

The Application of Ethnographic Studies in the Management of South-South Interstate Boundaries of Nigeria

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Abstract

Boundary disputes in the South-South (SS) Zone and the frequent conflicts exhibited along the interstate and inter-zonal boundaries of Nigeria have lingered for some time now. The paper argues that poor governance, poor infrastructural development, increased agitations for resource control, restiveness of minority ethnic groups and perceived domination by majority groups are some of the kick factors in boundary disputes in the SS Zone. The paper posits that the inability to set up an investigation team that would traverse the boundary corridor and recommend enabling and effective boundary management strategies further aggravates boundary disputes in the Zone, and recommends that the conduct of ethnographic studies by the National Boundary Commission (NBC) should be considered as part of the activities and Policy enablers in Boundary definition and management.

Keywords; *Boundary, Ethnography, Management, Peace, Policy, Research.*

Introduction

The geographical entity now known as Nigeria started as a collection of societies, which organized themselves into identifiable political systems of ethnic communities, kingdoms and empires (Dafe, 2008). However, the advent of colonialism brought in its wake, the drawing of Nigeria's National and Regional boundaries and subsequent boundary disputes that followed and persists. With reference to literature and personal experience, this paper will focus on the application of Ethnographic Studies in the definition and management of interstate boundary disputes in the South-South (SS) Zone of Nigeria. To do this, the paper x-rays perspectives of interstate boundaries in Nigeria and the SS in particular and concludes with adoptive strategies for the management of SS interstate boundaries.

Definition of Key Concepts

Boundary: This can be defined as the dividing line or location between two areas. The Encyclopedia Britannica aptly defines boundary as ‘any object serving to indicate limit or confine’. As a limiting measure, geographical boundaries are usually very important to communities, states and nations. Such boundaries can be categorized into land and sea boundaries. Thus, boundary disputes between adjacent villages, neighboring districts, local government areas, states and even nations are common phenomena in all inhabited parts of the world.

Ethnography: Historically, ethnography refers to the interdisciplinary subject arising out of qualitative research traditions in sociology and anthropology. Ethnography is thus defined as the systematic study of people and cultures. It refers to the research approach that uses ethnography to study or investigate events. As a research tool, it is defined by its attempt to generate participant’s insight from aspects of a people’s life and data is typically collected

through participation in normal settings. It is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study. The resulting field study report therefore reflects in-depth knowledge and understanding of the way of life and value system of the cultural group or people studied.

Research: Research is a compound word composed of two syllables, namely; ‘re’ and ‘search’. While ‘re’ is a prefix which means again or over again, ‘search’ is a verb which means to examine carefully or to probe closely or more deeply. Used together, these two words form a noun describing a careful and systematic study or inquiry or investigation into some field of knowledge to increase or revise current knowledge by discovering new facts. It has been defined as a structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge that is generally applicable. Simply put, it refers to a search for knowledge.

Research is commonly classified into two general categories, namely, basic research and applied research. While **basic research** is inquiry aimed at increasing scientific knowledge, **applied research** is effort aimed at using basic research for solving problems or developing new processes, products or technique. Research is thus a careful and rigorous process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information or data to answer questions.

Management: Is a process of planning, decision-making, organizing, leading, motivation and controlling the human resources, financial, physical and information resources of an organization to reach its goals efficiently and effectively.

Policy: This is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions.

Historical Perspectives

Boundary and *territorial disputes* often stem from material and/or cultural claims; sometimes they may also emerge as a result of fundamental changes in domestic and international environments. In certain circumstances, boundary and territorial disputes may even evolve into geopolitical games of big powers rivalry and competition. Sometimes, it is very difficult to clarify the real causes behind a specific case of territorial dispute (Guo, 2012).

African boundaries are known to have emerged as fallout of the Berlin West Africa Conference of November, 1884 to February, 1885 which regulated the scramble for Africa by imperial Europe and thus introduced Africa to the **Westphalian** concept of well-defined borders (Ahmad, 2015). The Westphalian concept of borders emerged following the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia on October 24th 1648, which gave precise and well-defined borders for European Nation States. The borders that emerged in Africa are therefore artificial and arbitrary as testified by the Colonial Actors themselves (Lord Salisbury in 1906) and other border scholars such as Asiwaju, (1984).

Such terms as Chieftoms, Emirates, Autonomous Communities, Local Government Areas and States and previously, Districts, Divisions, Provinces, Regions and Protectorates represent a defined limit of authority or jurisdiction. Bobbo, (2005) further agrees that the term boundary is used to refer to an administrative line which delineates or demarcates the scope of two or more administrative jurisdictions.

Also, Asiwaju (1984) describes a border to refer more commonly to the boundaries between politically sovereign territorial entities and is therefore viewed as the line that

demarcates one country from another. Accordingly, a border can be defined as a geographical boundary and legal jurisdiction of political entities such as Sovereign States, Federated States, Governments and Sub-national entities. It is generally regarded as the representation of a people's culture and history.

Nigeria's Interstate Boundaries

In 1954 when Nigeria became a full-fledged federation, the country had only three large regions. Each consisted of a regional nucleus occupied mostly by dominant ethnic groups, Yoruba in the west, Ibo in the east and Hausa/Fulani in the north with a peripheral zone occupied by various minority ethnic groups. The then structure led to increased agitations by various minority ethnic groups for the creation of their own states in which they would feel safe from domination by the majority ethnic groups. This agitation prompted the British Government in September 1957 to appoint the Minority Commission with Sir Henry Willink as Chairman (see Willink's Report, 1958).

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited boundaries that evolved during the colonial era. The internal boundaries include those of 24 provinces that were being run in three (3) clusters of geographical administrative regions. These regions became four (4) when the mid-western region was later carved out. In 1967, the four (4) regions were replaced by 12 states. Seven (7) more states were created in 1976 followed by the creation of two (2) more in 1987 and another nine (9) in 1991. Finally, in 1996, the number of states increased to 36 with the Federal Capital Territory (NBC Records).

Before NBC came on board in 1987, only a few of these boundaries were demarcated while the other remained indefinite, meaning that they were not officially surveyed. These boundaries were covered by various forms of legal instruments and supported by relevant maps on which the boundaries were delineated. There are currently a total number of 86 interstate boundaries that represent the definitions of the limits of all the 36 States and the FCT from their adjacent neighbours. In each of the 774 LGAs, there are several other districts, village areas, autonomous communities, emirates, chiefdoms etc.

It is pertinent to note that the process of state creation involved the alteration of internal boundaries. While states were being created, the relevant organs of the federal government that should be consulted were not. In the final analysis, the affected communities rejected many of the boundaries on the ground that they were neither consulted nor their views sought in making the boundaries. The issue of state creation became a nagging problem that plagued this nation from its very inception occasioned by continuous delineation of regions, provinces, divisions, districts, native authorities, local community development areas among others. As pointed out by Ekoko (2007), internal boundary disputes in Nigeria have become a veritable threat to peace and national security and good governance.

Fatile et al (1998), argues that the boundaries created by the colonial master cut across ethnic groups, cultures, families as described by the various administration's gazettes and legal notices. In most cases, tribal groups were not taken into consideration as the increase in rural population and expansion of agricultural zones of each defined community aggravated border disputes/tensions. It is important to state that there is hardly any community in Nigeria which has not been involved in boundary disputes (Uyi, 1998). In fact, the question of size, number

and appropriate composition of the states/units has often aroused debate right from the inception of Nigeria as a federation.

Since many of the existing units were simply the arbitrary or accidental product of British Colonial administration and bore little relation to linguistic, cultural and economic groupings within these societies, the possibility of redrawing provincial or state boundaries to coincide with cultural and other interests has been problematic in Nigeria.

Perspectives on SS Internal Boundary Disputes

The Six states that make up the SS are namely: Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Edo. However, with increase in the rate of internal migration after the Civil War, the SS zone has thus become multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, especially in the major urban centers like Calabar, Port Harcourt, Asaba, Yenagoa, Uyo and Benin City which has become the melting pot of the nation. Its boundaries are interregional, interstate, inter-local government and intercommunity.

Boundary disputes are a common phenomenon in the SS. High population growth and indeed spillovers along and astride interstate and inter-zonal boundaries, natural disasters; environmental issues etc, are common features of this zone, and have continued to put increasing pressure on scarce land and its resources and therefore constitute causative factors that further aggravate boundary disputes in the zone.

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 limitation and complex political and administrative problems these boundaries have generated, the boundaries that came on stream after independence generally adopted these colonial formations.

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 emirates/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’amma federation in the North and Itsekiri-Urhobo Division of Old Warri Province to mention a few.

It must be noted that majority ethnic versus minority ethnic group contradictions have 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 recognized by the constitution has put a heavy burden on internal boundary management in the South-South zone of Nigeria. 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 is becoming obvious in Nigeria that people of the same ethnic group, different ethnic groups and even groups that had hitherto coexisted peacefully for decades can no longer live together due to persistent conflicts over land and boundary.

In the South-South zone, disputed access to land by *natives* and *settlers* has served as basis for violent conflicts among members of the two major ethnic groups in the zone. To the *natives*, *settlers* are migrant who should neither own nor lay any claim to land rights in any part of their communities, which others see it differently. The resulting tension created by the opposing frameworks and perceptions of land ownership among these groups is at the root of the violent conflicts experienced in the zone especially in recent time. Violent communal conflicts driven mainly by land-based disputes have occurred among members of border communities of Ukuani (Delta State) and Orhionmwon (Edo State), Mgbede Agwe, Odugiri (Rivers state) and Oguta, Awara (Imo State).

Other conflict areas include Okpella, Ekpedo (Edo State) and Ogori, Oguda in Okene LGA (Kogi State), Ikpanya (Akwa Ibom State) and Ntan Obu (Cross River State) and the host of others. These internal boundary conflicts in SS zone are presently becoming more devastating. Indeed, boundary conflicts in the zone have led to the destruction of lives and property; thousands of indigenes have suddenly become internally displaced persons’.

Selected Cases of Boundary Disputes Along Inter-zonal and Interstate Boundaries Involving SS States

Interstate boundary dispute:

Bayelsa /Rivers

Hostility in Kula (Rivers State) and Nembe (Bayelsa State) communities along the Interstate Boundary following oil-mining activity by SPDC.

Akwa Ibom/Cross River

Clash over land dispute between Oku Iboku Community in Itu LGA, Akwa Ibom State and Ikot Offiong in Odukpani LGA, Cross River State where several persons were reportedly missing and houses burnt.

Delta/Edo

There has been series of attacks on the border Communities over boundary dispute in Orhionmwon and Esan South-East LGA of Edo State and Ethiope East and Ukwuani LGA of Delta State.

Inter zonal Boundary Disputes: Abia/Cross River

There has been renewed hostility along the boundary line of Abia/Cross River interstate boundary between Isu community in Arochukwu LGA of Abia State and Utuma, Ukuwa communities of Biase council area, Odukpani LGA of Cross River State. The renewed hostility began following the

Abia/Akwa Ibom

discovery of limestone deposit in Isu community, but Utuma community was allegedly laying claim to the site.

Boundary dispute between Nkari community in Ini LGA, Akwa Ibom State and Usaka in Ikwuano LGA, Abia State where people were reportedly killed and others abducted during the ensuring clash.

Cross River/Ebonyi

There has also been renewed boundary clashes between the Apiampkum, Ijaga and Oruenya communities of Obubara LGA of Cross River State and the Obeagulbom, Amachi and Izzi Communities of Izzi LGA of Ebonyi State, where people have confirmed dead and been others declared missing.

Benue/Cross River:

There have been sustained boundary hostilities between the Ugep community in Obanlinku LGA of Cross River State and Mbakunu community in kwande boundary dispute left in its wake casualties of death and wounded and destruction of properties worth millions of naira.

***Inter-local Government Boundary
Disputes: Abi/Ikwo
(Cross River/Ebonyi)***

In January, 2013, Ndiagu Amagu community in Ikwo LGA of Ebonyi State reportedly clashed with Adadama Community in Abi LGA of Cross River State over land dispute along the boundary line of both States. During the incident, over a dozen people were reportedly killed in the course of a weeklong hostility.

Boki/Etung (Cross River State)

The two LGA's experienced inter-communal land disputes in 2012- 2013 In Boki, Cross River State, hostilities between the Nsadop and Boje communities in April 2012, reportedly led to the death of three persons. Also in Etung, Cross River State, five people were reportedly killed in a clash between the two communities in April, 2013. The clash was anchored on disagreement over a parcel of land.

In October, 2013, for the Akparabong community in Ikom LGA and their

Intercommunity Boundary dispute Akparabong/Bendeghe Ekim (Cross River State) Bendeghe Ekim neighbours in Etung LGA, Cross River Central, these were not the best of times as both communities engaged in a communal clash as a result of disagreement over a parcel of land, which resulted in the loss of several lives and properties. Many people were also displaced from their homes in the process.

In summary, boundary disputes in the SS are caused by conflicting historical claims over forest reserves, farm lands, perceived administrative injustices, shared resources along disputed boundaries, the issue of overflowing ethnic groupings along and astride interstate boundaries, traditional land use as against legal notices, which are some of the common traits exhibited along the interstate and inter-zonal boundaries of the SS region.

The Concept of Ethnographic Study

Ethnography Study is part of the management strategies of the NBC in its search for enduring trans-border cooperation, good neighbourliness, and mutual development among border communities. The notion of ethnographic study as conceived is applied fieldwork. It is a study that investigates innate human factors, collate data and diagnose them for policy options. In its effort to manage disputes, conduct of ethnographic studies across Nigerian border communities especially in flashpoint areas as seen in the SS is given desirable attention.

Naturally, people who inhabit an area usually attach a sense of ownership or belonging to such area and hold on to the prevailing culture or religious practices as their identity. The notion wittingly creates boundary problems since their strong attachment to an undemarcated territorially claimed space make them feel that their perceived boundary must be accepted as the administrative boundary. Originally developed by anthropologists studying the cultures of non-western societies, this study is now used in other fields of social research, such as regional studies, border management, conflict management, human interactions etc.

In consonance with the mandate of NBC as enshrined in the 2006 Establishment Act, the following represent the main objectives of Ethnographic Study.

- To create a new awareness and perception of "boundary" as a "bridge" rather than a "wall".
- To bring border communities to understand that boundary is a mere "administrative convenience" which facilitates governance, thus ensuring that basic infrastructure, enlightenment, information, development and other dividends of democracy will reach the grassroots in different parts of the country.
- To re- educate and re-orientate Nigerian communities especially in flashpoint areas towards a more liberal concept of nationhood in order to help them break out from their ethnocentric fixations which make them tribalistic and sectional in attitude and mentality.

- To unearth, through the socio-cultural and historical past of the border communities, their shared values, in order to facilitate good neighbourliness and cross-border cooperation.
- To facilitate the demarcation effort of boundaries, especially at stretches where there are grey areas, e.g., where the legal instruments are hazy or unclear, or where there is remarkable tension. It is therefore used to compliment the technical methods in order to determine the true position of such boundaries.

It is posited that for boundary disputes in the SS zone to be properly managed, Ethnographic Study should play a pivotal role. Accordingly, the rest of the paper will discuss the process of achieving an acceptable boundary management technique among communities along the interstate and inter-zonal boundaries of the SS zone.

The Application of Ethnographic Studies in Boundary Management:

One of the main advantages associated with **ethnographic research** is that it can help identify and analyze unexpected issues. Ethnographic study/research is vital to understanding a certain cultural or social setting (Hobbs, 2011). The process involves the ethnographer to closely observe record and engage in the daily life of the people in naturally occurring settings. There is a growing recognition of the significance of ethnographic study as an approach for dispute resolution and boundary management in Nigeria. Generally, gaps in information about and understanding of border communities in the SS whose beliefs, behaviour, languages, traditions and culture differ from one another as in the case of inter-zonal boundaries (i.e. Edo-Ondo, Benue-Cross River) and interstate boundaries (i.e. Bayelsa-Rivers, Delta-Edo) can present a barrier to effective boundary management. To this end, gaps can be appropriately filled by the use of this approach.

Since discussions on boundary management are gradually expanding from the initial focus on the descriptive analysis of the location of the line separating states to the study of the dynamics of the bordering process as it impacts society and space. This approach has gradually gained more importance in the management of boundaries, as more in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of border communities have become critical to the process as the boundaries of SS have socio-economic and cultural consequences. This research approach is required not only to gain insight into how people at the border communities live and interact with each other in a social system, but also useful when proposing demarcation exercises that would ultimately lead to peaceful and acceptable boundaries.

In support of this approach, Dean (2012) argues that this is the only way to research in boundary communities. In adopting this view therefore, it is necessary to point out that a critical historical engagement in the SS zone is required to study the long-term impact that boundaries have on people's lives, hence incorporating an appreciation of everyday human experience. Having noted the causes and nature of boundary disputes in the SS which are complex and multifaceted, determining the ownership of a piece of land or the direction of the boundary line may often be complicated because of variegated interests; the solution cannot be provided through a simple technical or survey approach. More specifically, these issues are best addressed through the use of Ethnographic study approach.

For instance, in boundary management, there are cases where legal title may give way to the principle of *affectivity* as proposed by Ekoko et al, (effective occupation), as colonial treaty instruments are often vague. This may be applied especially where the features mentioned as reference have disappeared over time and the maps attached are obsolete. It therefore becomes imperative to be guided by the long existing socio-cultural relations among the populations. Another management approach to boundaries of the SS can be through investigation by means of traversing part or whole of the disputed area before suggesting a boundary line. It must be emphasized at this juncture that this approach could proffer faster solution considering the present boundary disputes in the zone.

Giving credence to this approach, Adejuyigbe (1978) opined that investigation into the causes of boundary disputes and ultimate solution is one of the earliest activities of the colonial officers in the South-South part of Nigeria. The investigation led to boundary delimitation or establishment of boundary marks. This approach can be replicated to resolve boundary problems in the zone.

Adejuyigbe (ibid) further elaborated that the colonial authority normally rely on the investigation provided by the residents and subsequently made recommendations to the district officers in charge of the disputed communities. To this end, each district officer investigated the claim of the community under him or her. After the reconciliation, they would make joint recommendations which would be sent to the resident and each community for consideration. Information provided by the Oba and chiefs as well as the field workers in the boundary area were usually relied upon by the district officer in the conduct of their investigation. Accordingly, this achieved feat can be modernized and replicated in the SS zone to further manage disputed boundaries.

Also, ethnographic study approach can be achieved in this region through routine visits to the target community (ies) with boundary issues where discussions are held with the Local Government Area Chairmen, Traditional rulers, the Youth, Community leaders, Women leaders, and other stakeholders in pre-arranged locations. During the visit, historical data and facts relating to the relevant sections of the boundary can be collected for proper diagnosis. Such information include treaties, Court Judgments as well as other documents such as exchange of notes and correspondences, agreements between the British, German and French Colonial officers etc.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to note that boundary questions go beyond technical issues of adjusting lines of demarcation and survey of boundaries; it involves the management of land, mineral, water, forest reserves/ resources as well as the whole pattern of economic and socio - cultural relationships between different communities along these boundaries. Thus, for a region that is prone to frequent problem of boundaries, the pattern of resource management and the question of the level of interstate and interregional relationships, integration and cross border cooperation cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

Ethnographic Study/research is a peace-brokering approach which major objective is to address and if possible, diffuse all forms of tensions emanating from boundaries such as serious boundary crisis, violence and destruction of lives and property. This it does by identifying and utilizing appropriate means of persuading border communities to appreciate the

need to live together in peace, co- operation and pursuit of mutual development and welfare strategies with their neighbours. If this approach is given support by the state governments in the SS zone, it will go a long way to put to rest the lingering boundary disputes in the zone.

Recommendations

- The conduct of Ethnographic Study should be considered as part of the activity and policy framework of States' Boundary Committees to further enhance the effective operation of boundary dispute management in the zone. In this regard, state governments should mobilize resources, personnel to support NBC and their various State' Boundary Committees whenever the exercise is being carried out in the State/zone.
- State governments in the zone should ensure that resources along the disputed boundaries should be jointly utilized to encourage cross border cooperation for the benefit of people of the border community (ies).
- The state governments should take the issue of minorities more seriously. They should be allowed to fully participate in the Political, Social and Economic development of the state especially on issues that affect them. Doing this will give them a sense of belonging and may stem the spate of crisis on disputed boundaries.
- In addition to the Joint Meeting of Officials (JMO) as first intervention strategy on disputed boundaries, an investigation team should be constituted that will comprise the federal government, States representatives of the disputed communities, enabled with the task to carry out inventory of communities along the disputed boundaries, identify their respective claims and make recommendations accordingly.
- In the promotion of peaceful co-existence, the survival of the country should be put above parochial sentiments. Considering the pivotal role of border communities as territories of first contact in interstate relationships, efforts should be made to protect the lives of the people at the border communities in their respective domain.
- The state governments should continue to cater for the needs of the border communities. Neglect, particularly in the exploitation of resources along the disputed areas, poor governance and lack of state and local government presence are some of the key factors in the emergence of boundary issues.

APPENDIX A.

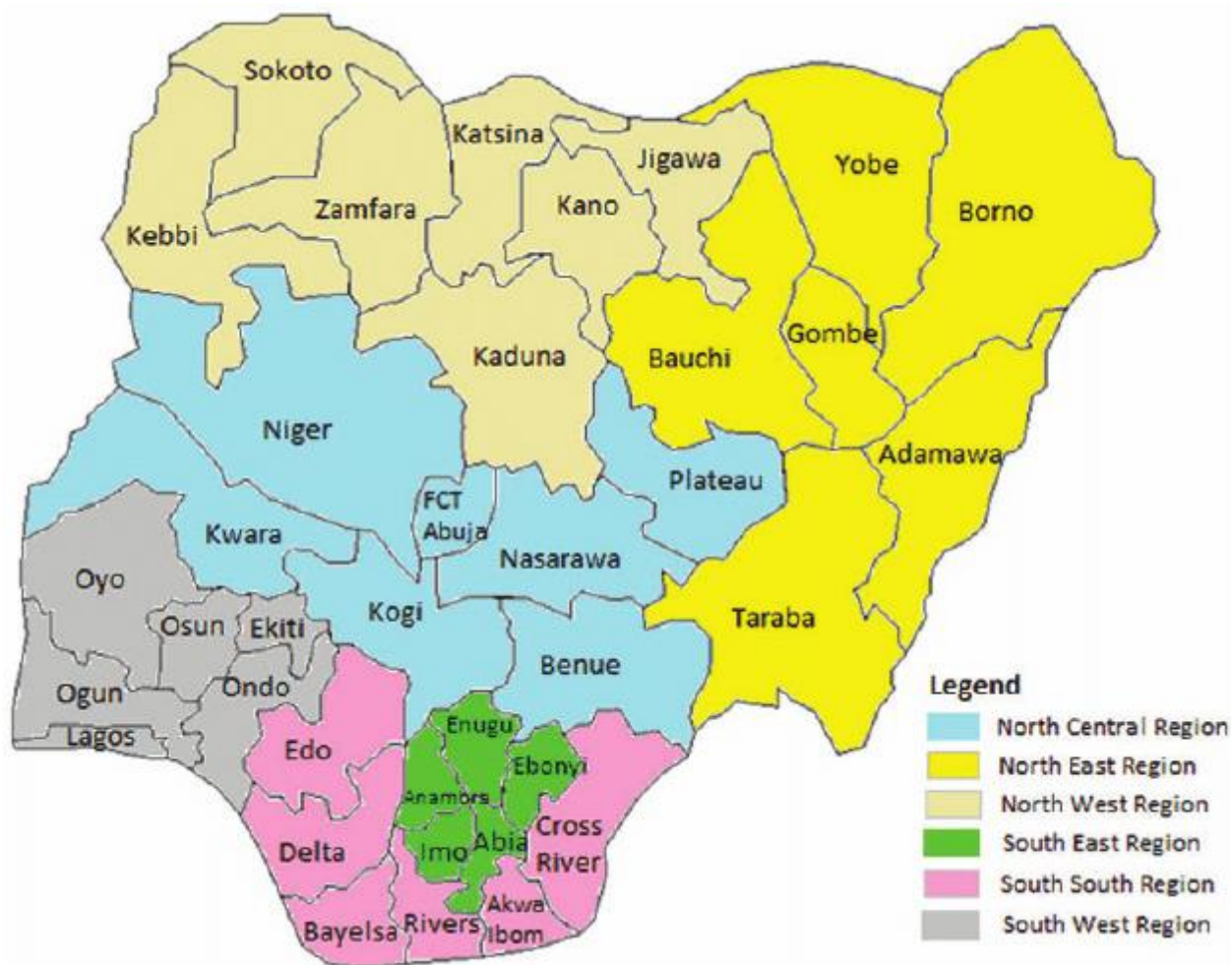
Map of Nigeria Showing the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory



SOURCE: 2017 AnnaMap.com

APPENDIX B.

Map of Nigeria Showing the Six Geopolitical Zones and Their States



SOURCE: 2017 AnnaMap.com

APPENDIX C.

MAP OF THE SOUTH-SOUTH GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA.



SOURCE: www.researchgate.net

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