the European colonialists gave Africa arbitrary international boundaries so the British provided Nigeria internal boundaries". Corroborating Asiwaju, Brownlie (1979) submitted that the division of Nigeria into protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria, provinces, divisions, districts, native authorities and federated communities, which was done primarily for British colonial administrative convenience, provided reference data relating to internal boundary management in Nigeria. The internal boundaries of Nigeria has continued to

changed from 1914 starting with the amalgamation to creation of regions and the introduction of federal structure and system of governance.

Even so, neither the colonial nor post-colonial boundaries seem to have functioned as they were expected to, because some of these divided groups continue to engage each other in violent confrontations over boundary. A boundary area, whether international, internal, inter-state or inter-community tends to be located at the periphery of the core areas of the entity. This puts boundary areas at a structural disadvantage in terms of allocation of resources and other infrastructural facilities by the controlling authorities. Thus, most boundary conflicts in contemporary Nigeria emanate from the use of land for agrarian purposes. During these conflicts, dangerous and sophisticated weapons are used leading to loss of lives, massive destruction of properties while in some cases citizens become internally displaced persons (IDPS). This paper examines the nature/status (disputed or otherwise) of the various interstate boundaries in Nigeria as well as investigates the strategies adopted by National Boundary Commission (NBC) in managing interstate boundary disputes in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to undertake an exploratory assessment of interstate boundary disputes in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- How many interstate boundaries in Nigeria are disputed
- How many interstate boundaries in Nigeria are undisputed
- What are the strategies adopted by NBC in managing disputed interstate boundaries in Nigeria

### **Methodology**

Primary data for the study was retrieved key informant interview respondents from National Boundary Commission of Nigeria, Federal Surveys Office and Border Community Development Agency while secondary data elicited from library and official sources, including books, journals, unpublished works, dailies and periodicals, online materials, as well as publications from relevant government establishments.

### **Perspectives on Nigeria's Internal Boundaries**

The emergence of internal boundaries in Nigeria was essentially for the administrative convenience of the British colonizing authority between 1900 and 1960. First to be created was the administrative boundary separating the Northern and Southern Protectorates described in a major Legal Notice No. 126 of 1954; then the boundary demarcating Western and Eastern Nigeria. Each of the regions was further broken into provinces for effective colonial control in economic exploitation, taxation and internal security. It is important to note that in spite of the limitations and complex political and administrative problems these boundaries generated, the boundaries that came on stream after independence generally adopted these colonial formations. For example, regional and state creation from three to four to twelve, nineteen, thirty and thirty six states followed the provincial administrative units with minor changes (Garuba, 1997:11).

According to Ekoko (1993), each of the four regions contained major/minor ethno-cultural groups of various communities. As the regions were further sub-divided into new states, new "majority" and new "minority" ethnic groups emerged, creating new boundary problems for successive administrations. Added to these were emirate/district boundaries in the North and divisional/district boundaries in the South. Where the British found conglomerates of tribes too small to be granted administrative "autonomy" they formulated local federation of tribes, like the J'amaa federation in the North and Itsekiri – Urhobo Division of Old Warri Province to mention a few. These administrative creations produced new problems in the immediate and long-term ranges. Today, almost all the local "federations" of the colonial past have been dissolved into new administrative units. But the colonial structures created political, administrative and many psychological problems and contradictions which are yet to vanish from the Nigerian political scene.

It must be noted that majority ethnic vs. minority ethnic group contradictions has now metamorphosed into ethnic nationalities question in Nigeria today. The rapidity and multiplicity of internal boundary creations over the years resulting in 36 states and 774 LGAs recognised by the constitution has put a heavy burden on internal boundary management in Nigeria. To underscore the complexity of administrative boundary problems in Nigeria, the Gowon regime introduced "Development Administration Areas", to address the question of localized development. In later days, with the emergence of new Chiefdoms and emirates in some of the Northern States and the phenomenon of "Autonomous Communities" in the South East, the hydra-headed and intricate problems of internal boundary management continue to increase.

Post colonial Nigeria has witnessed series of creation of more administrative units in the country. This in turn implies upholding colonially determined boundaries or establishing or demarcating new boundary lines. In 1963, the Mid-Western region was created out of the then Western region. Four years later, a more drastic restructuring of the nation was undertaken by the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon. This led to twelve states structure of Nigeria. Thereafter, another exercise of states creation was carried out in 1976 when

General Murtala Ramat Mohammed administration created a nineteen states structure for Nigeria. In 1987 and 1991, two and nine additional states were created respectively by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's administration. The regime of General Sani Abacha created another six new states in 1996, bringing to thirty six the number of states in the country excluding Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria). Ekoko (2001) noted that all the states creation exercises except that of 1963 were carried out side by side with the creation of more local government areas, chiefdoms, emirates etc. What emerged from the restructuring of Nigeria are thirty six states (excluding Abuja- the Federal Capital Territory), seven hundred and seventy four local government areas, several districts, villages and community areas.

### **Discourse on Internal Boundary Disputes in Nigeria**

It is becoming obvious in Nigeria that people of the same ethnic group, different ethnic group and even groups that have coexisted peacefully for decades can no longer live together due to persistent conflict over land and boundary. The conflict between Amagu/Adadama between Ebonyi and Cross River states, Aguleri/Umuleri in Anambra state, Ife- Modakeke in Osun state, between Demsa and Numan Local Government Areas of Adamawa. Others include: Ugep/Idoma, Fulani/Berom, Tiv/Jukun among several others. (Obono, 1999; Idowu, 2001; Oladoyin, 2001; Babajimi, 2003, Albert, 2001, 1999, Agbe 2001, Toriola 2001, Damson, 2015, Ibeanu, 2008) Also, internal boundary conflicts in Nigeria are becoming so catastrophic that the dead are not allowed to rest in peace. For example, in Cross River/Akwa Ibom conflict over Itu Bridgehead popularly called 'Volvo' market, graves were exhumed and corpses of "aliens" buried in "foreign" territories relocated for burial. Indeed, boundary conflicts have led to destruction of lives and properties, thousands of indigenes have suddenly become internally displaced persons consequent upon the boundary conflicts.

Ekoko (1987) noted that some consultant surveyors have not helped internal boundary management as their survey results were totally unscientific and technically faulted; Some Federal and State Governments have instituted commissions of inquiry to look into boundary problems; in some cases no white papers were issued; in others the reports and their white papers compound the original problems; some actions of the Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission especially in the oil producing states of the South-South zone have turned out to be dysfunctional and counter productive in internal boundary management; many Nigerians are either unable or unwilling to differentiate and distinguish between traditional boundaries which they claim from time immemorial and modern administrative boundaries or land ownership. According to Ekoko (2001), "the cumulative report card is that internal boundaries and their functional counterparts have created more security problems, claimed more lives and property than international boundaries in Nigeria. Yet, strangely, international boundaries have attracted the attention of more scholars than internal boundaries".

As states and local administrative units continued to be created, there grew with it conscious and dangerous inclination by Nigerians towards 'statism' at the expense of nationalism and patriotism leading to inter/intra state, inter/intra local government boundary conflicts and expansionists tendencies all in the quest for land and mineral resources. The scale and complexity of boundary conflicts led the Murtala-Obasanjo administration to appoint the Justice Nasir Boundary Adjustment Commission in 1976 to examine boundary disputes in Nigeria. In its report, the Nasir Commission traced the emergence of boundary disputes to the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates of Nigeria, precisely in 1917 when some people from Ilorin and Kabba provinces of Northern Nigeria demanded boundary adjustments in order to join their kith and kin in the western portion of the southern protectorate. Since the Justice Nasir Commission, the cry for boundary demarcation and adjustment has not ceased in Nigeria.

### **Discussion of Findings**

According to sources in National Boundary Commission (2017), there are eighty six (86) interstate boundaries in Nigeria. The table below outlines these boundaries:

**Table 1: Inter-State Boundaries in Nigeria According to Six Geo-Political Zone**

North-East	South-East	North-West	South-West	North-Central	South-South
Adamawa/ Bornu	Abia/Anambra	Jigawa/Kano	Ekiti/Ondo	Benue/Kogi	Akwa-Ibom/Cross-River
Adamawa/Gombe	Abia/Ebonyi	Jigawa/Katsina	Ekiti/Osun	Benue/Nasarawa	Akwa-Ibom/Rivers
Adamawa/Taraba	Abia/Enugu	Kaduna/Kano	Lagos/Ogun	FCT/Kogi	Bayelsa/Delta
Bauchi/Gombe	Abia/Imo	Kaduna/Katsina	Ogun/Ondo	FCT/Nasarawa	Bayelsa/Rivers
Bauchi/Taraba	Anambra/Enugu	Kaduna/Zamfara	Ogun/Osun	FCT/Niger	Delta/Edo
Bauchi/Yobe	Anambra/Imo	Kano/Katsina	Ogun/Oyo	Kogi/Kwara	Delta/Rivers
Bornu/Gombe	Ebonyi/Enugu	Katsina/Zamfara	Ondo/Osun	Kogi/Nasarawa	Cross-River/Benue
Bornu/Yobe	Anambra/Kogi	Kebbi/Sokoto	Osun/Oyo	Kogi/Niger	Cross-River/Ebonyi
Gombe/Taraba	Abia/Akwa-Ibom	Kebbi/Zamfara	Ekiti/Kogi	Nasarawa/Plateau	Delta/Ondo
Gombe/Yobe	Abia/Cross-River	Sokoto/Zamfara	Ekiti/Kwara	Kwara/Niger	Edo/Kogi
Bauchi/Plateau	Ebonyi/Benue	Jigawa/Yobe	Ondo/Kogi	Benue/Taraba	Rivers/Abia
Bauchi/Jigawa	Enugu/Benue	Kebbi/Niger	Osun/Kwara	Nasarawa/Taraba	Rivers/Anambra
Bauchi/Kano	Enugu/Kogi	Kaduna/Plateau	Oyo/Kwara	Plateau/Taraba	Rivers/Imo
Bauchi/Kaduna	Anambra/Delta	Zamfara/Niger	Ondo/Edo	FCT/Kaduna	Edo/Anambra
		Kaduna/Niger		Nasarawa/Kaduna	

Source: National Boundary Commission, (2017)

Furthermore, these inter-state boundaries can be categorized into two:

1. Resolved/Undisputed Boundaries in Nigeria - 38
2. Disputed Boundaries with On-Going action in Nigeria – 48

### Resolved/Undisputed Boundaries in Nigeria

These are boundaries that have been investigated, field traced, defined and resolved after series of meetings. There are thirty eight (38) boundaries in this category. However, it must be noted that there may still exist sectors of some of them that are still in dispute. The inter-state boundaries in this sector are outlined in the table below:

**Table 2: List of Resolved Boundaries in Nigeria**

S/N	States	S/N	States
1	Benue/Taraba	20	Ogun/Oyo
2	FCT/Kaduna	21	Osun/Kwara
3	FCT/Kogi	22	Oyo/Kwara
4	FCT/Nasarawa	23	Akwa Ibom/Cross River
5	FCT/Niger	24	Akwa Ibom/Rivers
6	Nasarawa/Kaduna	25	Bayelsa/Rivers
7	Nasarawa/Plateau	26	Cross River/Benue
8	Plateau/Taraba	27	Delta/Ondo
9	Nasarawa/Taraba	28	Delta/Rivers
10	Adamawa/Gombe	29	Edo/Kogi
11	Adamawa/Taraba	30	Jigawa/Kano
12	Bauchi/Jigawa	31	Jigawa/Yobe
13	Bauchi/Kaduna	32	Kaduna/Kano
14	Bauchi/Kano	33	Kaduna/Katsina
15	Bauchi/Plateau	34	Kaduna/Plateau
16	Bauchi/Taraba	35	Kaduna/Zamfara
17	Bauchi/Yobe	36	Ekiti/Kogi
18	Bornu/Gombe	37	Ekiti/Kwara
19	Gombe/Taraba	38	Lagos/Ogun

Source: National Boundary Commission, (2017)

### Disputed Boundaries with On-Going action in Nigeria

These are boundaries receiving National Boundaries Commission's attention and are at different stages of the intervention processes. There are forty eight (48) inter-state boundaries in this category. Some are at the initial stages of Joint Meetings of Officials, while some have advanced into the stages of preliminary field

investigations with reports yet to be considered. Some others have had their reports considered and the need for additional fieldworks and ethnographic studies have been identified for further necessary actions.

**Table 3: List of Disputed Boundaries with On-Going Action in Nigeria**

S/N	States	S/N	States
1	Benue/Kogi	25	Rivers/Imo
2	Benue/Nasarawa	26	Anambra/Edo
3	Kogi/Kwara	27	Jigawa/Katsina
4	Kogi/Nasarawa	28	Kaduna/Niger
5	Kogi/Niger	29	Kano/Katsina
6	Kwara/Niger	30	Katsina/Zamfara
7	Adamawa/Bornu	31	Kebbi/Niger
8	Bauchi/Gombe	32	Kebbi/Sokoto
9	Bornu/Yobe	33	Kebbi/Zamfara
10	Gombe/Yobe	34	Zamfara/Niger
11	Ekiti/Ondo	35	Abia/Akwa Ibom
12	Ekiti/Osun	36	Abia/Anambra
13	Ogun/Ondo	37	Abia/Cross River
14	Ogun/Osun	38	Abia/Ebonyi
15	Ondo/Edo	39	Abia/Enugu
16	Ondo/Kogi	40	Abia/Imo
17	Ondo/Osun	41	Anambra/Delta
18	Osun/Kwara	42	Anambra/Enugu
19	Osun/Oyo	43	Anambra/Kogi
20	Ondo/Osun	44	Anambra/Imo
21	Bayelsa/Rivers	45	Ebonyi/Enugu
22	Cross River/Ebonyi	46	Enugu/Benue
23	Delta/Edo	47	Enugu/Kogi
24	Rivers/Abia	48	Rivers/Anambra

Source: National Boundary Commission, (2017)

Table 3 reveals that Nigeria has forty eight (48) disputed yet to be resolved inter-state boundaries as against thirty eight (38) that have been successfully demarcated using different mechanisms out of eighty six (86) inter-state boundaries across the country. This implies that more than half of inter-state boundaries in the country are disputed.

### **Strategies adopted by National Boundary Commission in Managing Interstate Boundary Disputes in Nigeria**

While pursuing a policy of peaceful boundary coexistence with its neighboring countries, there was also a policy of replicating same in the various internal boundaries across the different states in Nigeria. Some of these interstates boundaries were colonially determined while others were demarcated by the federal government consequent upon state creation. The most fundamental feature of the policy on peaceful boundary coexistence was the establishment of a specialized agency, the National Boundary Commission (NBC) that, though legislated into existence by a law of 17 December 1987, began operation on a permanent basis in January 1989. The establishment of the commission was informed by the need to have an agency that focused on a detailed analysis of Nigerian and other African borderlands. Towards this end, the agency was empowered to among other things:

1. Intervene, and deal with any boundary disputes that may arise between Nigeria and any of her neighbors with a view to settling the dispute
2. Intervene, determine and deal with any boundary dispute that may arise among states, local government areas or communities in the Federation with a view to settling the disputes
3. Define, and delimitate boundaries between states, local government areas or communities in the Federation and between Nigeria and her neighbors in accordance with delimitation instrument or document established for that purpose
4. Take all necessary steps towards the implementation of resolutions on internal boundary disputes.

In carrying out its functions of managing Nigeria's boundaries, the National Boundary Commission operates by means of two standing committees:-

#### **International Boundaries Technical Committee (INBTC)**

The INBTC co-ordinates Nigeria's international boundary issues. Nigeria's international boundaries are grouped into land and maritime boundaries. Nigeria shares land boundaries with Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon while

her maritime boundaries is shared with Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Benin Republic, Republic of Cameroon and Ghana in the Gulf of Guinea. The International Boundaries Technical Committee's efforts in this line are geared towards the enhancement of peaceful coexistence among border communities, good neighbourliness and the promotion of African brotherhood. Hence, its activities are hinged on the promotion of peaceful boundary regime, trans-border cooperation and promotion of Nigeria's national interest generally.

#### **Inter-State Boundaries Technical Committee (ISTBC).**

Inter-State Boundaries Technical Committee ( ISBTC) of the National Boundary Commission oversees issues related to interstate boundaries so as to ensure dispute prevention, resolution and the nurturing and sustenance of trans-border relationships. As a strategy, the National Boundary Commission takes all contending parties in internal boundary disputes as stakeholders whose participation in the dispute resolution processes is crucial. Accordingly, the states, local governments, border communities and security agencies are incorporated into the dispute resolution processes. The various processes are conducted through:

1. Joint Meeting of Officials (JMO);
2. Joint Consultative Committee (JCC);
3. Joint Field Team (JFT) and Ad Hoc verification and ethnographic survey teams. All these processes are coordinated by the Inter-State Boundaries Technical Committee and forwarded to the National Boundary Commission. By virtue of the enabling law of the National Boundary Commission, State governors are members of the National Boundary Commission whenever issue(s) on their boundaries are presented for deliberations.

#### **Conclusion**

The incidence of boundary disputes in Nigeria has continued to be on the increase. Indeed, boundary related violent conflicts has led to loss of lives and properties. Most of the interstate boundaries in Nigeria were colonially determined. Consequently, these boundaries have continued to be sources of conflict between and among neighbouring states and local governments. Therefore, there is need to examine the functionality and sustainability of these boundary lines so as to reduce their conflict potentials.

#### **Recommendations**

Deriving from issues that emerged in the course of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need to establish a conflict resolution department in the National Boundary Commission so as to ensure that experts are utilized.
2. Government needs to pay holistic attention to issues of boundary dispute as it is gradually escalating in Nigeria
3. The National Boundary Commission should be supported to increase its manpower.

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