

# Poor Coordination Among Government Departments and Border Control Agencies: Its Impact on South African Porous Borders

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**Abstract:** This paper is focusing on the challenges of border control and coordination which are experienced by some of the government departments and agency in South Africa. This is a conceptual paper which the author relied mostly on secondary data. The South African borders are managed by several departments and government agency such as the Department of Home Affairs which is taking the lead, South African Police Service (SAPS) South African National Defence Force (SANDF), Department of Transport, Department of Environmental Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and South African Receiver of Revenue (SARS, Customs). All these departments have different command structures with different aims, work ethics and mandates. At some border posts, departments are housed in disconnected buildings and this continue to make sharing of information impossible. There is no institutional mechanism that provides for accountability of the various departments and their agencies, and there is no platform that links their information or IT systems. The paper concludes that good coordination should be taken into account when addressing the issues of border management in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Coordinated border management, Customs, Immigration, Integration, Porosity

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## 1. Introduction

Border can be defined as a geographical entity, comprising elements of the natural and built environments that define the boundary and control passage across it. It is a general concept which encapsulates the international normative concept of border as the line of separation between two sovereign states (Anderson, 2013; Rigg, 2017). Barka (2012), define border as a location where multiple of government agencies such as Revenue authority – Customs; immigration; security-police; Ministry of Health; Bureau of Standards are involved in the various documents and goods control, the calculation and collection of duties and taxes, as well as immigration.

The legal and illegal immigrants cross the South African borders daily. However, it is difficult to tackle problem of illegal immigrants because they spread across many areas of public policy and affect many sensitive interests. In South Africa, there are factors that complicate the issues and make credible, sustainable policies of migration management more difficult to achieve. It is believed that South Africa is being swamped by mostly illegal immigrants, largely from neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho and others because they take advantage of lack of

control at the borders (Schlemmer, 2006). The illegal or unauthorised migration from most part of SADC region like Zimbabwe and Mozambique has been part of regional migration to South Africa for many years and it still continue to this date (Crush & Peberdy, 2018). Immigrants enter South Africa very easily because of the porosity of borders within the country. The South African National Defence Force and South African Police Services can only be able to arrests one out of every four people who cross the borders (Maharaj, 2001).

Border control and management is more concerned with the administration of borders in a country. However, it is fundamentally important to note that this may differ according to national context, it frequently relates to the rules, techniques and procedures regulating activities and traffic across the border zones. Furthermore, border management and control can be taken to compromise the systems, process and procedures followed which is also regarded as guiding a country's border agencies and departments in ensuring that there is order and flow of traffic across the country's borders with other countries (Mackey, 2008; Shayanowako, 2013). As emphasised by Pécoud and De Guchteneire (2006), different countries continue to experience difficulties in controlling migration for multiple reasons.

This paper is intended to identify and understand how poor coordination at the border posts influence lack of control and make the borders so porous. Questions raised in this paper are: What really lead to poor coordination at the South African borders and how does this affect border management and control? And how important is information sharing to avoid duplicate of responsibilities? The answer to the inquiry questions will be based on an extended review and analysis of literature.

## **2. Poor Coordination and Border Control in South Africa**

In all South African borders, there are numerous government departments involved with the border control and management. All the departments have to deal with people, goods, means of conveyance, and the regulation of commercial activity and the prevention/combating of illegal activities on a daily basis. The following are the key departments responsible for border control, South African Receiver of Revenue (SARS), South African Police Service (SAPS) Dept. of Home Affairs (DHA), Dep. of Environmental Affairs, Dep. of Transport, Dept. of Health, Dept. of Agriculture and the South African National Defence Force. However, the coordination and working relations amongst the departments poses a significant challenge for effective coordination of the key border control and security functions at the shared borders and ports of entry (Taute, 2007).

In South African borders structures have been in place for quite some time now to facilitate co-operation between the different government departments involved in border control. Although this collective approach has been followed for nearly six years, problems are still experienced such as a lack of proper communication in all levels. There is a lack of communication between the agencies working in the same field, resulting in the loss of valuable information on crime and crime syndicates. Lack of trust that exists between agencies involved in border control at ground level, resulting in accusations of corruption continues to be a serious issue (Siavhundu & Nyabunze, 2020).

## **3. The Importance of Border Management and Coordination**

Okumu (2011) posits that border management which is commonly defined as the government functions of immigration, customs and excise, as well as

policing, with the aim of controlling and regulating the inflow of people and goods across a country's border/boundary in the national interest, in particular economic development, security, peace, law and order. It is further indicated that border management is more about the maintenance of boundary that mark the physical limits of a country's territory, South Africa included.

The government departments responsible for border control should work together to achieve their aims and objectives. However, the challenge is when the departments have different aim and objectives, i.e. the aim of SARS is not necessarily the same aim as Home Affairs or Department of Health. This problem of not having the same objective leads to weak coordination. There is an absence of uniform national standards (Steinberg, 2005), Moreover, one of the most significant shortcomings in South Africa's desire to achieve the world class standards in border control and management is lack of collective management by all the departments concerned. This leads to duplication of responsibilities and in turn make management and coordination very weak (Steinberg, 2005).

According to Hardmaker and Singh (2002), the border control in South Africa is the responsibility of different departments and they have different functions. The external controls are the responsibility of four agencies which are the South African Police Services, (Immigration, Home Affairs), Customs (Revenue) and, to a lesser extent, the South African Defence Force. Besides, the Department of Home Affairs continues to be primarily responsible for policy issues, making administrative determinations on residential status (including temporary permits for work, business, study or medical reasons), immigration permits and refugee status and exercises some external border control. The Police service plays the most substantial role in terms of manpower, enforcing internal control measures (detecting, apprehending and detaining suspected undocumented migrants) and manning several of the land border posts, in some cases jointly with Home Affairs. In addition to regulating the movement of persons, the police are also responsible for detecting illegal smuggling of goods and prohibited items (drugs, weapons, etc.) and, together with Customs, regulating the transport of legal goods. Lack of control has an effect not only on the policing of the country's borders, but also on the activities of crime syndicates active in the cross border smuggling

of drugs, illegal immigrants, firearms and other goods, as well as on the illegal export of stolen cars and endangered species (Minnaar, 2001).

### **3.1 Integration of Government Departments and Agency Responsible for Border Management**

Lack of integration is a major security failure when personnel, such as police, military and intelligence do not coordinate with each other at the borders. Government departments are struggling to do work closely to enhance border management by sharing of information and undertaking joint border patrols. It requires integration and cooperation among all the parties concerned to have effective border management (Okumu, 2011).

### **3.2 Collaboration Among the Government Departments to Ensure Effective Border Management**

The Collaborative Border Management (CBM) concept is based on the premise that agencies and the international and local community need to work together to achieve common aims that benefit all parties. Moreover, the CBM could only become progressively effective if departments and law enforcement agencies responsible for border management will be able to gather, collate and share data and all relevant information (Carrera, 2007). This will encourage and present opportunities for officials in different departments at the border posts and knowledge sharing culture, and it will result in a border management strategy that is built on proactive decision making. This collaboration will allow departments to work closely with each other, forming an inter-departmental approach for the sake of effective management. This will make the job easier at the borders because there will be a common aim (Doyle, 2010). Responsibility sharing is about coordinating and streamlining administrative and control tasks among border control agencies for the sake of effective border management. Jain (2012) argue that in most of the times the departments work independently, without a full understanding of what the other departments are doing and without regard to the consequences of multiple inspections of the same goods, this takes time and frustrate the clients who expect proper service.

There are insufficient border control information systems, and this means that there is no border control

authorities which have access to all the information necessary for fully effective operations at the ports of entry (Siavhundu & Nyabunze, 2020). The collapse and lack of information sharing is so severe that South Africa is not in a position to undertake a global border control risk assessment and thus cannot allocate its border control resources rationally. Lack of information has a negative impact on the operation at the borders and some departments will appear to be useless. However, it is so critical that the departments are able to share information and work as a team to achieve their end results. The country faces real risks because of shortcomings in its border control and this continues to make it easy for the illegal migrants to enter South Africa because of its weaknesses (Steinberg, 2005). Hennop, (2001) further argued that there is lack of trust among the department officials and that is why they do not share information. The departments are expected to work together to avoid any duplication, where there is information about illegal entrance the SAPS and SANDF should be able to liaise with the Department of Home Affairs. In a situation where there is an alleged smuggling of goods, it is important that the information reaches the Customs desk as they are responsible for goods coming into the country and going out of the country. However, there is a lack of communication between the agencies working in the same field, resulting in the loss of valuable information on crime and more corruption (Siavhundu & Nyabunze, 2020).

### **3.3 The Fundamentals of Coordinated Border Management (CBM)**

There is one most important non-physical barrier that is affecting international communities at the border crossings and that is excessive delays aggravated by a lack of coordination and cooperation among agencies and departments at the border posts. However, the reason for delays is because each of these departments has a different mandate with regard to goods and people crossing the borders, taxations, health related issues as well as criminal element. The departments end up rendering themselves useless and that is the reason why some people end up wanting to bribe officials to avoid the long waiting (Jain, 2012).

## **4. Porosity Borders and its Effect on South Africa**

According to Crush and Perbedy (2018), illegal human mobility is a challenge in South Africa and

will remain a problem for decades to come if the country is not doing anything about the weak borders. This undocumented migration has been part of regional migration (SADC) to South Africa for decades. Moreover, lack of control at the borders contribute to the illegal entrance to the country, migrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi comprise the majority of undocumented migrants in South Africa. The undocumented migration to South Africa continues to present a new and overwhelming problem for the post-apartheid South African citizens, and this poses a threat to the government of the day (Croucher, 1998; Crush, 2001). The undocumented immigrants are involved in organised crime syndicates and are responsible for a significant number of car hijackings, vehicle thefts, armed robberies (especially cash-in-transit and bank robberies), burglaries of homes, businesses, commercial crimes and even certain types of shoplifting due to poverty and unemployment because not all illegal migrants are able to secure jobs (Schönteich & Louw, 2001).

#### 4.1 The Flow of Undocumented Migrants in South Africa

In the African continent South Africa is the main magnet to migrants and remains the number one receiving country, and migration to South Africa is a well-established household poverty reduction strategy (Sebola, 2008). As noted by Bloch (2008), South Africa shares borders with a number of countries in the SADC region, and migration from these neighbouring countries has been described by the media as a 'revolving door syndrome' where migrants are deported and then return back to South Africa the following day and this costs the state more money.

The immigrants continue to cross illegally into South Africa because it costs money to obtain all the legal and necessary documents which will help them enter the country legally. One other thing that attract migrants to South Africa which most South Africans see it as a threat is the fact that there is a demand for the cheap and easily disposed of labour that undocumented migrants can offer in certain sectors of the economy like farming, construction and other. Immigrants are so desperate to get to South Africa and run away from poverty in their home countries, and the complicity of some government officials facilitates their illegal entry into South Africa which increases a level of corruption at the

borders. Furthermore, the moment the migrants accept the jobs, it means the South Africans will be left without jobs and this may lead to tension between the host citizens and the outsiders (Waller, 2006; Mawadza, 2008).

#### 4.2 Social and Economic Challenge

Illegal migration poses serious economic and social problems. Majority are involved in criminal activities and contribute to high rate of crime and violence, prostitution, small-arms and drug and human trafficking. It is worth noting that Car theft and robbery in South Africa continue to rise and this is being linked to the rising number of illegal immigrants in the country. As indicated by Reitzes and Bam (2000) on the level of crime, there are some plot owners who claim that their stock is depleted by theft and that every day you will see immigrants selling meat on the street, and yet they do not own any cattle or sheep. It is very astonishing how and where they get the animals to slaughter and sell the meat.

The availability of illegal immigrants poses severe health risks, because they come illegal and majority are sick, it is not easy to detect them and they put the lives of the locals in danger because they might infect them and that makes control of such diseases as Aids, cholera, malaria, and Ebola almost impossible (Carim, 1995; Crush, 2001). The Majority of the people in South Africa believe that human mobility has a negative impact on the country; it weakens the society and the economy of the country. It put a strain on South Africa's limited resources where the local people now have to share the little resources with the migrants (Crush, 2001), they compete with South Africans at the job market and because they accept low pay/wages, the employers prefers to employ them than South Africans because they know that they will save money and make more profit while the local people remain jobless in this hard economic conditions. Moreover, the illegal immigrants continue to compete with locals for jobs and consume public goods and services, this frustrates government efforts to regulate health, education, and housing sectors (Vigneswaran, 2008; Wotela & Litsiri, 2017). South Africans as the host nation is concerned about the potential depletion of limited resources if they were to share them with immigrants, there is fear that there might be a rise of the very same hostile conditions that forced immigrants to flee their own countries to South Africa, like hunger, economic and political disorders (Wotela & Litsiri, 2017).



### 4.3 Irregular Migration as a Threat to Domestic Security and Sovereignty

According to Koslowski (2004), irregular migration is often described as constituting a threat to state sovereignty. However, states have a sovereign right to control who crosses their borders and for how long the person is going to be in the country. The state must be able to trace the migrant and know what the migrant will be doing in the country. All those who cross the border should respect the laws of the country. Nonetheless, those undermining the rules and control of irregular migrants are a threat to sovereignty and domestic security of a country. When the immigrants overstay in the country illegally, they find it difficult to survive and resort to crime and terrorise the communities. Stopping irregular migration is fundamental to reasserting full sovereignty. The irregular migration is perceived as a threat to state security. Specifically, irregular migration and asylum, it has been suggested, may provide channels for potential terrorists to enter other countries (Koser, 2005). The irregular migration may in certain circumstances threaten state sovereignty or security because it is not easy for the police to trace all the immigrants who are involved in crime in the country (Koser, 2005).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The weak border control and management are mainly the reason we have irregular or undocumented immigrants, and consequently, the reason policymakers do not have reliable data to help them craft policies that will help avoid turning this country into a place of conflicts between the nationals and outsider, hunger, and economic and political disorders. It is therefore recommended that the law enforcement agencies and government department work together as a team and manage the borders with Home Affairs taking the lead.

Borders of South Africa are so porous, there is no control and because lack of coordination at the borders, this make it easy for the illegal migrants to enter South Africa. Moreover, the majority of immigrants in South Africa are irregular and illegitimately benefiting from government and that itself is illegal. Those responsible for border management and control should engage the local government because the local government is responsible for service provision at the local level, they should be able to identify the undocumented immigrants

with the help of the community members where the immigrants reside. It seems that South Africa's international land borderlines are open to whoever wants to enter or leave with illegal goods, without being detected or brought to book for these illegal actions. Information sharing and distrust among the departments becomes a serious concern and it should be addressed.

If South Africa could have effective border controls and management, we will know who is in our country at any given point, where the individual is staying and what the person is doing in the country. This is where the community members will come in and play a role because they leave with them in different areas of the country. It is therefore recommended that there should be Sharing of information, data, knowledge and intelligence to reduce reduces duplicate work, enables operational coordination and facilitates development of common agenda for future and efficient border coordination and management.

The South African government should indeed take control of borderline and the cross-border crimes associated with it. There should be enough personnel and resources deployed to handle these issues and ensure that there is no illegal activity taking place at the borders.

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