

Awareness, Causes and Prevalence of Smuggling among Adolescent Students in Seme and Owode-Apa Border Areas Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the awareness, causes and prevalence of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State. Three research questions guided the conduct of the study. The study adopted survey research method. The target population of the study comprised all senior secondary school (SSS II) students in Seme and Owode-Apa border towns of Lagos State. Two hundred respondents were randomly selected as sample for this study and the questionnaires were retrieved for data analysis. A structured questionnaire was constructed and administered on the respondents for data collection. The data obtained were statistically analyzed using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed there is a high level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent students; there are perceived causes of smuggling among adolescent students; the extent of smuggling prevalence among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-apa border areas of Lagos State is high. Based on the findings, it was recommended that community sensitization around border communities to enlighten members of the community on the evils of smuggling and the likely consequences on the students should be carried out regularly. Security liaison and networking with security departments should be encouraged towards achieving the national security objectives and so on.

Keywords: Adolescent, Awareness, Border, Causes, Prevalence, Smuggling.

Introduction

Smuggling is a worldwide activity that cuts across all the nations of the world. It usually occurs between rich countries and the poor countries (Bredow, cited in Olanrewaju, 2015). The unequal distribution of wealth across the world places some countries in a position of dependency. Such countries develop as major centres of international smuggling, while other countries serve as intermediate centres that provide channels to the less developed countries; still, other countries emerge as the true beneficiaries of a worldwide smuggling market (Deflem & Kelly, H., cited in Oyenuga & Owugah, 2021). The Nigerian economy has suffered a lot of battering over the years; which has largely been attributed to a number of factors ranging from unarticulated economic policies, policy inconsistency, corruption, unstable political environment as well as external political and economic influences (Oladeji, 2010).

Smuggling seems to be the mother of all crimes. It is the act of criminality that leads to robbery because it is when arms and ammunition are smuggled that robbery can thrive. What has turned the smuggling of goods in the recent years to an economic and social issue, and a worrying phenomenon is the unofficial imports and smuggling of consumable goods in an organized form. These occur through illegal formations and unallowable quays by the bands, and a number of business men or women who in recent years have caused severe damages to the economic system of Nigeria.

Smuggling also seems to be quite common among the adolescent students from the communities close to the neighbouring countries. The country is facing serious security challenges that are perpetrated by transnational, trans-border or cross-border groups, Jihadist movements and armed

Fulani herdsmen who are associated with organized crimes such as human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons, smuggling of goods and services, terrorism, oil bunkering, trafficking in gold/ diamonds, corruption, and business fraud, to mention but these notable few (Adetuba, 2015). Hence, proximity to the border could be a cause for interest in smuggling.

The phenomenon is considered as one which significantly undermines economic and social developments in societies where it thrives, due to its ability to reduce government revenue and state tax, undermine the growth and development of local industries by flooding local markets with cheap smuggled products, increasing crime rates, insecurity and unemployment among others (Olapegba & Idemudia, 2012; Mamazizi & Rostami, 2016).

The prevalence and continued growth of smuggling in several parts of the world, Africa and Nigeria especially, have become a prime concern for governments, law enforcement agents and concerned stakeholders over decades. Two significant factors have led to the emergence, sustenance and continued growth of smuggling in Nigeria. These, according to Okoiye and Adebisi (2016), include the protectionist policies of successive Nigerian governments and the continuous demand and preference for imported goods among citizens. These factors have created an atmosphere for smuggling to blossom over the years.

Although protectionist laws by successive Nigerian governments often result in total or slight restriction of importation, many of them are motivated by a variety of reasons such as protecting local industries, raising state revenue and conserving foreign exchange, all induce smuggling activities (Okoiye & Adebisi, 2016). For instance, after import restrictions are imposed, local industries are usually unable to meet up with local needs. Since the price difference between local goods and imported goods are high, the former being more expensive, it creates an avenue for smugglers to buy cheap products from abroad and sell at home. This opportunity to make huge profits in an already established local market created by a high demand for foreign products, the inability of local industries to meet rising demands and the high cost of local goods, create the incentive for smugglers to engage in clandestine importation even when the risks are high.

As identified by Defiem and Kelly, cited in Oyenuga & Owugah (2021), there are two categories of smugglers, both of which are in operation in the Nigerian borders. These include petty smugglers and commercial smugglers. Petty smugglers are individuals or groups who cross national boundaries to purchase contrabands or non-contrabands at lower prices, either for resale or for personal use without paying duties and taxes. Commercial smugglers, on the other hand, refer to smugglers who cross national borders to purchase contrabands in large quantities without paying the appropriate taxes and duties. Studies have consistently demonstrated the negative impacts of smuggling on the economy of Nigeria and several other countries where smuggling thrives. For instance, Olapegba and Idemudia (2012) described cross-border smuggling as one of most common crimes around the Nigerian borders that result in economic consequences such as increased rates of poverty, unemployment, direct loss of government revenue, death of local industries etc. Mamazizi and Rostami (2016) also emphasized the fact that smuggling imposes economic hardship on members of society by increasing joblessness and discouraging the growth of local industries.

Ojo and Okunola (2014) asserted that youths play significant roles in the socio-cultural development of every society of the world through the education and skills acquired in the society. Such basic skills are meant for their survival in the society. For instance, the education received by Samoan youth was based on the basic knowledge they needed to survive in and feel as part of the community (Moreno, 2009). The youth should work industriously and skillfully. The girls were expected to work for adults. They should be valuable economic assets to their families and their husbands by performing household and agricultural tasks identical with those performed by the adults. The boys cannot acquire a reputation without the whole emphasis upon a steady demonstration of increasing skill that will be earnest of the necessary superiority over their fellows. The high ranks always subjected them to more rigorous discipline and careful training than the other youth.

Smugglers consider smuggling as a highly profitable venture that offers them an avenue to quick wealth (Obembe, cited in Oyenuga & Owugah, 2021). The profitability of smuggling often causes smugglers, especially adolescents, to downplay important social structures such as morality, education and vocational training, in the pursuit of quick riches. In the short term, smuggling seems to be next option considered in order to escape poverty and unemployment through false job creation, however, these activities will not lead to production, so smuggling of goods will exacerbate poverty in the long term through weakening production fundamentals (Horvath, cited in Malechi, & Mathias, 2021). The past studies failed to pay particular attention to the categories of people involved, especially adolescent students in developing countries, like Nigeria, where there is a peculiar dimension in security demands because of poverty, unemployment, hunger, and increased belligerency among component entities that make up the continent. The activities of rebel groups, trans-border criminals, kidnappers, smugglers, armed-smugglers, cultists and other social misfits add up to the tension that has characterized life in Nigeria. The situation has become more eerie when the issue of demented persons such as serial killers, rapists, drug-abusers, child-kidnappers, prostitutes, ritual killers and pedophiles are taken into consideration. This wide range of crimes constitute social nuisance to Nigeria.

On a visit to the border, one will see the lifestyle of citizens. Most of them do not even want to go to school because of the little amount of money they make from smuggling and related activities. They do not want to be in school because their parents or other members of the community, who have been into smuggling, have built houses, bought cars and done other things. Therefore, they feel that it is a more profitable venture than to be in school for years. Smuggling and the activities of smugglers encourage stealing. Smugglers sometimes use smuggled weapons to rob innocent citizens and rid them of their belongings. They also smuggle guns and weapons for sale to other members of the community who use them for other selfish reasons. Most of the smugglers seem to own rifles and other sophisticated weapons and are often involved in physical combats and shootouts with customs officers, which leads to the death of officers and of innocent civilians and citizens, who are caught in cross fire between smugglers and law enforcement officers. Smuggling also obstructs morality because as soon as they begin to make little money from smuggling, that is when they begin to look down on elders or even their parents (Oyenuga & Owugah, 2021).

In Nigeria, a huge amount of money is lost to the activities of smugglers. This is visible in area of duty evasion and under payment (The Sunday punch, 2009; The Guardian, 2009). The efforts

of the Nigerian government to check the nefarious activities of smugglers seem to be making expenditure on security to be on the increase with huge allocation. This cost can be conceptualized in terms of the expenditure on security agencies (Soyombo, 2009). Furthermore, the illegal importation of some foreign goods and products is 'killing' the spirit of home made similar goods and products. For instance, the massive smuggling of second-hand textile materials has finally wrecked the growth of textile industries at home (Irin, 2003; The Guardian, 2009).

Most of the adolescent students seem not to take education seriously because of the amount of money they make from smuggling and related activities. In addition, smugglers use adolescent students around the border towns, to import drugs and substances in very large quantities. Several containers of these drugs are seized and destroyed often. An example is the case of a drug seizure by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agents (NDLEA) in Ikorodu Area of Lagos State on the 18th September, 2022. The drug was worth N194bn. (Punch 19th September, 2022). Finally, smuggling cumulates to making Nigeria, an economic dumping ground for foreign products, and creates a discouraging environment to the foreign economic investors (Soyombo, 2009). Research works argue that for perpetrators of these criminal offenses, contemporary states have foreseen predominantly the possibility of imposing a sentence of imprisonment, and / or a fine. All over the country, the lives of different sections of societies also face the consequences of smuggling. Therefore, the study is focused on the awareness, causes and prevalence of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Smuggling is a very serious problem in the border towns of all countries. If not seriously tackled, smuggling around border towns can lead to the absence of adolescent students from schools, damage to school property and even death. Smuggling is the illegal movement of goods or persons across the border of a country. Adolescent students in the border areas, due to the proximity of their schools, to the border, may get involved in smuggling on purpose. This is either to make money or through persuasion by their peers. Some of these adolescent students see smuggling as a way of life because of the perceived fun and financial benefits derived from it, not minding the risk involved. While this problem persists among adolescent students, some may get killed during disagreements with security agents, some drop out of school, while others get away with it, which reduces the revenue derivable from the importation of these goods if they had been imported or exported legally.

It should be noted that these smuggling activities across the border also exposes the country to social problems, as arms and ammunition are also among items smuggled into the country. This proliferation of arms and ammunition, has led to contemporary issues of banditry, ritual killings and so on. Smuggling has therefore created a serious problem for the smugglers themselves and for the various communities around the border areas, who may be victims of cross fire whenever there is trouble between smugglers and security agents. Furthermore, as goods are smuggled, the nation loses revenue, which on the long run, leads to unemployment, under employment, poverty, armed, robbery, prostitution and so on. The factors above are clear indicators that there is a problem that needs attention. Hence, this study is focused on the awareness, causes and prevalence of smuggling among adolescent students in the border areas of Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the, awareness, prevalence and causes of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas Lagos, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of this study are listed as follows:

1. To determine the level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State.
2. To determine the perceived causes of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State.
3. To examine the prevalence of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State.

Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study stated above, the following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?
2. What are the perceived causes of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?
3. To what extent is smuggling prevalent among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design involved the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. This study was conducted in Seme and Owode-apa border towns of Lagos State. The two transportation corridors under this research work link to Cotonou, a commercial centre and a central economic nerve of Republic of Benin. Therefore, the neighbouring communities in Benin Republic, which share borders with Nigeria at both Seme and Owode-apa transportation corridors, were incorporated under the study areas. The target population of the study comprised senior secondary school two students (SSS 2) in Seme and Owode-apa border towns of Lagos State.

The sample of the study was made up of two hundred (200) participants. Two senior secondary schools were selected randomly in Owode-apa, while one senior secondary school was selected in Seme. Fifty (male and female) participants were selected randomly from each school in Owode-apa, making a total of one hundred participants from two selected senior secondary schools in Owode-apa, while one senior secondary school was selected in Seme, one hundred male and female participants were also selected randomly.

The study made use of a self-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, A and B. Part A contained items on the bio data of the respondents such as age, gender and name of school. Part B contained items on awareness, causes and prevalence of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas on a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaires were administered to the students selected in their schools and they were collected immediately, after they were completed. The data obtained were statistically analyzed using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Result

The data used in this study was obtained from two hundred questionnaires and were retrieved for data analysis. There were three research questions formulated in the course of this research and were analyzed using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Presentation and Analysis of Data According to Research Questions

Testing of Research Questions

Question One: What is the level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?

Table 1: Analysis showing the level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent student

S/N	ITEMS	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	S.D	Rank
1	I do not feel safe about smuggling activities in my school.	69 (34.5)	131 (65.5)	3.34	1.22	3
2	Smuggling is bad.	91 (45.5)	109 (54.5)	3.34	1.34	3
3	Someone can be jailed or killed if caught involved in smuggling.	200 (100)	0 (0)	3.55	1.35	2
4	I am aware of the smuggling activities going on around my school.	104 (52)	96 (48)	2.87	1.17	4
5	I know that some students engage in smuggling activities.	200 (100)	0 (0)	3.57	1.34	1

Source: *Field survey 2023.*

The table 1 shows that 69 (34.5%) of the respondents agreed that they do not feel safe about smuggling activities in their school while 131 (65.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 91 (45.5%) of the respondents agreed that smuggling is bad and they do not like it while 109 (54.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 100 (100%) of the respondents agreed that people can be jailed or killed if involved in smuggling while 0 (0%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 104 (52%) of the respondents agreed that they are aware of the smuggling activities carried out by students in their schools while 96 (48%) of the respondents disagreed. Finally, it also shows that 200 (100%) of the respondents agreed that they are not involved in smuggling while 0 (0%) of the respondents disagreed.

Question Two: What are the perceived causes of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?

Table 2: Analysis showing the perceived causes of smuggling among adolescent students

S/N	ITEMS	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	S.D	Rank
1	In my opinion, lack of parental care or supervision can make students go into smuggling activities.	146 (73)	54 (27)	3.23	1.22	3
2	I believe poor school management encouraged students smuggling activities.	181 (90.5)	19 (9.5)	3.26	1.34	3
3	I view peer pressure as the cause of students' involvement in smuggling activities.	156 (78)	44 (22)	3.53	1.35	1
4	In my opinion, close location of my school to the border encourages smuggling.	119 (59.5)	81 (40.5)	3.09	1.31	5
5	Low financial status of parents can make students go into smuggling activities in my opinion.	121 (60.5)	79 (39.5)	3.40	1.35	2

Source: Field survey 2023.

The table 2 shows that 146 (73%) of the respondents agreed that lack of parental care or supervision can make students go into smuggling activities while 54 (27%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 181 (90.5%) of the respondents agreed that poor school management pushed students into smuggling activities while 19 (9.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 156 (78%) of the respondents agreed that peer pressure is a cause of students involvement in smuggling activities while 44 (22%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 119 (59.5%) of the respondents agreed that the proximity of my school to the border encourages smuggling while 81 (40.5%) of the respondents disagreed. Finally, it also shows that 121 (60.5%) of the respondents agreed that low financial status of parents can make students go into smuggling activities in my opinion while 79 (39.5%) of the respondents disagreed.

Question Three: To what extent is smuggling prevalent among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa border areas of Lagos State?

Table 3: Analysis showing the extent of smuggling prevalence among adolescent students

S/N	ITEMS	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	S.D	Rank
1	Smuggling of contraband food items such as rice, turkey etc., is common among my colleagues in school.	136 (68)	64 (32)	3.21	1.28	4
2	Drug trafficking is common among my schoolmates.	116 (58)	84 (42)	3.04	1.23	7
3	Smuggling of cars is a thriving business among my schoolmates.	191 (95.5)	9 (4.5)	3.43	1.21	2
4	Smuggling of natural resources such as oil and petrol is a common thing among students in my school.	151 (75.5)	49 (24.5)	3.21	1.24	4
5	Small arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons can happen among my schoolmates.	200 (100)	0 (0)	3.42	1.21	3
6	Child/Women trafficking take place among students in my school.	126 (63)	74 (37)	3.18	1.22	5
7	Trafficking in gold/diamonds happens among my schoolmates.	106 (53)	94 (47)	3.18	1.20	5
8	Smuggling of illegal Migrants is common among students in my school.	136 (68)	64 (32)	3.21	1.28	4
9	Currency trafficking takes place among students in my school.	74 (37)	126 (63)	3.12	1.26	6
10	Smuggling of motor parts and electronics takes place among students in my school.	200 (100)	0 (0)	3.57	1.34	1

Source: Field survey 2023.

The table 3 shows that 136 (68%) of the respondents agreed that smuggling of contraband food items such as rice, turkey etc., is common among colleagues in their school while 64 (32%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 116 (58%) of the respondents agreed that drug trafficking is common among their schoolmates while 84 (42%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 191 (95.5%) of the respondents believe that smuggling of cars is a thriving business among their schoolmates while 9 (4.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 151 (75.5%) of the respondents agreed that smuggling of natural resources such as oil and petrol is a common thing among students in their school while 49 (24.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 200 (100%) of the respondents agreed that arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons can happen among their schoolmates while 0 (0%) of the respondents disagreed. In addition, it shows that 126 (63%) of the respondents agreed that child/women trafficking take place among students in their schools while 74 (37%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 106 (53%) of the respondents agreed that trafficking in

gold/diamonds happens among their schoolmates while 94 (47%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 136 (68%) of the respondents believe that smuggling of illegal migrants is common among students in their schools while 64 (32%) of the respondents disagreed. It also shows that 74 (37%) of the respondents agreed that money laundering takes place among students in their schools while 126 (63%) of the respondents disagreed. Finally, it also shows that 200 (100%) of the respondents agreed that smuggling of motor parts and electronics takes place among students in their schools while 0 (0%) of the respondents disagreed.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed as follows:

The study found that the level of awareness of smuggling among adolescent students in Seme and Owode-Apa, Lagos Nigeria, is deemed high. This finding supports Eselebor (2013) who reported that smuggling thrives in our border environment because criminal offenders know that law enforcement is weak and the risk of apprehension is low. In this case, one of the motivating factors that make smuggling of consumable goods thrive in this corridor of the state is her proximity to the border that leads to sub-Saharan francophone countries (Benin Republic and Togo), and the seemingly ineffectiveness of customs officers patrol teams to monitor and control the smugglers. The globalization phenomenon that emphasizes interconnectivity, interdependence and interrelationship of all states of the world is another motivating factor that continue to increase smuggling activities and engendering the socio-economic situation and security of the nation. The use of communication and financial facilities, makes transaction easy among the smugglers, because equipment such as mobile phones, internet gadgets, automated teller machines and other technologies contribute negatively to socio-economic development of the country, when used for this purpose.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there are various causes of smuggling activities in the border towns of Seme and Owode-Apa, Lagos, Nigeria. This supports the findings of Akano cited in Omotosho (2013) that the trend of smuggling has become an institutionalized behaviour and a criminal enterprise in the sense that border town dwellers provide the essential impetus for the thriving of smuggling activities in and around Nigeria borders. Corroboratively, the study shows that about 500 warehouses, where various smuggled items are secretly kept were discovered by the Nigerian Customs Service in Saki town, Oyo state, western Nigeria (Omotosho, 2013). Others like proximity to the border coupled with the unemployment saga in the community contribute to the social vices engagement. This gives credence to a proverbial saying, 'an idle hand is the devil's workshop'. Majority of the graduates, drop-outs and adolescent students seem to engage in this criminal act of smuggling. The get rich syndrome in a depressed economy and lack of inter-agency collaboration among the border security personnel and corrupt security officers encourage smuggling activities. Moreover, smugglers seem to see the heavy taxes on goods as a factor which encourage the smugglers to engage in purchasing such goods in large quantities and at low taxes or levies from manufacturing countries, to the demand countries, who place high taxes on the same goods, or close the international borders for such commodities, and therefore, encourage and motivate the smugglers to use the difference in engaging in illegal transportation of such goods for profits.

Finally, the findings revealed a high prevalence of smuggling activities among adolescent students in the border towns of Seme and Owode- apa, Lagos, Nigeria. This is in line the Adeola

and Fayomi (2012), who found that Nigeria has been trapped in numerous and multifaceted problems orchestrated by her exposure to the influx of smuggled arms into the country through her border posts. This is a pointer to prevalence of smuggling activities. Eliagwu (2003) noted that there were recorded incidences of over fifty violent clashes and conflicts in Nigeria that left over thousands of persons dead, many injured and many rendered homeless. The increasing arms smuggling activity along the nation's borders portends great danger with dire consequences on national and regional security, as unauthorized persons are unlawfully possessing arms. Consequently, illicit possession of arms by individual or groups becomes a formidable means for actualization of heinous desires, such as armed robberies, kidnapping, cult clashes and terrorist acts. Nigeria is a destination of smuggled arms (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). The causes include criminal activities, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social unrest, ethnic tensions, cross border smuggling, porous borders, black marketeering, privatization of security, insecurity, poverty, economic crisis, mass unemployment, among others (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that smuggling affects education of adolescents, especially in the border communities and surrounding areas. Many adolescents in school around the border communities do not want to go to school for several reasons. In the first place, they assume that they make a lot of money from smuggling and prefer to be involved in it than to be in school "wasting time" when they can be out there making money. Furthermore, they follow precedence, laid by their parents and others in the community, who did not go to school and were rather involved in smuggling and became rich. Smuggling may also promote the use and abuse of drugs and substances in several ways. Smugglers may get exposed to the use of narcotics as these are part of the items smuggled across the porous borders. Smuggling and the activities of smugglers can also promote insecurity, and increased rates of crime in border communities, surrounding areas and in Nigeria as a whole. As indicated by this study, there may be consequences for the smuggling activities which may include poor attitudes towards education and vocational training among adolescents, crime and insecurity, drug abuse and health challenges in Seme and Owode-Apa. In addition to past studies, the study found that smuggling promotes other social vices among adolescent students such as moral decadence, promotion of drug and substance abuse, laziness and acceptance of smuggling as a way of life.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions reached above, this paper offers the following recommendations:

1. There should be sensitization around border communities to enlighten members on the evils of smuggling and the consequences to the individuals, groups and the entire country if smuggling is not abated.
2. The federal government and state governments should create employment opportunities at border areas that would engage adolescents' skills and employ a good number of the youth around the border areas.
3. There should be set up of a security liaison and networking with various security departments towards achieving the national security objectives. This is equally important to fill intelligence gaps, minimize costs of intelligence collection, and

establish diplomatic relations among states, and at the same time, check the smuggling activities around the border towns.

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