OPEN VERSES CLOSED SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT OF CROSS BORDER MIGRATION: EVIDENTIAL ANALYSES OF FOUR AFRICA COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The discourse on cross border migration is dominated by terms such as state security, cross border crime, sovereignty and illegal migration. As a consequence, securing borders are seen as a primary function of the government even if a material threat does not exist. In light of current attempts at political and economic integrations in Africa, it is imperative to question the wisdom of excessive border controls. By comparing two border towns; Busia between Kenya and Uganda, and Nkomazi between South Africa and Mozambican borders, this paper advances the argument that it is possible to have open and secure borders which benefit all those involved without necessarily compromising national security. This argument draws from evidence collected during field work in the two border towns in 2007. Several reasons are advanced to support this position. First and foremost, not all borders are the same in terms of demographic composition, political and economic importance (imagined or real), economic activities and preferences. Secondly, there is no evidence that these border towns pose more threats to national security concerns and practices and than other towns- a position normally advanced by central governments to justify having heavy security personnel in border areas. Three, local people who benefit from open borders have interest in keeping borders safe and secure so that they can conduct their business safely, continue visiting their kith and kin without hindrance from security officers. Four, closed border systems are both expensive and impractical to police given the limited human and material resources available to both national and local authorities.

Keywords: Cross Border Migration, Boundaries, Security, Integration, Immigration