

# Dynamics of Maritime Trade along the Fako Coastal Belt of Cameroon: Ambiance, Challenges and Sustainable Combat Strategies

Tufoin Kilian Diang<sup>1</sup>, Ojuku Tiafack<sup>2\*</sup>, Nnecdem Padison<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Student, Department of Geography University of Yaounde 1, P.O Box 755, Yaounde, Cameroon

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Geography University of Yaounde 1, P.O Box 755, Yaounde, Cameroon

<sup>3</sup>PhD, Department of Geography University of Yaounde 1, P.O Box 755, Yaounde, Cameroon

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\*Corresponding author: Ojuku Tiafack

Associate Professor, Department of Geography University of Yaounde 1, P.O Box 755, Yaounde, Cameroon

## Abstract

Maritime trade is dynamic and indispensable for economic growth and development around the World. This trade if not well monitored can become a threat to development considering the illicit and criminal transactions that surrounds the sector. In Cameroon, this informal trade has degraded customs income and promoted the infiltration of contraband goods into the country via local anchorage sites where custom services are weak. This trade has affected the State pricing policy of certain goods especially fuel. It is against this background that this study sets out to investigate, seaborne trade, and the illegal transactions that are common along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon. Data for the study have been gathered from secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were gleaned from soft and hard copies of both published and unpublished documents, newspapers, and decrees relevant to maritime transport and trade. Primary data were sourced from field surveys where a simple random sampling technique was used to administer 278 copies of questionnaires to 10 localities along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon using a convenient sample size. Supplementary primary data was gotten via interviews and observations in the three seaports along the coast. Results revealed that the Limbe, Tiko and Idenau ports though secondary, handles thousands of tonnes of cargo annually making Fako Division where they are located in Cameroon an eminent trading hub. Statistics from the Limbe Port Authority (PAL) indicated an increasing trend of export and imports annually in thousands of tonnes. The results shows that illicit seaborne trade is very common along this coastal belt with over 67 percent of the goods coming in from neighbouring Nigeria. The illicit product identified are petroleum products (46.2%), pharmaceutical products (30 %), food items (16.7%) and chemical fertilizers and others (5.3% and 3.8%) respectively. The results also revealed that in the year 2021 between January and August, over 18 cases of illicit goods were intercepted along this coastline with petroleum products destined to Limbe, Tiko and Idenau ports dominating. The reasons for the persistency of this illicit trade were corruption and the existence of a network of illegal organisation that transact the goods. This study recommends that custom and naval services be reinforced along this coastal belt to ascertain the type and originality of the products entering the country via the sea. Also, the State should investigate and dismantle illicit and organised illegal seaborne trade chains and charge officials at the maritime frontiers to be responsible and corruption free.

**Keywords:** Maritime trade, illicit maritime trade, Fako, Coastal belt, Tiko, Limbe, Idenau.

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## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2017) acknowledged that the world maritime trade and economic development continue to increase averagely by 4 percent per year which has led to an increase in the demand for shipment around the world both at local and international scale. Maritime trade between nations and sub regions has always made a significant contribution in stimulating wealth and economic progress among the world's population. Today, almost 80 percent of all trade is seaborne (Stopford, 2009; UNCTAD, 2015). UNCTAD (2017) underpinned that the world's merchandise trade volumes have grown to a modest rate of 2.3 percent in

2014 following the global increase of Gross Domestic Product (GPD) at the rate of 2.5 percent indicating a strong link between trade and GDP. The history of urban development also reveals that economic progress is very apparent especially in seaport towns ignited by seaborne trade (Ziaul and Hans-Joachim, 2018; Shan *et al.*, 2014, Ojuku, 2017).

In Cameroon for example, the evidence of seaport towns and economic progress are glaring with Douala (the economic capital), Kribi, Limbe, Tiko etc being eloquent testimonies. This is further confirmed by Onwuegbuchunam (2019) who noted that maritime transport plays a vital role in the socio-economic

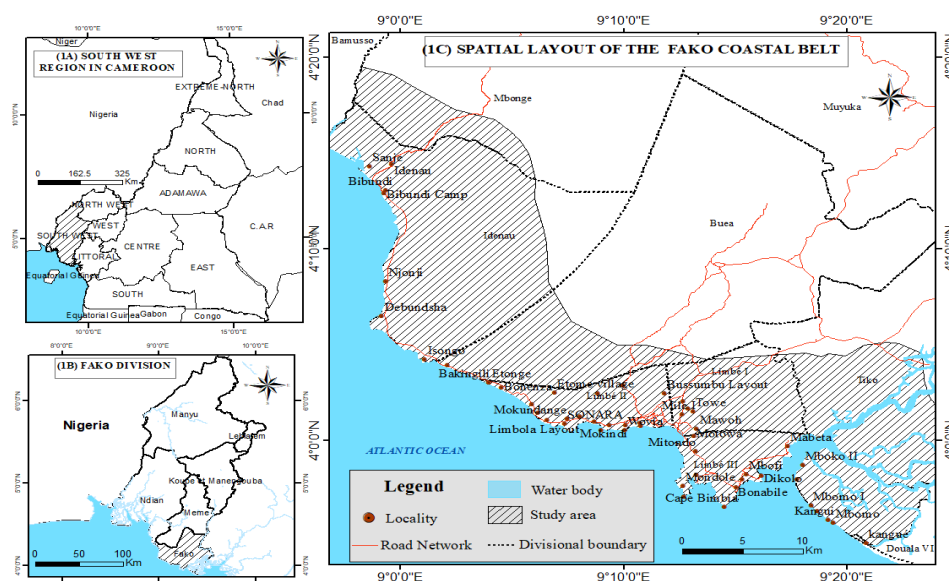
development of a country via seaborne trade. Africa in general is increasingly attracting attention as a region with significant potential for maritime transport and seaborne trade. Although Africa's impact on seaborne trade is still comparatively low, it is poised to expand as the continent sets out to exploit its vast resources and as consumption demand increases in tandem with improved income levels (Opuware and Ambakederemo, 2018). Even though much has been written on maritime trade and freight and its economic relevance or its ability to stimulate economic growth and development, very little research has been conducted on illicit maritime trade hubs especially along the Gulf of Guinea and the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon in particular which is a pre-occupying issue. This discourse leads us to point out some blurred aspects of seaborne trade along that Fako coastal belt of Cameroon.

Despite the paramount role played by maritime transport on seaborne trade, illicit trade on drugs, arms and other contraband are being perpetrated through major sea routes especially at the Gulf of Guinea (Ifesinachi, 2020). It is further noted that illicit seaborne trade is escalating in this region because of porous borders, inadequate maritime security enforcement and corruption which have given way to the establishment of criminal networks (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018). This has made it very difficult to quantify the economic impact of seaborne trade in the region. Most of the illicit merchandise are also traded illegally along the Gulf of Guinea region. Ifesinachi, (2020) further underscored that sometimes criminal groups have a market for legal products (like fuel) with “out-of-reach” communities in coastal areas which are all completed through maritime transport gateways. The impact of this illicit seaborne trade is felt on government revenue

(taxes) and state pricing policy as such goods are most at times under-priced. In Cameroon, contraband goods are usually ferried from neighbouring countries through the Tiko seaport before being transported into the hinterlands and other parts of the country (Bruno, 2019, Ojuku 2017). In March 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned about the circulation of counterfeit hypertension drugs in Cameroon which were known to cause hypoglycaemia. Following a joint operation by the Cameroon Marine force and the Cameroon Custom Brigade in April 2019, some counterfeit anti-malarial drugs were seized along the Fako coast of Cameroon (Ifesinachi, 2020). The link between illicit seaborne trade and maritime transport in the Gulf of Guinea region and Fako coastal belt of Cameroon cannot be under rated when handling maritime trade in this region.

## THE STUDY AREA

The Fako coastal belt lies between longitude 9°0'0" and 9°20'0" east of the Greenwich Meridian and between latitude 4°0'0" and 4°10'0" north of the Equator. This coastline is bounded to the west and north by Meme Division and to the east by the Littoral Region and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 1). The Fako coastal belt of Cameroon spreads across five Sub-divisions namely Limbe I, Limbe II, Limbe III, Tiko and Idenau Sub-divisions. The area has a total population of 466, 412 inhabitants and land surface of 2093 km<sup>2</sup> as of 2021 (BUCREP, 2010). The Fako coast stretches from Kangué in the Douala VI Sub-division to Tiko through Limbe, Batoke, Bakingili to Sanje in the northwestern part Idenau where it shares boundaries with Bamuso in the Ndiang Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon.



**Figure 1: The location of the study area**  
*Source: National Institute of Cartography (NIC), 2021*

## METHODS AND TOOLS

For better insights into maritime transport and maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon, a scoping study was conducted in the three ports found along this coastline. The study was based on both quantitative and qualitative data sourcing. Qualitative data sourcing was gleaned through review of related literature on maritime transport and maritime trade. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were granted to some port authorities, custom officials and some navy patrol agents in the Tiko, Idenau and Man of War Bay for a wider insights and appreciation of maritime trade along the coastline.

Primary qualitative and quantitative data for the study were collected at the different port yards of the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon and neighbouring households. The intension of the inquiries were to investigate to extent to which maritime transport contributes to the enhancement of seaborne trade along this coastal belt. Focus was also laid on annual export and import tonnage of the PAL. A random sampling technique was used to administer 278 copies of questionnaires in the nearby communities to the port environment using a convenient sample size. Observations effectuated were both participants and on-the-spot with some port authorities and key informants. Using a GPS, relevant way points were collected which were latter spatialised on the shape file maps for

analysis. The realised figures from statistics collected from field surveys were input into cartographic software for spatialisation.

Qualitative data was processed using *in vivo* data coding approach whereby categories of responses were identified, classified and then recorded on a prepared sheet as per research objectives. The themes were drawn from the different categories of codes identified which is an approach commonly used in qualitative data analysis (Strauss, 1987, Gilbert, 1998 and Cope, 2003). As concerns quantitative, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel software were used for data processing. From the processed data, tables containing mean scores, frequencies and percentages was generated for analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Maritime trade ambience along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon

The Fako coastal belt of Cameroon host three secondary seaports which have become a prominent maritime trading hub. This hub handles thousands of tonnes of goods completed at these ports annually. Data gathered from the PAL dataset from 2015-2020 revealed that the port of Tiko, Limbe and Idenau, transacts hundreds of thousands of tonnes of dry bulk cargo annually (Table 1).

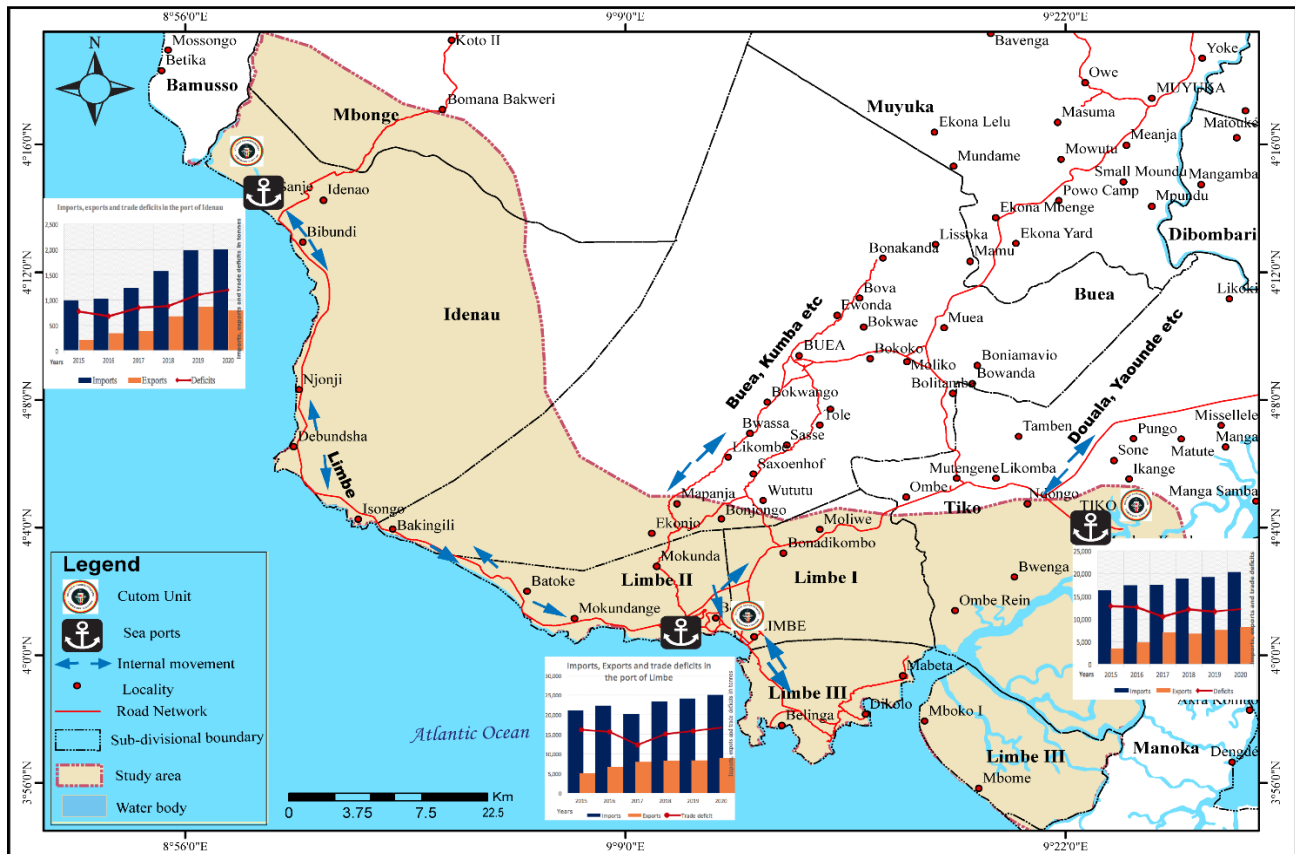
**Table 1: Import and Export statistics in tonnes from the port of Limbe, Tiko and Idenau from 2015-2020**

Ports	Imports Exports (Tonnes)	YEARS					
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Limbe	Import	21,141.76	22,313.45	20,274.56	23,349.10	24,078.23	25,930.00
	Export	4,997.89	6,702	7,990	8,267.87	8,282.44	8,987.56
Tiko	Import	16,274.98	17,398	17,492.5	18,872	19,201	20,981
	Export	3,495.89	4,782.9	6,973	6,779.8	7,567.82	9,458.04
Idenau	Import	9,89.7	1,023	1,234	1,567	1,982	2,456
	Export	213	341	389	678	872	982

*Source: Compiled from PAL dataset, 2021*

Table 1 reveals that the port of Limbe spanning from 2015-2020 has registered increasing trends of imports and exports, though imports are projecting more than exports. For instance, in 2015 imports were 21,141.76 tonnes against 4,997.89 tonnes for exports and in 2019 the imports stood at 24,078.23 tonnes against 8,282.44 tonnes for exports. The trend seems to be increasing simultaneous though the imports remain higher. A similar trend is observed with the port of Tiko and Idenau. The study results suggest that the imports and exports of the ports are in line with the capacity of the ports to handle the bulk of cargo. The

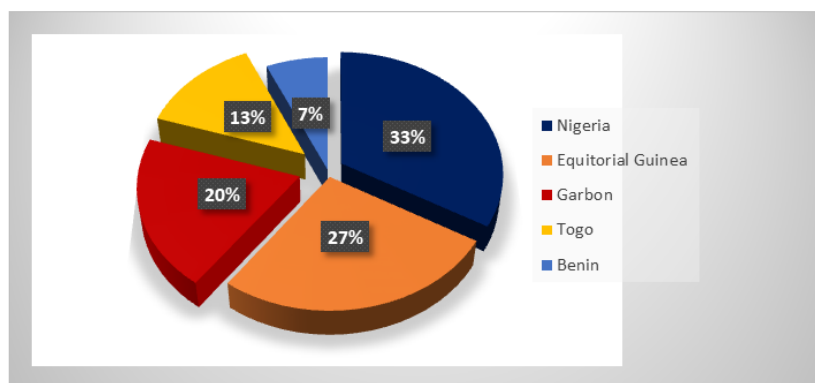
increase tonnage of cargo completed via these ports gives an eloquent testimony that the coastal belt is indeed a veritable maritime trading hub. The goods completed at the ports are mostly trade articles such as cosmetics, textile materials, plastics goods, amongst others. Imports are diversified and range from automobile spare parts, vehicles, textile material, drinks, cotton, robber to cereals amidst others. Data analysis for the three ports, portrays those imports were far greater than exports leading to high trade deficits in trade transactions operated in the ports (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Situation of imports, exports and trade deficits on the different ports along the Fako coast**  
Source: Data Compiled at the Limbe custom unit, PAL and field survey, 2021

Figure 2 shows the situation of imports, exports and trade deficits on the port of Tiko, Limbe and Idenau from 2015 to 2020. It is observed that imports are very high compared to exports in the three ports under observation (table 1). This high import has resulted to very high trade deficits as more goods are imported than exported. Goods imported into Cameroon via these ports are disseminated to all parts of Cameroon and some countries of the CEMAC Region (Central African Republic, Chad, Congo). Interviews conducted with the marketing manager and the manager in charge of logistics in PAL revealed that the trade

deficits is in connection to the production capacity of Cameroon as per the other neighbouring countries like Nigeria with a very strong industrial capacity to produce more and export to Cameroon. This is also explained by the fact that some of these goods do not only remain in Cameroon but are transported to other countries by land transport. The main trading partners of these ports are Nigeria, Togo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Nigeria is the most active trading partner of the ports. This is seen on the frequency of Nigerian goods in the Fako coastal belt when compared to other ports of the country (Figure 2).



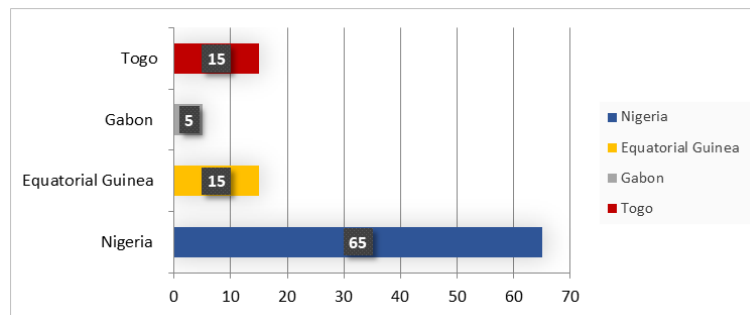
**Figure 2: Main seaborne trading partners along the Fako Coast of Cameroon**  
Source; PAL and Field interviews, 2021



The proximity of Nigeria to this part of Cameroon and its position as the strongest economy in the whole of Economic Community of Central African States (ECOWAS) and (CEMAC) Sub-regions accounts for the domination of these ports by Nigerian goods. Nigeria has the capacity to produce and export its goods to all neighbouring countries, Cameroon inclusive. Nigeria also has more industries that produce a wide variety of goods. Cameroon on her part is the strongest economy in the CEMAC sub-region, with a relative capacity to produce more goods. Made in Cameroon goods are distributed to her neighbouring countries that attracts many trading partners. Seaborne trade has greatly contributed to the socio-economic development of these coastal area and beyond. Several local markets in Fako have gained a lot of international and regional focus as a result of seaborne transport and trade. However, illicit trade from maritime origin remains a challenge along this coastal belt which is an issue to deal with.

### Challenges of maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon

Maritime trade is one of the most vulnerable form of trade with regards to the circulation of illicit goods which represent a veritable challenge not only to maritime trade itself but also to maritime transport. This happens when security and law enforcement are weak. In the Gulf of Guinea illicit trade has become very common, alarming and escalating at a very high rate. This illegal trade is very common along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon. This is because the circulation of contraband products is very common. Several illegal goods infiltrate into the Cameroon market in unlawful ways and most at times taxes are evaded were the traders succeed to infiltrate the goods via illegal corridors. Even at this, corruption by some officials are also enable the flow and circulation of such goods. In an interview granted to officials of the custom unit at Idenau it was highlighted that customs along the Fako coast of Cameroon lost millions of FCFA annually due to illegal seaborne trade. Key informants in the field and custom officials reliably informed the study that most of these contraband goods come from neighbouring Nigeria with very little leaving the country via maritime ways (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Respondents opinions on the circulation of illicit goods along the Fako coast**  
*Source: Field interviews, 2021*

Figure 3 reveals that 65 percent of contraband goods circulating along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon are smuggled from Nigeria. Results of interviews granted to custom officials at the Limbe port showed that it is the proximity and porosity of the borders with Cameroon that often facilitate the easy penetration of Nigerian goods into Cameroon via waterways. 15 percent of the goods come from Equatorial Guinea and 15 percent from Gabon. The least is Togo with only 5 percent probably because its

spatial distance from the Cameroon borders is far. The Fako coastal belt of Cameroon has gradually become a hot spot for the proliferation of illicit goods from neighbouring countries especially Nigeria. Custom and naval officers interviewed were of the opinion that most of the goods are often intercepted and destroyed but the practice persist. The survey identified smuggled goods considered as contraband to include pharmaceutical products, petroleum products, food items (rice) and chemical fertilisers among others (Table 2).

**Table 2: Illicit goods circulating in the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon**

Localities or quarters	No. of/Resp	What are some illicit products circulating in the Fako coastal belt?				
		Petroleum products	Pharmaceutical products	Food items (rice drinks)	Chemical Fertilisers	Other products
Idenau town	50	19	16	9	4	2
Bakingili	14	6	3	3	0	2
Gardens	37	17	11	5	5	0
Down beach	11	5	4	2	0	0

Localities or quarters	No. of/Resp	What are some illicit products circulating in the Fako coastal belt?				
		Petroleum products	Pharmaceutical products	Food items (rice drinks)	Chemical Fertilisers	Other products
Batoke	40	22	14	4	0	0
Bota land	14	7	2	1	0	4
Limbe town	28	11	9	3	5	0
Dikolo	7	3	4	0	0	0
Army camp	68	39	18	10	1	0
Tiko beach	9	4	3	1	0	1
Totals	278	133	84	38	15	9
Percentage	88.8	46.2	30	16.7	5.3	3.8

*Source; Field work, 2021*

From Table 2, one observes that petroleum products (46.2%) are the outstanding illicit goods circulating in the Fako coastal belt. Custom officials interviewed in Limbe port revealed that most of the petroleum products frequently consumed in Fako Division comes from Nigeria and are transported illicitly via the sea to places such as Bakingili and Idenau and other sites where custom services are not very strong. However, it was observed that the Cameroon patrol military elements have join the fight against the circulation of illegal petroleum products in this part of the country with so many illegal petroleum products caught infiltrating into the country annually. Pharmaceutical products represent 30 percent of the goods circulating in this part of Cameroon. As earlier highlighted, over 80 percent of the products identified by the Cameroon custom officials and the navy mostly come from neighbouring Nigeria.

Substantial evidence from journals consulted are revealing. The *Quotidian Echos santé* newspaper on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2021 reported about the illegal and fake drugs flooding the Cameroon markets. Also,

*Emergence* newspaper dated 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 reported a similar situation where 30,000 medical kits were seized by security officials in Idenau and destroyed. *L'œil du Sahel* a popular Cameroon newspaper also reported about 7 tons of drugs caught in this border and destroyed by the custom officials. Finally, Ifesinachi (2020) citing Transparency International (2019), Moki (2019) further noted that porous borders and corruptible officials have enabled fuel smuggling by non-state actor to flood the Cameroon markets with very glaring evidence of illegal fuel sales points along major streets in Limbe, Idenau, Tiko, Buea Doualal etc and even beyond.

Food item and chemical fertilisers represents 16.7 percent and 5.3 percent respectively. Other items that were not classified represents 3.8 percent which are basically some cosmetics some plastic goods as underlined by some respondents during survey interviews. Between 2017 and 2021, over 55 incidents of interception of illicit goods were recorded along the Fako coastal belt. Table 3 shows a sample situation in 2021.

**Table 3: Situation of Contraband Good Intercepted along the Fako Sea Belt**

No.	Type of goods	2021 (date)	Quantity	Destinations
1	Petroleum products	17 <sup>th</sup> January	150,000litters	Idenau
		24 <sup>th</sup> January	250,000litters	
		2 <sup>nd</sup> April	38,000 litters	
		07 <sup>th</sup> June	25.000 litters	
		20 <sup>th</sup> March	42,500 litters	Limbe
		5 <sup>th</sup> February	15.000 litters	
		5 <sup>th</sup> April	100,000 litters	
		14 <sup>th</sup> April	20.000 litters	
		16th May	45.000 litters	
		25th July	32.000 litters	
		8 <sup>th</sup> June	27,000 litters	Bakingili
		2 <sup>nd</sup> June	60.000 litters	Tiko
2	Drugs	28 <sup>th</sup> January	2500kg	Limbe
3	Fish illegal	28 <sup>th</sup> February	-	Limbe
4	Drinks	2 <sup>nd</sup> June	190 crates	Idenau
5	Rice	26 <sup>th</sup> June	8674 bags (each 25-45 kg)	Tiko
6	Fish illegal	9 <sup>th</sup> August	-	Limbe

*Source: Compiled from Cameroon Navy and Custom unit, in Limbe, Idenau and Tiko, 2021*

Information obtained from the Limbe custom unit, revealed that the rate of illicit trade has increased due to the ongoing socio-political upheavals in the Anglophone region of Cameroon. The survey show that marine patrol agents have join efforts with custom

officers to check the flow of these goods along the coastal belt even though the goods continue to infiltrate into the country. On Table 3, it is observed that petroleum products dominate in the flow of illegal goods along this coastline (Plate 1).

**Plate 1: Scenes of Interception and sale of illegal fuel “*funge*” in Fako**



**Photo 1: Contraband goods track by security Agents**

*Sources: Cameroon Navy, sub commander of Limbe naval base 3:00pm 17/01/2021*



**Photo 2: Illegal petrol displayed for sale at Batoke**

*Sources: Tufoin K.D, 10:15 am 19/08/2021*

It was observed that in some areas, vendors of this petrol hide in bushes and only indicate with the use of an empty vessel on the road to vehicle owners especially clandestine vehicles and bikers. It is a business channels well known and organised among stakeholders involved in carrying out transactions with this type of petrol. The circuit flows from the suppliers across the high seas to transporters via those who buy in bulk to those who finally retail the fuel. The illicit fuel is commonly called *funge*, an appellation well

understood by the dealers and consumers. According to information from *The Post newspaper* of 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021, the police commissioners of Limbe blamed custom officials and naval officers for complicity in the trade and very pessimistic about the activity coming to an end as corruption has eaten deep into the activity. He further notes that the customs agents are ‘feeding fat and filling their pockets’ from corruption money generated by these goods from Nigeria (Figure 4).



**Figure 5: The circulation of illegal goods along the Fakö coastal belt of Cameroon**

Source: Limbe custom unite and Field surveys, 2021

Figure 5 illustrates the proportions of the different types of goods illegally traded along the Fakö coastal belt of Cameroon. From the figure, it is observed that fuel represent the dominant illegal good that that passes via maritime gateways. These products distribution at the ports of Tiko, Limbe and Idenau show that fuel alone contributes between 78-85 % of illegal trade along this coastal belt. This is closely followed by food items such as rice and pharmaceutical products. According to a clearance custom officer at the Limbe custom unit, some of these goods are illegal traded illegally while others are legal also traded illegally. He further reveals that over 90 % of such goods infiltrate Cameroon from neighbouring Nigeria which doubles as the main Cameroon trading partner along the Gulf of Guinea.

Illegal maritime trade and circulation of contraband goods in the Fakö coastal belt have gone a long way to promote the black economy in this area with outstanding effects on customs revenues and lives of the population. This is because at times the goods traded are expired and dangerous for consumption especially drugs and foods items. This has even made it very difficult to quantify exports, imports and trade deficits along this coastal belt due to the existence of large organise criminal illegal trade channels.

Interviews with port authorities of Limbe revealed that on several occasions some goods have been repatriated because they were expired. However, it was observed during field surveys that proper checks are not conducted on most goods on ports when they arrive. Informants, informed the study that at times random checks are conducted. These controls leave some illicit goods unchecked that infiltrate into the local markets. At times most of the goods do not enter the country via these ports but rather through local anchorage sites where security and custom services are not very effective. Interviews conducted with some port authorities at the Tiko port revealed that measures have been put in places especially at ports to check illicit goods. Even though port authorities, customs services and police have been made available at different port sites, the situation persist. This is largely linked to corruption by some officials involved in the illegal trade transactions along this coastal belt that continue to give way for such contraband goods to infiltrate the country. It is also suggested that traffickers or dealers have changed their strategies of infiltrating illegal goods into the country via this coastal belt. What then is the way forward?



### **Sustainable combat strategies to the circulation of illicit goods along the Fako coast**

Combating informal maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon requires a myriad of actions and the involvement of several stakeholders. These stakeholders may range from customs officers, port authorities, the police, Cameroon navy to cross-border traders. All these stakeholders must work collectively to eradicate if not limit illicit maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon.

Firstly, reinforcing security measures at maritime frontiers can be a sustainable measure to curb the circulation of contraband goods along this coastline. This is because dealers in contraband exploit weak security measures and porous sea frontiers to attain their objectives of carrying out illegal transactions on illegal goods into the country. Field surveys revealed that there are some illegal anchorage sites exploited by traffickers dealing on contraband goods to carry out their criminal activities. Thus, reinforcing both custom services and Cameroon navy security in such areas and stationing some at the Cameroon territorial waters may go a long way to contain such illicit trade along this coastline. It will also help to deal with all sorts of maritime insecurity such as maritime piracy and armed robbery which is cause for concern along this zone and the Gulf of Guinea in general.

Secondly, charging the frontier police, custom officials and the naval officers along this coastal belt, corruption free and responsible can be a promising measure to deal with all sorts of illicit seaborne trade along this coastal belt. Field interviews indicated that corruption and irresponsible attitude of some uniform men were at the origin of this illicit trade perpetrated via the sea along the Fako coast. It is in this light that Transparency International (2019) underscored that porous borders and corruptible officials have enabled fuel smuggling by non-state actors along the Cameroon coast. In February 2019, the Cameroonian police, assisted by the country's elite corps, seized hundreds of fuel containers smuggled from Nigeria by a suspected rebel group that were destined to the Central African Republic via Idenau (Ifesinachi, 2020). This is crystal clear that corruption instigated by uniform officers is largely at the origin of illicit trade along this coastline. Thus, the State should sought measures to sort out all these corrupt officials and dismantle all criminal networks involved in illicit maritime trade.

Thirdly, reinforcing proper checks on goods by the ports police, clearing customs and the various stakeholders involved can go an extra mile to attenuate the flow of illicit goods into and out of the country. This suggest why field observations revealed that proper checks were not conducted on goods upon arrival at the port which can give dealers the green light to try their luck. Also, intensifying the use of ICTs at

the ports such as survey cameras, detectives, test kits and monitors can also go a long way to deals with such illicit trade operated using maritime ways. Field surveys indicated that the ports along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon lacks all these necessary facilities to control export and imports of goods in the ports. All these measures can go a long way to deal with illicit trade along this coastline to safe the economy and people's lives in general.

### **DISCUSSIONS**

Maritime trade and transportation are key drivers of economic growth and development. Countries with the vision of emergence must begin to accord relative importance to maritime trade which accounts for up to 80 percent of international trade around the world (UNCTAD, 2015). Maritime trade is less costly and more sustainable. It can boost the economy via internationalisation of local markets and creation of industrial zones in port towns such as Limbe, Tiko and Idenau along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon. Maritime trade can also be a setback to the economy if loosely monitored as the case is apparent along the Fako coast of Cameroon. As earlier underpinned, this trade can open up new avenues for greater trade opportunities with more countries along the Gulf of Guinea and beyond. The Fako coastline has potentials with naturally deep seaport like Tiko, Limbe and Idenau that can be exploited and expanded to create more maritime trade transactions in the area to attract investors. By expanding these secondary ports, industries will naturally be attracted for trading and businesses since the greater proportion of international trade is maritime.

Also, properly controlling maritime trade along this coastal belt can attract other investors and relevant stakeholders to invest in various trading activities along the coastline. The illegal part of this trade and the faint-hearted nature of some officials has scared away investors in the sector since the pricing policy has been altered due to illegal goods flooding this area. Hitting hard on corruption free transactions, criminal organisations on circulation of illicit goods along this coastline can be a steppingstone for progress and development around this area and its environs. This is added to the fact that this coastline is strategically located and shares both maritime and land boundaries with Nigeria giving it a flamboyant advantage on trade deals since this country is the greatest economy in the ECOWAS Sub-region.

The three secondary ports along this coastal belt is linked with a single lane road which is susceptible to traffic jam. Adding to the size of the road, constructing more roads and interconnecting the ports with a railway line can facilitate trade transactions into the interior and from the ports. More interestingly, this coastline is also located around the major

agricultural hotspot of Cameroon where almost 90 percent plantations are found advantaged by the fertile volcanic soils at the flanks of Mount Fako. Developing the ports infrastructure and expanding these seaports to anchor larger vessels will facilitate maritime trade and help to decongest the Douala port which handles over 80 percent of goods entering the CEMAC sub- region. This falls within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs9) which centres on building resilient infrastructure and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon is booming and spearheading economic progress and development. Unfortunately, this trade has taken a U-turn to promote illegal maritime trade transaction where criminal actors deal on illicit goods predominantly fuel and pharmaceuticals. These illegal transactions on contraband goods have had adverse effects on the State revenue (taxes), State pricing policy and the general lives of the people. The efforts of uniform officers along this coastal belt such as custom officials, naval officers and the police have not yield sufficient fruits as the situation continue to persist. Sustainable measures to curb such criminal chains of illegal trade transactions at the sea can stem from reinforcing security measures at the maritime borders to improving customs and police services at port sites. Charging uniform men to be responsible and ethical and strengthening the role of law at maritime frontiers can go a long way to curtail such illegal trade transaction and dismantle criminal trade chains along this coastal belt. This is because illicit actors exploit inadequate capacities and corruption networks established by some law enforcement personnel to find their way to operate criminal activities at the sea. It is, therefore, important that maritime trade and transportation along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon be given a profuse priority and attention to kindle economic growth and development. This is at a time when there is increasing globalisations and rapid trade expansion in Cameroon and around the world at large. It is also at a time when the Cameroon government is yawning for horizon 2035 for emergence. Thus, exploiting resourcefully maritime trade and transportation along the Fako coast can be a perfect idea of enhancing maritime trade along the Fako coastal belt of Cameroon and the country as a whole.

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