
NIGERIA-BENIN BORDER CLOSURE: ITS ECONOMIC IMPLICATION AND EFFECTS ON NIGERIA DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Smuggling is a natural outcome of the combination of economic, ethnic, and cultural connections transcending artificially- demarcated national borders with lack of coordination of trade policies across countries and weak state enforcement capabilities are likely exposed to all sorts of smuggling activities across borders. This paper seeks to examine the Nigeria-Benin border closure and its implications on Nigerian economic development. The paper employs rational choice crime theory. The study utilizes secondary data. The study revealed that smuggling of contraband goods, illegal arms and ammunition, illicit drugs, and petroleum products, all of which in turn poses serious threats to Nigeria's human security, financial security, food security, and health security. Nigeria-Benin Republic relations have had its ups and downs, but the seemingly unending illegal activities on the border between the two countries made Nigerian government unilaterally close the border against Benin Republic. The border closure is advantageous to Nigerian economy in many important ways, such that it will become possible for Nigeria government to take stock and regulate its economy. This paper posed some recommendations towards reducing smuggling activities on Nigeria-Benin border and strengthening the economy of the two countries. Which are Change in Economic Policy by Benin Republic: Benin Republic as a country should change its economic policy from an Centre pot economic policy (in which goods are primarily imported with the intention of re-exporting it mostly illegally to another country) to a more productive economic policy and Increase Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Efforts: There had been cases of financial corruption among anti-smuggling security agents in Nigeria in which anti-smuggling security agents were apprehended while collaborating with smugglers for financial gains. The Nigeria anti-corruption agencies like Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should be granted wider legal powers to investigate suspected corrupt Nigerians.

Keywords: Border Closure, Economy and Smuggling.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's borders reflect late-nineteenth century agreements among the British, French, and Germans. Most African borders were similarly created by European colonial powers. The point being, the borders rarely reflect indigenous history or culture. In the case of Nigeria, while there are formal border crossings with customs services along the main roads, there are literally hundreds of others along footpaths and minor roads that are unregulated. The practical consequences of closing the land borders is likely to vary from

one part of the country to another, based on government capacity to enforce closures.

Smuggling on the Nigeria-Benin Republic border poses a major challenge to Nigeria despite efforts by security agencies officially responsible for curbing illegal trade and other activities on the border. On the establishment of Nigeria Customs Service in 1891 till the present day, (then officially known in 1891 as Customs for the Collection of Inland Revenue in Niger Coast Protectorate) has been and is still responsible for the prevention and suppression of smuggling and the collection of import and excise duties (Nigeria Customs Service, 2019). Despite all efforts of the Nigeria Customs Service, smuggling activities have always been much pronounced on the international border between Nigeria and Benin Republic. The World Bank estimating that goods worth more than US\$2.4 billion were smuggled into Nigeria in 2006 alone from Benin Republic (Raballand & Mjekiqi, 2010:212). Also, Adejo (2005:98) stated that the porous nature of the Nigeria-Benin border makes the crime of weapons theft very common because the weapons thieves easily escape across the border into Benin Republic after stealing weapons from Nigerian sources or vice versa. In a related submission, Hoffmann & Melly (2015:43) affirmed that the overwhelming bulk of refined fuel sold in the domestic market of Benin Republic (including more than 80% of gasoline as well as 20% of diesel and other products) are smuggled from Nigeria across the Nigeria-Benin international boundary. Also, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006:56-57) confirmed that Nigerian human traffickers regularly use the Nigeria- Benin international border to transport human trafficking victims from Nigeria to Benin for onward delivery to Gabon, Togo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Spain, France, Russia, Switzerland, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia for commercial sexual exploitation and child labour. In the same vein, the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria insisted that more than 1 billion kilogrammes of rice were smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic alone in the first three months of 2019 (Munshi, 2019). In another view, the United States Department of States declared Benin Republic as the world's second largest destination for India-manufactured variety of the opioid known as Tramadol in 2016 (Kazeem, 2018). Most or all of which would be smuggled into Nigeria through the Nigeria-Benin border. Corroborating this, Odunsi submits that, the large-scale smuggling of Tramadol into Nigeria once indirectly led to the seizure of over 500 million tablets of Tramadol by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in just two days (Odunsi, 2018).

Smuggling activities on Nigeria-Benin border have negatively affected Nigerian society in many ways. Smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALW) into Nigeria has been discovered to lead to the death of an estimated 1,000 Nigerians per year since 1999 through armed robbery (Okeke & Oji, 2014:416). In addition, smuggled weapons increased the insecurity in Nigeria in the form of Boko Haram terrorism in the country's northeast region (Awodola & Ayuba, 2015:247); increased oil bunkering, oil pipeline vandalism, environmental degradation, and kidnapping for ransom in the country's Niger Delta region (Badmus, 2010:323); worsened the violent activities of the country's urban youth gangs (Oruwari & Opuene, 2006:8); increased herdsmen attacks on the country's farmers (Omitola, 2014:2); and emboldened secessionist agitations in the county's southeast region (Adeniyi, 2017:8); Increased cultism and rival cult clashes among the youths in academic institutions and urban centres. Intra and inter party violent conflict. Also, counterfeit, substandard, and adulterated goods and items like counterfeit computer software,

adulterated or deliberately abused medical drugs like Tramadol, banned and substandard food items like smuggled rice, and counterfeit clothing materials smuggled into Nigeria have led to revenue loss for the Nigerian government, increase in the general health problems of the country's residents, increase in the country's unemployment rate, and severe as threat to the country's food security. This paper seeks to explore the Nigeria Benin Border closure and its implication on Nigeria Economy.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Smuggling

Etymologically, 'smuggling stems from the Germanic word *smeug* or *smugan* which means To lurk secretly and spitefully and from the Danish *smug* which means 'secretly; 'hidden Bruns, (2019). It originated in the 1660s at the North Sea region from the Low German *smuggeln* or Dutch *smokkelen*, which originally meant something like 'to sneak or perhaps literally 'to slip (smuggled goods through), as well as 'to creep⁵ and 'to move in a ducked way⁵ Bruns,(2019). As an illegal act, smuggling was defined on legal basis as well as academic terms and there is no one particular definition the whole world agrees upon. However, the World Customs Organisation (WCO) glossary (2000) defines smuggling as, "Customs offence consisting in the movement of goods across a Customs frontier in any clandestine manner, thereby evading Customs control. Smuggling of goods products (herein "goods/products means only "legal or non-prohibited goods/ products) may take place through both legal channels of trade, i.e., normal movement of trade through designated customs stations (port, air cargo, land custom stations) or illegal channels of goods movement by adopting different ways and means to evade customs duties. Smuggling taking place through illegal channels is referred to as outright smuggling and may be distinguished in two ways: goods that do not undergo customs clearance in either the exporting country or in the importing country, and goods that pass-through customs clearance in the exporting country, but not in the importing country, (Khodadoost, 2014).

Consumer Goods

Consumer according to Grabner-Krautre (2018) refers to the ultimate user of products, ideas, and services. Consumer goods (CG) refer to essential and non-essential items purchased by the consumer at frequent intervals such as soap, detergents, cosmetics, and other toiletries which have swift turnover and relatively low cost. Adebayo (2017) posited that consumer goods are a generalized term for any product or service purchased primarily for personal, family, or household uses. They are goods, which are directly consumed or used by the buyers without any commercial processing. Consumer goods are products bought for consumption by the average consumer. Alternatively called final goods, consumer goods are the end result of production and manufacturing. Clothing, food, and jewellery are all examples of "consumer goods. Basic or raw materials, such as copper, are not considered consumer goods because they must be transformed into usable products.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes consumer goods as any tangible commodity produced and subsequently purchased to satisfy the current wants and perceived needs of the buyer. Bryan (2010) on his part describe consumer good or final good as a commodity that is used by the consumer to satisfy current wants or needs, rather than to produce another good. For example, a microwave oven or a bicycle is a final good, whereas the parts purchased to manufacture it are intermediate good. Consumer goods such as clothing,

foodstuffs, or toys are intended to satisfy human wants and needs through their direct consumption or use.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is predicated on the rational choice theory of crime. The rational choice theory of crime is based on the works of Gary Becker published as an article titled "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach" in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1968 (Becker, 1968:169-217). The theory postulates that crime is committed only after a human being weighs the benefits derivable from committing the crime and the punishments (if any) for committing the crime (Becker 1968:169-217, Scott, 2000:1, Lovett, 2006:237-239, Regis University College of Contemporary Liberal Studies, 2016). The rational choice theory of crime rests on the assumption that crime is a purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender's commonplace needs for such things as money, status, sex and excitement (Clarke, 1997:21). It further assumes that meeting these needs involves the making of decisions and choices that are usually constrained by limits, ability and the availability of relevant information.

The strength of the rational choice theory lies in the fact that it is very useful in explaining instrumental crimes (O'Grady, 2016:101). Instrumental crimes are crimes involving planning and weighing of the risks associated with the crime with a rational mind (e.g tax evasion, traffic violation, illegal border crossing etc). Other strengths of the theory are that its assumptions pertaining to a certain rational actor are compatible with any set of structural assumptions about other rational actors; it treats variations in choices among many rational actors and by single rational actor over time as entirely a function of their structural positions; it displays a clear predictive advantage; and its independent variables are amenable to reliable measurements (Chai, 2001:9-16).

On the other hand, the weakness of the rational choice theory of crime is that it is not useful in explaining expressive crimes (Clarke, 1997:21). Expressive crimes are crimes involving emotion and lack of rational thinking without being concerned of future consequences (e.g manslaughter, assault, etc). Other weaknesses of rational crime theory are that several factors like altruism, expressive desire, and sense of justice have been confirmed to lead to decision making in the direction of crime as opposed to the theory's insistence on mono-maximized self-decision; it wrongly insists that rational human beings always make rational decisions; it cannot be used to analyse situations which consists of corporate actors like political parties, firms, and states; its predictive advantage is weak when analysing a wide range of behaviours because it generates multiple equilibrium or no equilibrium at all when used to analyse such wide range of behaviours; and it does not accept that culture and ideology play important role in decision-making (Chai, 2001:9-16).

Despite the identified flaws, the rational choice theory of crime is important to this study because smuggling on Nigeria-Benin Republic border is a crime that involves planning and weighing of the risks associated with the smuggling activities by rational minds, and also because the theory displays a clear predictive advantage when analysing smuggling activities. Also, rational choice theory of crime is relevant to this study because its independent variables are reliably measured when analysing smuggling activities because smuggling activities involves real entities like smuggled goods, not abstract items. The smugglers are mostly ready for the consequences of their actions and inaction because of

the derivable and expected benefits. In general, the derivable benefits of smuggling overweight the penalty if caught. Therefore, the benefit smuggling encourages those involved to continue and inspire others to join.

Nigeria-Benin Republic Relations

The international border between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin is roughly 700 km long. The current border corresponds to the inter-colonial border between British and French territories that was set up in 1889. Due to the fact that between these two countries hardly any natural boundaries exist, in some parts its exact demarcation remains unclear. The border region includes a large surface of lagoon- and marshlands in the Ouémé valley, which have traditionally been used as transport and trade routes and which are very difficult to control and monitor by migration and customs authorities. The multiple local markets found along the border line, from the North to the South, are the backbone for the buzzing web of exchange taking place between both countries. These markets also constitute the main places of contact and exchange between people, who come from both rural and urban areas.

Historically, the border region has always been the center of economic activities between both countries. The Southeast in particular, with its numerous local markets including Lagos and Badagry, has been a focal point of economic activities dating back to colonial times. Consequently, the border region is particularly busy between Lagos and Sémé-Podji in the South. Today, the economic needs of the big cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou and Lagos which are linked through the border corridor in the South are constitutive of this cross-border vitality. This is further fuelled by a high permeability of the borders. Along the entire border lies a labyrinth of little creeks and streams, which have never been forbidden and are unmonitored by the police and the border control. The lagoon linking Porto Novo to Lagos and its pirogue traffic further facilitates the transport of agricultural goods, such as rice and cooking oil. Geographical conditions play a vital role: the proximity of major consumption markets and the absence of natural boundaries are important contributing factors in making contrabandism an "institution" within the entire region.

Benin Republic became independent in August 1960 while Nigeria became independent in October 1960, cultural interaction freely continued across the Nigeria-Benin Republic border in such that two traditional rulers in Benin Republic viz the Onisabe of Sabe and the Alaketu of Ketu were in 1982 invited by Ooni of Ife, a traditional ruler in Nigeria to take part in royal council deliberations in a country other than theirs. Similarly, the consent of the Emir of Borgu in Nigeria is always sought before the appointment of a king of Nikki Kingdom in Benin Republic even till the present day while the Babanna tribe in Nigeria and the Gbaso tribe in Benin Republic are so intermixed that a Babanna Nigerian can emerge as the king of the Gbaso Beninoise and vice versa.

Politically at independence, the foreign policy priority of Benin Republic was directed towards France and French-speaking countries of West Africa and Central Africa while the foreign policy of Nigeria was directed at Great Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations. The implication of this is that Nigeria and Benin Republic maintained awkward political distance despite their physical contiguity and cultural intermix. This was one of the reasons why Benin Republic was adversely affected when Nigeria broke diplomatic relations with

France in the 1960s and banned France's aircrafts and ships from its territories (Dahiru, 2003: 10-12). At that time, Benin Republic depended on the Nigerian port at Lagos for the reception of equipment needed for the construction of Cotonou harbor. Owing to this, it had to diplomatically solicit with Nigeria to lift the embargo on French aircrafts and ships few weeks later. Benin Republic was the first country with which Nigeria signed its first friendship treaty at the end of the Nigerian Civil War (Oyebode, 1988: 225). The official visit of Nigerian Head of State General Yakubu Gowon to Benin Republic in 1975 led to agreements to further strengthen the links between the two countries in the areas of setting up joint development projects, facilitating free movement of persons, and intensifying cooperation in such fields as transport, power, telecommunication, information, and cultural exchanges (Oyediran, 1978:297). The good relation between Nigeria and Benin Republic later made Nigerian Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo officially visit Benin Republic in 1978 and address his audience in Yoruba language, which is a language indigenous to both Nigeria and Benin Republic (Dahiru, 2003:20). General Ibrahim Babangida formally re-opened the Nigeria-Benin Republic border in 1986 (which had been hitherto closed) six months after becoming Nigeria's Head of State and subsequently officially resolved after a crucial meeting with the visiting Benin President Kereku in 1986 to reduce bureaucracy to the minimum among the security officials of the two countries along its mutual border and also to establish direct contacts between the two heads of state of the two countries and their ministers and officials at all levels (Isyaku, 2017:212). In 2011, President Yayi of Benin Republic declared during a visit to Nigeria that Nigeria and Benin Republic are working towards one and same currency, and further announced that agreement has been reached between the two countries for Nigeria to assist in the training of Benin army officials as a furtherance of the brotherhood which made the two countries set up a joint border patrol eight years earlier in 2003 in their bid to combat inter-border crimes.

Nigeria-Benin Republic relations have not always being as rosy as the narration seems to suggest. Nigeria-Benin Republic relations was severely strained in the 1960s when it was discovered that Benin President Zinsus was collaborating with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) to use Benin airport and seaport as transit or staging posts for aircraft relief materials to Biafran secessionists during the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War (Isyaku, 2017:216) The attempt by five men from Benin Republic to kidnap a Benin diplomat in Nigeria Mr Abel Zinsou in 1975 caused a serious diplomatic uproar and an even more serious public opinion ire by Nigeria against Benin Republic (Oyediran, 1978:297-298). In the same vein, Timothy-Asobele & Medupin (2003:37) confirmed that deliberate smuggling of contraband goods into Nigeria defines the activities of many Benin on Nigeria-Benin Republic border up to the level that smuggling on the selfsame border is the second highest foreign exchange earner for Benin Republic. Relatedly, the criminal activities of the trans-border car snatcher Hamani Tidjani (a citizen of Niger Republic but a resident of Benin Republic) - who specialised in crossing the border from Benin Republic to Nigeria with his armed gang, snatch cars at gunpoint, smuggle them back to Benin Republic, and repackage the stolen cars as imported cars to be smuggled back to Nigeria for sale - was so serious that Nigerian Government in 2003 unilaterally closed the border against Benin Republic and re-opened it only when Hamani Tidjani was arrested in Benin Republic and

brought to Nigeria for trial (*The Nation*, 2013). Golub, et al (2019:6) asserts the fact that Nigeria's border with Benin Republic was closed from February 1984 to February 1986 in a futile attempt to curb smuggling of petroleum products out of Nigeria, and the same border was closed by Nigeria in 1996 due to a political dispute between Nigeria's head of state General Sanni Abacha and Benin's President Soglo. The dispute was due to Soglo's military cooperation with USA which Abacha viewed as a threat. Similar to this was the diplomatic tension generated when 40 Nigerian businessmen were illegally detained by Benin security agents in 1999 for allegedly entering the country without valid documents despite the provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Freedom of Movement and Residence, and the furor caused in Nigeria in 1996 when 2,000 Nigerians were deported from Benin Republic due to being declared as illegally residents (Isyaku, 2017:217). The above assertion indicates that Nigeria relationship with Benin republic have been well streamline.

The Rationale for Border Closure

Nigeria is a well-known destination for all manner of finished goods and services, including assorted food items which are imported from Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. The country in 2019 exported mainly mineral fuels which accounted for 87% of the total US\$54 billion worth of goods shipped from Nigeria. Other principal Nigerian exports are miscellaneous base metals and agricultural products such as cocoa, oil seeds, tobacco, fruits and nuts, as well as raw hides, skins and leather. On the hand, Nigeria was reported to have imported US\$47 billion worth of goods from across the globe in 2019. This was 30% higher than the previous year's imports, and a 40% increase in the volume of imports since 2015. Besides machinery, computers and mineral fuels including refined oil, food items including rice and wheat have featured prominently in Nigeria's top imports in recent years. A steady rise in the amount Nigeria spent on food and drink imports, from about US\$3 billion in 2015 to about US\$4 billion by 2017, was reported (Iloani, 2019).

The rationale for the border closure, as explained by Nigerian Minister for Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed, was that the Nigeria-Benin Republic border has been lately used for illegal activities frequently and so inordinately in perpetrating cross-border banditry, kidnapping, smuggling of goods and human beings, illegal migration, proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW), and circumvention of the ECOWAS Protocol on Transit. Relatedly the Head of Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) Colonel Hameed Ali (rtd.) gave the reasons for the Nigeria-Benin Republic border closure as being to protect Nigeria's interest as a nation by curbing the illegal medical drugs like Tramadol and illegal arms and ammunition smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic (Royal, 2019). According to British Broadcasting Corporation (2019), the main reason Nigeria closed its border with Benin Republic was the extraordinarily high role of rice smuggling into Nigeria despite the ban placed on foreign rice by Nigerian government. Smuggling contraband goods into Nigeria (mostly through the Nigeria-Benin Republic land border) account for over 20% of the gross domestic product of Benin Republic while about 80% of all imports into Benin Republic is destined to be smuggled into Nigeria. BBC (2019) also identified cars as items heavily smuggled into Nigeria (the estimate is that 10,000 cars are imported into Benin Republic each month, most of them intended to be smuggled into Nigeria) while petroleum products particularly gasoline are regularly smuggled from Nigeria to Benin Republic (as at July 2019, the estimate of the quantity of gasoline smuggled out of Nigeria on daily basis was about 10

million litres).

Long before the closure of Nigeria-Benin Republic border, Nigeria socioeconomic setting has been battered by the rampant smuggling on the selfsame border. Timothy-Asobele & Medupin (2003:40) confirmed that Nigerian naira currency is freely spent as a legal tender in markets in Benin Republic, an act which qualifies and protects smuggling on its own and which directly weakens the naira against the French CFA which supposed to be official legal tender in Benin Republic. Blum (2014:56) confirmed the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), narcotics, and human beings on the Nigerian-Benin Republic border as well as cross-border armed robbery which has turned some villages like Djoffin in Benin Republic to real exchange markets for stolen goods and contrabands, all these being part of a broader illegal network. Raballand & Mjekiqi (2010:216) submitted that the value of textile products smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic in 2006 equaled US\$402m, partly contributing to the collapse of Kaduna Textile Limited, Arewa Textiles, United Nigerian Textiles Limited, and numerous other textile manufacturing companies in Nigeria (Maiwada & Renne, 2013:173). Non-medical use of the opioid Tramadol (the Tramadol sold outside of medical establishments is often adulterated and substandard) has led to a rise in hospital admissions and mortalities in many West African countries including Nigeria (Klein, 2019:52). Benin Republic imports large quantities of India-manufactured Tramadol to be later smuggled across the border into Nigeria (Kazeem, 2018). Also, Hoffman & Melly (2015:vii) insisted that large companies operating in Nigeria have been found combining formal (legal) and informal (smuggling) channels to get business done in Nigeria because in many respects, the boundary between the formal and informal is blurred. Added to this is the World Bank's affirmation that Nigeria experiences an estimated revenue loss of US\$1.2 billion annually to smuggling since 2006 (von Uexkull & Shui, 2014:15). In essence, all these examples of sabotage of Nigeria's socioeconomic setting via smuggling contributed to the Nigerian government's decision to unilaterally close its border against Benin Republic in August 2019.

The unilateral decision to close the border against Benin Republic did not go down well with some public personalities in and outside Nigeria. Nigerian activist lawyer Femi Falana condemned the border closure in strong terms and insisted that the action was primitive and a contravention of citizens' constitutional rights to free movement (Olowe, 2019) and that the Nigerian government should have instead acquired the necessary technology to fish out the smugglers and their collaborators in public service and persecute them without any delay as opposed to sentencing of all those who travel by road to collective punishment and inconvenience through the border closure. The matter of border closure also fomented a temporary division in the Nigerian House of Senate (Umoru, 2019). While majority of the 109 senators lauded the Nigerian government for unilaterally closing the border with Benin Republic, seven separate senators insisted that the closure was a wrong option and, at most, should be the last option in tackling smuggling due to the fact that the border closure is only effective on the 87 legal land border routes between Nigeria and Benin Republic while being completely useless on the over 1,000 illegal routes connecting to the two countries. Outside Nigeria, former Ghanaian president John Mahama submitted that Nigerian's closure of its border against Benin Republic is a superlative threat to the economy of smaller West African nations and that re-opening the border will be in

the overall interest of all West African people (Aderibigbe, 2019). In a related view, a former director of anti-corruption in Kenya Professor Patrick Lumumba declared that the closing of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border due to border porosity is simply unnecessary because a border can still be opened without being porous and insisted that if Nigeria has strong regulations that are obeyed by her citizens, there would have been no need to close the border (Ebhomele, 2019).

The decision of the Nigerian government to close the border with Benin Republic was well received and lauded by many public personalities and organisations in and outside Nigeria. The governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria Godwin Emefiele expressed the border closure is an important step in curbing trans-border crime because many youths who would have taken to cross-border crime will have no option but to embrace legitimate work, and he subsequently requested the Nigerian government to keep the border closed for two years (Wahab, 2019). A state governor in the northern Nigeria, Kaduna State, Mr Nasir el Rufai expressed support for the border closure because it is the only way to stop other smaller West African countries from sabotaging Nigeria via inordinate smuggling (Olowolagba, 2019). Also, another governor in the southern Nigerian, Ebonyi State, Mr David Umahi similarly confirmed his support for the border closure by insisting that it is the only way to stem the tide of illegal migration and illegal dealings within Nigerian's petroleum sector. Apart from the fact that majority of the senators of the Nigerian Upper House of Assembly openly supported the Nigerian government's decision to close its borders against Benin Republic (Umoru, 2019), the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), the Nigerian Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines And Agriculture (NACCIMA), and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) all lauded the Nigerian government's decision to close the border (*Punch*, 2019). At the international level, the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Feed Africa Advocacy Network (FAAN) all submitted that the border closure against Benin Republic by Nigeria is a welcome development (Nuhu, 2019, *Nigeria Tribune*, 2019, Uwugiaren, et al, 2019).

Olowe, (2019) in response to the insinuation in some quarters that Nigeria violated the free movement of people guaranteed under the ECOWAS Treaty due to its closure of the border against Benin Republic, the Nigeria-based Daily Trust Board of Economists insisted that the opposite is the fact (Iloani, 2019) in that the ECOWAS Treaty does not support a country using itself as a transit point for cross-border transactions resulting in security breaches for another country as practiced by Benin Republic against Nigeria, and added that Article 13 of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) has a provision for an African country to refuse entry of goods with dubious origin from another African country. Similarly, in the *PM News* (2019) the Nigerian government found it imperative to debunk insinuations in some quarters that the border closure is targeted at importers of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria by insisting that the closure of the border against Benin Republic is targeted against all smugglers on the aforementioned border, not against any legitimate importer or exporter from any ethnic group in or outside Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2019).

Implications of Border Closure on Nigerian Economy

The country dramatically closed its land frontiers to goods traded with Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, saying its economy needed to be protected from rampant smuggling. The move has met with howls of pain in Benin especially, and cast a shadow over a newly-minted agreement to scrap restrictions on trade among African economies, but the issue is whether it has been beneficial to Nigeria, as the government has sought, which is, no. Evidence seen by AFP suggests that any benefits are at the macro level and the country's many poor are likely to be among the losers. The two main commodities being smuggled were petrol and rice. Petrol was being sneaked out from Nigeria, where subsidies make the fuel half as cheap as in its neighbours, and resold. Rice, on the other hand, was being brought into Nigeria, where consumers favour imported Asian-grown varieties over the locally-grown competitor, from Benin via its port in Cotonou. The most visible winner from the closure is the Nigerian treasury, which has benefited from the falling cost of petrol subsidies and from a rise in customs receipts. Sales of gasoline in Nigeria fell by 12.7% after the border closure, which indicates that millions of subsidised litres are being secretly taken abroad for resale. The reduction in consumption, if sustained, could lead to subsidy savings of around 13.5 billion naira (\$37 million) monthly and 162.1 billion naira annually. As for rice, the country's agriculture lobby is loudly supporting the border closure. Investment in Nigerian agriculture was being hamstrung by the rice trafficking, which is estimated to reach two million tonnes a year. The biggest rice-growing business in Nigeria, owning 13 000 hectares (30 000 acres) of cultivable land of which only 4 500 hectares are being used because the sector is not profitable in the face of competition from Asian rice, but since the border closure, locally-milled rice has started selling, and the entire rice value chain has been positively impacted by the closure. But if the border closure is a boost for domestic growers, it has led to price increases for consumers.

The price of a 50-kilo (110-pound) bag has more than doubled to 20 000 naira, roughly the entire monthly income of a Nigerian living in extreme poverty — of whom there are an estimated 87 million in the country. Traders in Lagos Island, a vast market of Made in China textiles and gadgets, say the closure of the borders had crimped supplies via Benin's Cotonou. Because of the situation, the annual inflation rate has edged up to 11.24 per cent, while inflation ran at 13.51 per cent in September, 2019 (Rasheed, 2020). Nigeria's industrial sector, which is already struggling with the country's notoriously poor transport system and electricity shortages, is equally affected by the border closure. Trade with neighbours is essential. The intention of stopping smuggling is praiseworthy but the point is that measures have an impact on the sector as the measure affects investors who specialise in the import and export of manufactured goods. Between 10 and 20% of Nigerian manufactured goods are sold to other countries in West Africa, with many of these items, such as pasta and cosmetics, exported through informal routes, mainly through small sellers who travel around the region.

There is need for direct investments; there is need for industries to create jobs in this country. Just before the border closure, new measures were introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) amongst which was the prohibition of some imported items for accessing the official foreign exchange market. Whilst this was ongoing the government closed the land borders with her neighbours, all of which are mostly members of the Economic

Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), except Cameroon who is not a member. The border closure has generated public discourse by all, the reason being that Nigeria is a major stakeholder in ECOWAS and also a strategic nation for the success of the African Continental Trade Agreement (Bouillon, 2019). In the various discourse, it is becoming apparent that Nigeria's land border appears to be the pivot of international trade in West Africa and nay Africa. Furthermore, because of the vastness of her border, pervasive dumping of goods and illegal trade with her neighbours had become a norm, notwithstanding the detrimental effect on Nigerian Economy (see Boulon, 2019). Nigeria's recent announcement confirming that it is closing its borders to prevent movement of all goods has been met with harsh criticism from neighbours and regional integration advocates. The government has justified the decision as a tactic to curb smuggling of goods of which the country wants to internally increase production, such as rice. The border closure will have particularly negative consequences for trade especially informal ones, along the Benin-Nigeria border, as the two economies are closely intertwining. Indeed, this informal trade generates substantial income and employment in Benin, and Benin's government collects substantial revenues on entrepôt trade goods imported legally and either legally re-exported to Nigeria, or illegally diverted into Nigeria through smuggling. The informal sector throughout West Africa, and particularly in Benin, represents approximately 50 percent of GDP (70 percent in Benin, in fact) and 90 percent of employment. Unsurprisingly, informal crossborder trade (ICBT) is pervasive and has a long history given the region's artificial and often porous borders, a long history of regional trade, weak border enforcement, corruption, and, perhaps most importantly, lack of coordination of economic policies among neighbouring countries. Notably, ICBT takes several forms, not all of which are illegal: For example, trade in traditional agricultural products and livestock in bordering countries may involve little or no intent to deceive the authorities, as peasants and herders ignore artificial and un-policed borders (Abia, 2019).

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) confirmed that the border closure raised inflation from 11.2% to 11.61% in less than three months but the selfsame CBN assured that the inflationary pressure will moderate and reduce in a maximum of four months (Odunsi, 2019). In a similar vein, the Nigeria-based National Union of Chemical Footwear, Rubber, Leather, and Non-Metallic Products Employees asserted that the border closure threatens to lead to chemical companies downsizing their workers because several goods produced by the companies could not be moved to West African countries for sale as is usual practice due to the closure of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border (*Premium Times*, 2019).

The implications of the unilateral closure of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border on the Nigerian economy are: the Nigeria- Benin Republic border is permeable to smuggling of any kind of goods. It has drastically reduced foreign exchange earnings on both import and export goods. Majorly smugglers were the main beneficiary while the government was losing in all fronts before the border closure.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A closed economy is self-sufficient, meaning that no imports are brought in and no exports are sent out. Therefore, the border closure policy stance of Nigeria was a quasi-open economy since goods and services were allowed to be imported by air and sea. What is of importance is to evaluate the impact of the policies on average Nigerian on the street.

Regarding the import prohibition list, CBN should provide the micro sectoral impact of the policy not necessarily on reduction in foreign exchange utilization, but on specific industries and or companies affected by the policy. This will guide in a holistic evaluation of whether it has achieved the purpose intended. It may not be surprising that those items in the prohibition list were the ones being dumped in Nigeria through the land borders.

Furthermore, CBN can implement a total ban on foreign exchange allocation to non-capital goods. If such a policy is implemented, it will force the existing industry to source raw material within our domestic economy. Although such decision will come with temporal pain to the public but it will eventually result in internal self-sufficiency. It is opinion of this paper that government should sustain the quasi-open economic policy for a reasonable medium term to enable the country to evaluate appropriately the real impact on the domestic economy especially the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Some policy makers argued that the land border should be closed until 2023 when the current government must have left office.

They premised their argument on the ground that China closed her economy in the 15th century AD during the reign of the Ming dynasty, which gave her the advantage of developing domestic capacity. America, North Korea, Macedonia, and Hungary have also closed their borders in the past for various economic and political reasons. Nigeria can learn from the Chinese and other countries' experiences. They opined that to continue to give teeth to the policy, it is imperative for the government to engage in continuous manpower swapping. The officers involved in the enforcement of the policy should be rotated on a quarterly basis. General believed is that the officers at the border posts are enmeshed in corruption and connivance with economic saboteurs and jobbers. This insinuation is never supported by facts or evidence. It is mainly a public bias against the customs officers serving their fatherland. Of course, there might be bad eggs like in any other organization; government decision should not be based on biasedness. For this reason, the adoption of rotational swapping of officers will assist. This should also be extended to CBN, ministry of finance and all agencies involved in border monitoring. Another area that should be evaluated is the impact of the policy on exports and export earnings. CBN should provide statistics of exports going through the land borders vis-à-vis the foreign exchange earnings. It may also be likely that the land border is a source of leakage of revenue to the government if export documentation procedure is weak at the border. Most of the export earnings by land may ultimately not be repatriated to Nigeria, given room for reverse dumping which is detrimental to earning capacity.

The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria and other self-regulated associations should provide supportive information to the government on the impact of the policy on their members if any. This should be an opportunity for the government to develop and revise the process of export data through the land borders. The Nigeria-Benin-Niger and Cameroon border closure in August 2019 was unexpected and made without any formal communication with government officials of these neighbouring countries. The aim was to stop all movements of goods, except oil, from import to export. The closure was part of Nigeria's economic strategy to tackle the smuggling of goods across the border, to increase local production and protect local producers, as outlined in its 2017-2020 Economic and Recovery Growth Plan. Smuggling activities across the Nigerian-Benin border account for

about 110 billion naira (\$303,614,300 United States dollars) in trade revenue loss every year (Liedong, 2019). However, smuggling is nothing new along these borders, with historical roots from British and French colonial authorities, when colonial rivals implemented trade policies to protect local industries from external competition, which exacerbated illicit trade activities across the border.

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