

NIGERIA'S BORDER CLOSURE, THE ECOWAS AND DYNAMICS OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN POST-COLONIAL WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

The central objective of this paper is to analyze the implications of Nigeria's border closure policy on its economic relations with other West African countries. It is evident that the intersections between the politics of border closure and economic relations in sub-Saharan Africa have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent times. However, the extant literature on this subject reveals a gap, as there is scant research focusing on the implications of Nigeria's border closure policies on its economic relations with other West African countries since the country's return to democratic rule. This paper fills this gap by interrogating the complex dynamics of Nigeria's border closure policies and how they have shaped internal imbroglio, tensions, and frictions arising from economic distress and inflationary pressures. The study also examines the impact of border closure on strained diplomatic rapprochement and economic relations between the Nigerian state and its immediate neighbours within the West African sub-region. The data used for this study were collected through secondary sources obtained from the review of related literature. The major findings of the study indicate that although the policy was necessitated by the need to address cross-border security infractions, smuggling, terrorism, and economic protectionism aimed at shielding domestic industries and boosting local agricultural production, it has produced significant consequences not only for economic relations and cooperation within the sub-region but also for the diplomatic and domestic policies of the affected West African states.

Keywords: Border closure, ECOWAS, economic relations, cooperation and Policies

Introduction

In global history, the closure of the border is not a new phenomenon as it has long-established historical antecedents. At different historical moments and epochs, societies across various continents in the global world including Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America and others applied different trade policies to see that their level of production was excellent in the international arena compared to other countries or regional neighbours (Hellman and Smith, 2021). At different in human history, economies deployed measures geared towards trying to have a favourable balance of trade than another, for that, among their policies was to close the border for either trading policy or other reasons (Abdulkarim and Ibrahim, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the history of border trade highlights the inter-dependence and inevitable cooperation that exists in the sub-region from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial times (Aborisade, 2018; Abolorunde, 2019; Afolabi and Seriki, 2020). Impliedly, border residents in West African sub-region were living together for harmony and brotherhood long before the advent of colonial masters (Afolabi and Seriki, 2020). Through the ages, Africans and migrant associations have migrated across what has been termed international boundaries as pastoralists, traders, muggers, and refugees (Seriki, 2025; Johnson, Toesae and Seriki, 2026). However, with the scramble and politics of territorial acquisition in West Africa by the major European powers of Britain (United Kingdom), France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy at the Berlin Conference of 1884, the West African region and indeed the whole of Africa were demarcated into the present political boundaries known as borders among African countries (Seriki and Odediji, 2024). Hence, borders not only between Nigeria and its neighbours but the entire borders in Africa were artificially created by these European countries. These boundaries defined in terms of latitudes, longitudes, geometric circles and straight lines-split several ethnic and cultural communities, a situation which has made it difficult for most African states to effectively administer their borders cutting across cultural and ethnic groups (Okunade, 2019).

Nigeria is at the forefront of international border closure in West African sub-region since the military era. Nigeria which shares boundaries with Benin, Niger, and Cameroon closed all of its land borders in order to ensure total control over what comes into the country in October 2019 (Olatunji, 2019). The cause of this action in the view of the government was the smuggling of rice and other illicit exports of cheaper, subsidised petrol from Nigeria to its neighbours, as 10 to 20 per cent of Nigerian fuel was smuggled abroad. Nigeria's decision to close her international borders has undoubtedly produced several implications on economic relations among the member states of the ECOWAS. Of course closing Border in Nigeria is not a new phenomena each regime will come

along with its policy on Trade (Cross Border Trade inclusive) and contraband which either led to Land Border Closure or classifying certain goods as contraband. This closure was in breach of the protocol on the free movement of goods, services and people, established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to which Nigeria is a member and in which it wields significant political and economic weight. This action also came just two months after the country signed the African Continental Free Trade Area (Unah, 2019) which aims to remove barriers to trade and promote the free flow of goods, services and people across the continent. Thus Nigeria border closure was inconsistent with the country's multilateral commitments, including ECOWAS and AfCFTA, and was seen as a major disruption to Nigeria and the entire West African sub-region in terms of their international trade relations (Seriki, 2025).

The apparent ECOWAS dream is recreating a borderless West Africa. Member countries have collectively endorsed this dream by initiating policies to reduce delays and extortion by security agencies at border posts by removing the numerous road blocks and security check points; abolition of residence permit; introduction of ECOWAS passport; and the pursuance of a Shengen-type visa for the community. Thus, salient questions have been raised concerning Nigeria's border closure in the past and in recent times. Does Nigeria's border closure policy in contemporary times conform to ECOWAS protocol and borderless campaign? What are the factors motivating Nigeria's border closure policy? What are the pains and gains of Nigeria's border closure on her and other West African states? All these among others constitute the focus of this paper.

Conceptual and Theoretical Analyses

Ullah and Kumpoh (2018) view border as one of the key determinants of geopolitics in Southeast Asia. Border is integral in trade relations, security and migration flow in the areas. Similarly, southeast Asia's heterogeneity politically, ethnically, religiously, economically, demographically and spatially has crucial implications for neighborly relationships, trade, border constructions, migration and refugee flows for all the countries. Ullah and Kumpoh concluded that the type of border determines the level of relationship between neighbouring countries and security challenge, trade, and population mobility. The study shows that a country can adopt a border policy for political, economic and security reasons, depending on the prevailing circumstances. Similarly, in the context of migration or forced displacement, borders are significant because, in some countries, they mark the place where one country ends and another begins.

To understand the concept of border in the present day, Jimenez, Orenes and Puente (2012) further examine its concrete manifestations by grouping the above enumerated dimensions into two fundamental distinct planes namely *geographical borders*, connected with states, and *symbolic borders*. Geographical borders identified with states refer to geography, economics, politics, and the administrative realms, while the symbolic demands significant effort to demarcate given that it does not address a concrete or defined reality. From the foregoing, border can be comprehended as a space demarcated by symbolic limits linked with social representations, whether they coexist with physical and official barriers or not. It has also been noted that border could be seen as a limitation that is mental or imaginary, constrained by variables such as space, identity, time, desires, actions, etc. Border, therefore, becomes a locale in which "we" and the "other" are conceptualized, and which is in some circumstances identified by its permeability, in variance to the stringency of the identity. This is the most related to geographical borders. However, it was suggested that borders are highly complex, social spaces that need interactive and dialogic assumptions to be comprehended in their full extension (Jimenez, Orenes and Puente, 2012).

Grimson (2005) points out that while geographical borders which refer to geography, economics, politics, and the administrative realm identified with states, separate different realities, they simultaneously produce trans-border spaces. Such spaces produce power contest implicating diverse territories and identities; they are equally differentiated spaces, which produce or provoke conflicts, and which serve as a locale for trans-cultural dynamics. Weber (2012) describes a border as a line that symbolizes a boundary. Borders are seen as boundaries between states, while boundaries are markers in existing states. As borders distinguish a state's territory, it also expresses belonging, identities, and political affiliation. Weber goes on to say that borders, boundaries, and borderlands make up numerous potentials as well as obstacles. As borders remain important in demarcating the physical boundaries of state territories, it remains important in daily practice to the people living within such spaces. She further opines that smuggling of small arms, human trafficking, and provision of refuge for armed opposition groups are all activities which can be carried out by borderland communities. This constitutes a risk to the security of the state. O'Dowd (2002: 24) notes that borders are "places of economic and political opportunity for nations and states as well as for a host of other interest groups and agencies, legal and illegal". He says for some countries, borders have been transformed from barriers, and acquired a new 'bridging' function.

According to Simmel (1992), border is not a spatial fact with a sociological impact, but a sociological fact that shapes spatiality. In this sense, a border is not defined by the geographical space but by the impact of people. Barka (2012: 5) noted that a border post can be defined as the “location where one country’s authority over goods and persons ends and another country’s authority begin.” It is the location where a multitude of government agencies.

A border provides a practical opportunity to assist a state to maintain its internal security against external threats and aggression against its territory and people. A border is subsequently, a separation between states but also a process of control on behalf of their national security. Nonetheless, demands made by the current global economic system require a certain degree of border openness. Hence, borders should not just be exclusive (refusing entry to undesirable products and people); they should also be inclusive (facilitating the movement of individuals and goods). It is, therefore, important that states find a balance between the need for mobility and control between “doors and walls”. A completely closed border is not in fact the solution to border insecurities and other transnational challenges. On the contrary, it would be in danger of creating an environment that is propitious to illicit activities. The balance between “doors and walls” should therefore be respected, to facilitate development of legal, economic activities in and beyond the border region and subsequently help reduce the conditions that generate illegal activities.

The function of a border in the definition of the state should not be underestimated. In certain regions of the world, borders are still subject to dispute or are in the process of being stabilized. A lack of clear delimitation and demarcation between two states is a potential source of tension, which can affect other countries in the region. In May 2009, for example, only 25% of land borders in Africa had sufficient demarcation lines (GTZ and GABP, 2009). According to the declaration of the African Union Border Programme and its implementation modalities as adopted by the Conference of African Ministers in charge of border issues held in Addis Ababa, the African Union is aware of the importance of having stable borders for peace, security and cooperation in the continent and in June 2007 it launched the Border Programme, in an effort to define and demarcate the borders of its member states by 2012.

Eselebor (2008) has noted that a border is a line or thin strip delimiting the territories of sovereign states with equal jurisdiction as can be observed at the Nigeria border with Benin Republic at Seme. Eselebor further notes that an understanding and interpretation of what border is and means vary with different strategic interests that could be social, economic, political or environmental; and that our border, therefore, performs the dual function of a line that links and separates.

Be that as it may, this study adopts the Theory of Comparative Advantage developed by David Ricardo whose notion adequately explains the theoretical exploration and analytical discuss of the need for one country to trade and relate with other countries in various ramifications. Ruffin (2002) explains that the Law of Comparative Advantage or rather Theory of Comparative Advantage was proposed and developed by David Ricardo Ricardo considered two or more countries like Nigeria and other West African countries for instance whereby Nigeria produces certain goods or commodities at a cheaper rate and with higher specialisation her neighbouring may equally be specialised in the production of other goods which Nigeria does not produce. This brings the two or more countries together for international trade probably Cross Border Trade since Nigeria and some West African countries share boundary together. However, when it is stated that, international trade depends on the differences in comparative advantage one may explore not absolute cost of production in the two countries. For instance, England might be able to raise Coal at one-half of the price of labour and abstinence needed in France. Therefore, this will not render it profitable for France to purchase or supply Coal from England. On this note, it is good for a country to import commodities from another country where the cost of production of those commodities cost less than it would be at home. This by extension necessitated the trading, transaction and relating with one country by another perhaps Nigeria and Niger Republic. Whereas closing the border between countries will disconnect one from the other. Ricardo cited an instance that; Two men can both make shoes and hats and one is superior to the other in both employments but in making hats, he can only exceeded his competitor by one-fifth or 20% and in making shoe she can excel him by one-third or 33%: will it not be in the interest of both that the superior man should employ himself exclusively in making shoes and the inferior man in making hats?

The above instance can be applied between countries or among nation – states not even between individuals as portrayed in the above indention. When such model was adopted between Nigeria and other ECOWAS member states, foreign trade or cross border trade will benefit countries, increases the revenue generation through tariffs and allow the import of commodities and other goods at a cheaper rate as well as provides employment to so many people in both countries (Edo and Aborisade, 2012; Ogbogbo and Aborisade, 2018).

Consequently, the aforementioned benefits and advantages will be lost when a country like Nigeria closed its entire borderland with her neighbouring countries, in the sense that, whenever a border is closed, Government's revenue generation will drastically be reduced, cost of goods or commodities be very high, unemployment rate will persist as those involved in the Cross Border Trade will lost their jobs, farmers who cultivate vegetables other perishable fruits meant for Cross Border Trade will automatically incur serious loss and damages, drivers who carry goods on their vehicles across border will be jobless and the labourers who load goods and offload such commodities from trucks will also run out of jobs. This by extension will lead to high unemployment rate, high poverty percentage, high crime rate and backwardness of economic growth and development. Thus, the paper realised the relevance and significance of the Theory of Comparative Advantage which was discovered and developed by its prominent proponent David Ricardo which the research finds highly imperative and adopted accordingly.

Nigeria's Border Closure Policies: Interrogating the underlying Factors

A lot of factors were advanced by countries that adopted the policy for land border closure and restriction. These factors could be economic, security and political depending on the prevailing circumstances. On the political ground, the politics of border surveillance and monitoring constitutes a major rationale for the border closure policy of the Nigerian government. International migration and security has continued to blur the difference between illegal/irregular and legal migration. The deepened and devastating activities of smugglers to the economy, security and state sovereignty has made it impossible for policy makers to effectively differentiate between policies that infringe on human rights from those that actually address illegal migration (Fayomi and Gabriel, 2012). The issue of granting political asylum to wanted individuals and personalities and politicians of Nigerian origin by neighbouring West African states has generated a lot of heat and imbroglia between Nigerian government and the government of those West African states, hence the need or necessity for the closure of Nigerian borders. For instance, In 1996, following the execution of nine Ogonis including Ken Saro Wiwa for illegal murder of four prominent Ogoni chiefs by the regime of General Sanni Abacha, there were closure of borders between the two countries (Fayomi and Gabriel, 2012). Many Ogonis fled and sought political asylum in Benin Republic; the Beninois authorities denied granting political asylum to Ogonis; the tense political situation and security fragility made both countries closed their borders (Fayomi and Gabriel, 2012). The land borders were re-opened on April 18, 1996 after the two leaders, the Beninois President Mathieu Kerekou and General Sanni Abacha had had bilateral talks.

There is also the security dimension to the explanation of the rationale or reasons for Nigeria's border closure policy and implementation. The alarming rate of cross border criminalities between Nigeria and her West African neighbours has also provided a justification and motivation for the border closure policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria in recent times. In other words, insecurity and criminalities such as armed robbery, terrorism and banditry and trade in weapons or smuggling in of weapons from neighbouring West African states has also given the Nigerian government enough reason to shut down the land borders. For instance, crimes increased at alarming rate between the Nigeria and Benin Republic in 2003 involving and international robbery network, the leader of the gang, a Beninois national was so notorious that his operation rocked the customs and security operatives of Nigeria (Johnson and Seriki, 2024). President Olusegun Obasanjo had to order the closure of the borders at least two times. The second time, the President ordered the border to be closed was on August 9, 2003 and it lasted six days. It was only reopened after President Mathieu Kerekou personally ordered the handing over of the notorious criminal gang leader Hamani Tijani to Nigerian authorities to face criminal charges before the borders were reopened.

Indeed, the effect of trans-border crimes between the Nigeria and other West African countries which has been worsened by globalization, provides a motivation or reason why border closure in Nigeria became pertinent to the Nigerian state. Boko Haram terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, human trafficking and several other security challenges facing Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari provided the basis on which the policy of border closure was adopted and implemented. Between 2015, when President Buhari assumed office and 2021, Nigeria has been marred by numerous security threats, a situation that has been blamed on the free movement of persons or migration across Nigeria-West Africa borders. This situation has necessitated the decision of President Muhammadu Buhari led administration to shut down land borders.

The desire of the Nigerian government to protect the Nigerian economy from the menace of illegal importation is another crucial factor responsible for the closure of the land borders. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari, which has pursued a range of protectionist economic policies, worries that allowing cheaper imports will undermine efforts to push Nigeria towards self-sufficiency in local production. Since 2015, the Central Bank has placed restrictions on the sale of foreign exchange for the importation of 41 products, including rice, palm oil, beef, toothpicks, textiles, tomatoes and cement.

Indeed, Nigeria – which shares boundaries with Benin, Niger and Cameroon – closed all of its land borders to the movement of goods in a bid to tackle smuggling. At the heart of the problem, according to the government, is the smuggling of rice and illicit exports of cheaper, subsidised petrol from Nigeria to its neighbours. Defending the government's protectionist economic policy of border closure, Hameed Ali, the comptroller-general of the Nigerian Customs Services vehemently posited that:

All goods, for now, are banned from being exported or imported through our land borders and that is to ensure we have total control over what comes in (The African Business, 2019).

Furthermore, Nigeria, with a population estimated at about 196 million, has a huge demand for rice. So, it is mainly rice, among other commodities, that are more smuggled. The notorious route for such illegality is Cotonou, Benin's commercial hub, targeting Nigeria's economic capital, Lagos. The World Bank report showed that Benin's economy is heavily reliant on the informal transit trade with Nigeria, which accounts for about 20% of its GDP and national income (The Guardian, 2019). About 80 per cent of Benin's imports are not for their consumptions, but onward movement to Nigeria, with the majority finding their way in the country illegally (The Guardian, 2019). While bans have stopped the illegal trade over the years, it was time to experiment with total closure of the land borders.

This same border is also a major corridor for second-hand cars to Nigeria, where there is a ban on importing cars that are more than 15 years old. A report claimed that Luxembourg-based shipping company, BIM e-solutions, said that an average of 10,000 cars arrive at the Cotonou port from Europe monthly (The Guardian, 2019). But sources from the Nigeria Customs Service, agreed that many of these cars are smuggled across the border to Nigeria. Thus, the Nigerian felt a stop must be put to the menace of smuggling in all forms.

As a corollary to the economic protectionist rationale for border closure in Nigeria is the desire to strengthen local industries and boost agricultural production. Full closure, authorities reason, will promote local production. The government felt that boosting the economy could come from enhancing the capacity of local industries in the production of some items. To do therefore, land border closure is nothing but a necessity. An economist and financial market analyst with FSDH Merchant Bank Limited, Ayodele Akinwunmi posited that one strong reason for the closure of borders in Nigeria is the drive to protect local industries and boost their capacity of production. He submitted as thus:

Besides, there is a subsisting policy concerning the importation of items that can be produced locally, which majority of them are smuggled through the border. No sovereign state will allow free movement of goods and persons that can cause havoc to its economy....Whatever diplomatic agreements were signed, they are within a set of guidelines that should be mutually beneficial to all the states within the economic regions. Any deviation would not only be tantamount to breach, but would create diplomatic friction and distortion of economic cooperation (The Guardian, 2019).

The need to strengthen the revenue base of Nigeria through an improvement on import duties from the ports is also another important reason why the Nigerian government under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari adopted and implemented the border closure policy. Put differently, the move was aimed at boosting government revenues because more duties would be collected from the volume of goods entering the country legally through the ports, if land borders are shut down.

Reactions, Responses and Resistance on Nigeria's Border Closure by the ECOWAS Members

Nigeria and her neighbours in the ECOWAS have increasingly traded with one another, and in recent years this has expanded. Of course, Nigeria is a key regional player in the economic growth of West Africa and facilitates the growth of informal trade across the region. Thus, Nigeria's border closure has immensely affected the informal sector which represents about 50 percent of West Africa's combined GDP—a situation that has propelled ECOWAS member states to react, protest and respond to Nigeria's border closure policy with vehemence.

Nigeria's decision to close her international borders has undoubtedly produced several implications on economic relations among the member states of the ECOWAS as it has continued undermine and negatively affect other states in the West African sub-region. To this end, several reactions and responses have gritted the Nigeria's border closure policy as ECOWAS members have strongly criticized Nigeria's policy and made important steps

to ensure the reversal of the policy. It must be stated that closing Border in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon each regime will come along with its policy on Trade (Cross Border Trade inclusive) and contraband which either led to Land Border Closure or classifying certain goods as contraband.

Indeed, Nigeria's moves towards protectionism through closure of land borders have been met with some backlash from ECOWAS and the African Union, institutions that push for regional cooperation, especially with regards to trade. ECOWAS member states, particularly, Benin Republic, Cameroon, Togo, Chad, Republic of Niger and Ghana are the worst hit economies affected by the phenomenon of border closure as a policy of the Nigerian government under president Muhammadu Buhari. ECOWAS member states particularly Benin Republic, Cameroon, Togo, Chad, Republic of Niger and Ghana have continually accused Nigeria of breach of the protocol on the free movement of goods, services and people, established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to which Nigeria is a member and in which it wields significant political and economic weight. ECOWAS member states have also protested Nigeria's closure of land borders on the grounds that the country's action is a massive departure and contravention of the the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Unah, 2019) Nigeria signed which aims to remove barriers to trade and promote the free flow of goods, services and people across the continent. On this account, ECOWAS member states have also criticised and protested against Nigeria's border closure as they consider inconsistent with the country's multilateral commitments, including ECOWAS and AfCFTA, and was seen as a major disruption to Nigeria and the entire West African sub-region in terms of their international trade relations.

The series of reactions and protests by ECOWAS member states of Nigeria's decision to close her land borders have led to tensions which are not only alive but kicking between Nigeria and her neighbours. The imbroglio and tensions between Nigeria and ECOWAS members states which are occasioned by Nigeria's closure of her borders have led to remarkable consequences not only on economic relations and cooperation in the sub-region but also on diplomatic and domestic policies of the affected West African states.

Ghana is at the forefront of the series of reactions, protests and fights against Nigeria over the issue of border closure. The Ghanaian leaders and government are growing impatient with the border closure, due to the negative economic consequences on their economies, which could result in potential political tensions between the two countries. Undoubtedly, Ghana depends on the Abidjan-Lagos Highway for overland access to markets in West Africa, which was closed due to the Nigerian-Benin border closure. Thus, businesses and industries in Ghana are adversely affected by the border closure policy of the Nigerian state.

Barely a month after Nigeria shut its land borders, the first wave of attacks on Nigerians in Ghana came in the form of a boycott of their businesses. No one envisaged the boycott would later graduate to physical attacks on Nigerians and their shops in the country. In October 2018, Ghana Union of Traders Association called on citizens of the country to stop patronizing products that are imported from Nigeria. While making the call for the boycott, the regional secretary of the union, David Kwadwo Amoateng said the Federal Government of Nigeria is not being fair to foreign traders. He said shunning Nigerian products would serve as pay back to Nigeria for closing its borders. Kwadwo Amoateng stated that:

Either somebody's bread has been buttered or we are cowards. Government is not being fair to us...Let's boycott Nigerian products as payback to their government's action. How can we be slaves in our own country? (Wahab, 2019).

Republic of Benin is another worst hit ECOWAS member state that has continued to protest, react and agitate against Nigeria's closure of her borders. There is no disputing the fact that the most notorious route for such smuggling into Nigeria is Cotonou, which is Benin's commercial hub, targeting Nigeria's economic capital, Lagos. The World Bank report showed that Benin's economy is heavily reliant on the informal transit trade with Nigeria, which accounts for about 20% of its GDP and national income (Nelson, 2019). About 80 per cent of Benin's imports are not for their consumptions, but onward movement to Nigeria, with the majority finding their way in the country illegally (Nelson, 2019). While bans have stopped the illegal trade over the years, it was time to experiment with total closure of the land borders. This same border is also a major corridor for second-hand cars to Nigeria, where there is a ban on importing cars that are more than 15 years old. A report claimed that Luxembourg-based shipping company, BIM e-solutions, said that an average of 10,000 cars arrive at the Cotonou port from Europe monthly (Nelson, 2019). But sources from the Nigeria Customs Service, agreed that many of these cars are smuggled across the border to Nigeria. This year, former Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Maikanti Baru, said petrol smugglers were taking about 10 million litres out of the country each day through Benin axis.

The impact of the border closure policy of Nigeria on Republic of Benin has been so profound that the government of the country has deployed several means of reversing the policy through ECOWAS. In fact, Benin's Agriculture Minister Gaston Dossouhoui echoed the frustration of ECOWAS member states when he described the situation as "a distressing sight" when he visited markets in the town of Grand Popo. "It's very difficult for our producers. It's a disaster," he said further.

Apart from Benin, Nigeria's border closure has also propelled reactions and retaliations from the Cameroonian government. Cameroonian government in a bid to retaliate what it called wicked and obnoxious policy by the Nigerian government was **increasingly willing to suffer economic hardship to make a point**. In retaliation of the border closure policy of the Nigerian government, Cameroon banned the exports of wheat and millet to Nigeria, even though the Nigeria-export trade was about half of all cereal sales over there in Cameroon. Cameroon's example proves that it too can impact Nigeria and ultimately, cooperation has to be a two-way street.

Republic of Niger has also reacted to and resisted Nigeria's border closure policy In an effort to mollify its powerful neighbor. Niger has since imposed its own ban on the exportation of rice to Nigeria. But it is the border communities, where traders often criss-cross for market days, that are suffering. BBC Hausa reporter Tchima Illa Issoufou in Niger said traders in two border towns she visited were unable to do business as most were not able to cross the border. And a long line of lorries, most heavy with goods, stands at Maradi close to the border with Nigeria.

Be that as it may, because of the draconian and harsh implications Nigeria's border closure policy has produced on other ECOWAS member states, members of the ECOWAS expressed their determination to find solutions to the ongoing unilateral border closure by Nigeria. In 2019, ECOWAS' fifteen member countries met in Ouagadougou to find what they described as "realistic solutions" in the "short term". The unilateral closure of borders goes against all the trade and free movement treaties signed by Nigeria, ECOWAS member states all opined. At the opening of the meeting which brings together ECOWAS foreign affairs and trade ministers, Nigerien Lieutenant General Salou Djibo posited that:

The closure of Nigeria's land borders to goods is very worrying because it affects the very foundations of our community, namely the free movement of people and goods... This meeting must propose realistic and applicable solutions in the short term," ... The unilateral closure of borders goes against all the trade and free movement treaties signed by Nigeria within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (African News, 2020).

It is pertinent to state unequivocally that the ECOWAS and African Union have failed to compel Nigeria to drop her border closure policy which runs counter of the ECOWAS protocols of free movement of goods and services as well as humans in the sub-region. In other words, the complaints of ECOWAS member states and their appeal to the intergovernmental organization to contain Nigeria and make her reverse the policy have not been properly handled. ECOWAS has refereed to as a toothless bulldog that could only bark but not bite because of its failure to call Nigeria to order and make her reverse the harsh border management policy she embarked upon. An important reason for the failure of the ECOWAS to salvage other member states from the menace and harsh consequences the policy has had on the economies of these states is that Nigeria is the key and most powerful hegemon whose ordinary silent whispers frightens other member states.

Gains and Pains of Nigeria's Border Closure Policy on Her and ECOWAS Member States

Since the border closure announcement and its immediate implementation in Nigeria, Nigerians and indeed other West Africans have experienced serious pains on the one hand and remarkable gains on the other hand. On the gains of border closure for Nigeria, the country has been able to generate more revenue or money since it closed its land borders. Increased revenue base or generation was at te root of the implementation fo border closure in Nigeria and this aim has been attained to a significant extent. According to the customs, customs has been making between N4.7 billion to N5.8 billion daily--more than the agency used to generate before the closure of Nigerian borders. Ali was also quoted as saying that "one day in September, a record N9.2 billion was collected, which had never happened before. After the closure of the border and since then, we have maintained an average of about N4.7 billion to N5.8 billion on a daily basis, which is far more than we used to collect. The Customs boss Ali corroborated this claim when he said:

What we have discovered is that most of those cargoes that used to go to Benin (Republic), shipped to Benin, and then discharged and smuggled into Nigeria, now that we have

closed the border they are forced to bring their goods to either Apapa or Tin Can Island and we have to collect duty on them...It that would continue to us, it is a welcome situation. As a matter of fact, our revenue has not reduced, it is increasing as a result of closing the border (Egba, 2019)

Secondly, the closure of Nigerian borders has also improved agricultural production as the rice and poultry farming are now lucrative and profitable areas of agro investment in Nigeria. Indeed, since the border closure, Nigerian rice, as well as poultry farmers have been benefitting, as they have been able to market their accumulated produce, which sales were hampered by illegal importation and smuggling. Between 2015 and 2020, Nigeria experienced an astronomical rise in the number of companies, corporates and individuals that are setting up mills, integrated mills and even small mills in the various areas. The Central Bank and agriculture ministry have been at the centre of not just encouraging the production of rice in Nigeria, but also funding these farmers to buy seedlings, fertilizers or some of the herbicides that they need for their rice production, These efforts have sufficiently backed the border closure policy of the government to spur a kind of agricultural revolution and increased production margin.

In addition, the incidence of smuggling has reduced significantly due to the border closure policy of Nigeria. As noted earlier, food imports are part of a widespread smuggling ring that benefits from political protection in Benin and Nigeria's neighbouring countries. The smuggling in of food items has reduced significantly and local production of such items encouraged or boosted.

Arms smuggling has also reduced in Nigeria due to the policy of border closure thereby positively impacting on the security landscape of the country. Prior to the closure of the borders in Nigeria, arms smuggling into the country was very worrisome and rampant but the closure of borders has reduced the incidence. As a corollary to this, the fact that criminalities have also reduced provides another gain of border closure for Nigeria.

Dependence on imports has also reduced and this represents another important gain of border closure for the Nigerian polity. When Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office, one of his major goals was to improve the growth of the agriculture sector to decrease dependency on the oil sector, enacting a policy to restrict the Nigerian Central Bank from distributing funds to facilitate the importation of food, especially rice. The policy of border closure has therefore improved local production of agricultural products which has now reduced food imports into the country. Presently, Nigeria produces about 6.9 million metrics tons of rice annually (Yeboah, 2020).

On then pains for Nigeria and other ECOWAS members, the action of the Nigerian government is affecting trade across the sub-region. The bustling borders have come to a standstill, with goods rotting and queues of lorries waiting at checkpoints in the hope the crossings will reopen, and Nigeria's neighbours are angry, saying the smuggling of rice mainly prompted the action. As expected, Benin, Ghana and other ECOWAS members have been heavily hit by the closure because of its informal trade dependence on Nigeria, which accounts for significant percentage of the country's GDP. This explains the reasons why the governments of these ECOWAS members' states are growing impatient with the border closure, due to the negative economic consequences on their economies, which could result in political tensions it potentially generates.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the shutdown of the land borders by the Nigerian government was propelled by a combination of factors, including the need to address cross-border security infractions, smuggling, terrorism, and economic protectionism aimed at shielding domestic industries and boosting local agricultural production. The study also found that Nigeria's border relations and policy stance in recent times have produced both gains and challenges. The closure of Nigeria's land borders has generated some remarkable positive changes; however, it has also led to tensions, rancour, and imbroglio not only within the country but also between the Nigerian government and other West African countries that have been significantly affected by the policy. On the other hand, the closure of the land borders has adversely affected the inflation rate, as it has accelerated food inflation in Nigeria, thereby increasing the risk of protests in urban centres and communities close to border crossings that have been most affected by the trade restrictions. The End SARS protests by Nigerian youths lend credence to the frustration-aggression theory in the context of rising inflation and economic hardship occasioned by the closure of the borders in Nigeria. Indeed, pressure has been mounting on the government to lift the restrictions, although hard-line advisers to the president remain steadfast in their commitment to the trade ban, which they believe will protect local industries and curb smuggling activities. Nigeria's exports have also been restricted, thereby limiting the movement of products such as cocoa and sesame seeds through land borders.

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