
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 2019 BORDER CLOSURE BY THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND IMPLICATIONS ON WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

The paper critically examines the far-reaching implications of Nigeria's border closure of August 2019 on the economic and political landscapes of the neighbouring African states of Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The Nigerian government's decision to shut its borders, primarily aimed at curbing smuggling, illegal cross-border activities, undocumented migration and enhancing domestic industries, had unintended consequences that reverberated across the region. Previous studies largely focused on transnational organized crimes across states' borders with little attention given to the implications of border closure in West Africa. The study is designed to examine the rationale behind Nigerian government's closure of her land borders, and as well interrogate the implications on the neighbouring states' national security. The paper adopts the dependency theory to explain the closure issues while the case study design. Data are collected using the secondary sources. Findings reveal that the Nigerian government shut the border to enable her develop effective policies and foster regional cooperation; and to as well enlighten the neighbouring countries devise strategies to diversify their economies, reduce dependency, and enhance resilience to external shocks. The paper recommends there is a need for dialogue and collaboration to address cross-border challenges, security and legal initiatives between Nigeria and her sister's state to war against unhealthy activities at the border. This paper, however, concludes by shedding light on the interconnectedness of nations in the African context, emphasising the cruciality of a holistic approach to policy formulation and implementation, fostering cooperation and sustainable development within the continent.

Keywords: Diplomatic Relations, Border Closure, ACFTA, Regional security

Introduction

A country cannot survive in isolation; hence the necessity for diverse countries' involvement in international trade across various boundaries. No country can meet all its needs and sustain its economy solely through internal resources. Engaging in trans-border and international trade allows countries to access a broader range of goods, resources, and markets, promoting economic growth and development. International trade facilitates the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures (Abdullahi & Abdulrazak, 2021). Trans-border trade is a vital component of the global economy, integral to developing nations and sustaining communities. It is an economic activity regarded as domestic and international (Afolayan, 2000).

However, the Nigerian government's decision to close its land borders on August 20, 2019, disrupted this established trade affecting not only Nigeria but also its neighbouring nations like Niger, Benin Republic, and Cameroon. This decision aimed at addressing security concerns, which include a means to curb smuggling, which has had immediate and far-reaching consequences. The border closure has strained Nigeria's relationships with its neighbours, eliciting their strong opposition (Adeyemi, 2021).

To put this into perspective, consider that Benin imports more rice from Thailand than even China, the nation with the largest population. Benin cannot consume the amount of rice she imports, so it will likely be repackaged and exported to the nations nearest it (Business Day, 2020). The countries that share borders with Benin, with a population of about 13 million, include Nigeria, with a population of about 213.4 million, Chad with a population of 17.18 million and Niger, with a population of approximately 25.25 million (World Bank, 2021).

Nigeria's decision to close its borders created significant tensions between its national policies and the objectives of regional economic cooperation. It violated the Protocol on the Free Movement of Products, Services and Persons developed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), where Nigeria participates and has considerable political and economic weight. This ban occurred two months after the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) was concluded. The ACFTA primarily aims to boost intra-African trade by excluding tariff and non-tariff barriers to a unified liberalised market for goods and services across Africa (Wapmuk & Ali, 2022).

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine why the Nigeria Government closed her land borders; How the border closure affected the economies of the neighboring states; Examining the political consequences of the border closure; Find out how the neighboring African states responded to Nigeria's border closure and to examine how it disrupted trade networks and its consequences on regional and continental trade agreements. The research findings will enable governments to develop effective policies, foster regional cooperation, it will help both Nigeria and neighboring countries to devise strategies to diversify their economies, reduce dependency, and enhance resilience to external shocks.

Conceptual Clarification

Trans-border Trade

Trans-border trade promotes economic development, cultural exchange, and global understanding by permitting the movement of commodities, services, and ideas across international borders. This interconnection drives innovation and diversification of economies. It plays a vital role in supporting livelihood, promoting entrepreneurship, and reducing poverty in various communities worldwide (Afolayan, 2020).

The combined population of the neighbouring states in Africa represents a significant market and labour force. Population dynamics, geographical proximity and historical trade routes influence the demand for goods and services, labour availability, and overall economic activities, making them crucial factors in regional trade considerations. For example, With a population of over 12 million, Benin is one of the nations that borders Nigeria. According to data from the Thailand Rice Export Association, Benin has long been Thailand's top rice importer commercially.

Literatures Review

Several works or studies have been carried out on border closure from different disciplinary perspectives. Notable among these studies is the research by Abdukarim and Ibrahim (2021). These two scholars examine the political economy of border closure, focusing on Nigeria's border from 2019-2021. Their study's main argument is determining whether the border closure has impacted Nigeria's economy. In their findings, the authors submitted that using the theory of political economy of protectionism, the study established that the policy of border closure comes with both positive and negative implications. The latter mainly points out inflation, which is characterised by a hike in the prices of goods. At the same time, the former implicates the protection of local industries, increase in the consumption of locally produced commodities and protection of citizens.

While the authors have commendably evaluated the political economy of the policy of border closure, their identification of inflation as the only negative impact of the policies stands to be strongly contested, as other studies have shown. Godson Nwagu (2023) examined the microeconomics implications of border closure, focusing on the Nigeria border from 2023. The thesis of his study is aimed at the implications of border closure in Nigeria. In his findings, nearly half the household budget is spent on food, even at comparable income levels. He established that the border closure has a positive impact on agriculture.

At the same time, the latter is based on the negative impact, where many businesses are facing a loss. Several parts of the Nigeria border were closed after the ACFTA was signed in 2019. The closure has angered ACFTA critics. However, the author has commendably evaluated the microeconomic implications of border closure in Nigeria. His identification of the increase in staple food prices in Nigeria as the only negative impact of the closure is widely debated, as other studies have shown (Omodunbi et al., 2022). The three scholars critically examined the politics of border closure and the associated implications on the Nigerian economy.

Their study uncovers that the closure of the land border s had inevitable consequences, negating Nigeria's international trade treaties and economy as certain African countries backfired against Nigeria due to the land border closure. The study also discovered that the Nigerian economy faces the problem of inflation due to high reliance on foreign and imported products. At the same time, the positive impact of the closure of the border has created job opportunities, leading to the production of locally made goods, which enhances the growth and development of the Nigerian economy.

Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020), the two scholars, examine the Nigeria-Benin Border closure: implications for Economic Development in Nigeria. Also surveyed the effects of the border closure on Nigerian socio-economic, which included decreased In their work, they discovered that there was an increase in domestic production and patronage: a 60% increase in rice consumption, a 30% decrease in domestic fuel consumption, 56% increase in daily income generation of Nigeria Customs Service, and seizure of contraband goods worth over US\$6.4billion within 71 days of the border closure.

The downside effects of the border closure include restricted movements of residents of border towns in Nigeria, the price increase in consumer goods across Nigeria, and an increase in national inflation from 11.22% to 11.61%. They, however, said that 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 goods. It has drastically reduced foreign exchange earnings on both import and export goods. Majorly, smugglers were the primary beneficiaries of the government on all fronts before the border closure.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employed the Dependency and Complex Interdependence Theories to analyse the implications of the closure of Nigeria's border with the neighbouring countries. By considering both theories, the dependency theory comprehensively analysed the multifaceted impact of Nigeria's border closure, encompassing both economic dependency dynamics, and the Complex Interdependence Theory will explore the political implications on neighbouring countries.

The Dependency Theory

The dependency theory became influential mainly due to the Modernization theory that originated from the West. The modernisation theory argued that underdeveloped countries were hindered by cultural traits or lack of adherence to specific economic stages of growth. Dependency theory, in contrast, rejected modernisation theory, emphasising the role of global economic and political structures and criticising its lack of historical context in development (Ushehwe et al., 2017). The theory was developed in the 1950s and 1960s by the prominent proponents of the idea of Raul Prebisch, Fernando Cardoso, Theotonio dos Santos and Andre Gunder Frank.

However, the dependency theory argues that historical factors, including colonisation and economic dependence, have created structural imbalances in the global financial system. These imbalances perpetuate the economic dominance of developed nations over developing ones, leading to unequal financial relationships (Kvangraven, 2017).

In a contemporary context, dependency theory argues that underdeveloped countries are disadvantaged by their integration into the global economic system, often perpetuating their dependency on more advanced economies (Vernengo, 2017). In the case of the Nigeria border closure, this theory suggests that neighbouring African states, which rely heavily on cross-border trade with Nigeria, faced economic vulnerabilities due to their dependence on a single trading partner. Dependency theory focuses on the financial relationships between developed and developing countries, emphasising the structural imbalances and power dynamics in international trade (Egeonu, 2017).

Furthermore, as analysed by Amin (2017), the Dependency theory states that the widely accepted law of value's main characteristic is that the labour force's price is more unequally distributed than the productivity of social labour. The closure of Nigeria's borders disrupts the flow of goods and labour across the region, accentuating existing global economic inequalities (Amin, 2017). The neighbouring countries with lower labour costs faced challenges due to their economic dependency on cross-border trade with Nigeria. They became economically vulnerable due to their reliance on cross-border trade with financially powerful nations like Nigeria, making them susceptible to challenges when disruptions occur in these trade relationships.

Complex Interdependence Theory

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye developed the Complex Interdependence Theory in the 1970s. The term 'interdependence' is frequently used in the contemporary globalised world. It is a situation in world politics where all the actors, including states and non-state actors, depend upon one another (Weeda, 2017). In this system of 'Interdependence', states cooperate because it is in their common interest, and the direct outcome of this cooperation is prosperity and stability in the international system. (Genest, 1996). Mutual interests in economic prosperity, regional stability, and diplomatic harmony drive cooperation among these states.

The theory suggests that states interact through numerous channels, such as economic, social, and political ties (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Nigeria's border closure disrupts such channels, affecting the economic interdependence with the neighbouring countries and leading to political tensions. Diplomatic relations might strain as neighbouring nations seek to address the economic fallout through political negotiations and dialogue.

The theory argues that in complex interdependence, non-security issues gain prominence (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In the case of Nigeria's border closure, economic concerns take centre stage. Political discussions shift from traditional security matters to economic cooperation, border policies, and trade agreements. Neighbouring countries use diplomatic efforts to address these financial issues, emphasising peaceful negotiations over military responses.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the use of a secondary method of data collection as its source of information. The study was carried out using basically the existing data and information from reliable sources which includes internet information, journals, newspapers, magazines, articles and textbooks.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the research show that since the Nigerian government shut all the land borders in August 2019, there have been combinations of positive and negative impacts on the nation's revenue generated, respectively. Nigeria closed her land border in 2019 to curb the smuggling of goods particularly rice and illicit export of locally subsidised petrol to neighbouring countries. This was also a part of Nigeria policy of food import substitution, which aim to encourage local production of rice and other agricultural goods. (Premiumtimeng.com August 28, 2019)

The border closure is affected the trans-border commerce between Nigeria and her neighbours. Traders from Nigeria have for long imported vegetables, tubers, livestock and grains from Nigeria's immediate neighbours namely Benin, Chad and Niger Republics. The importations of these products were meant to make up for deficits in Nigeria. Manufactured household products and building materials were also exported from Nigeria to these countries through such arrangement. For countries like Benin in particular, the border closure is having severe economic effects on the country's economy, a country through which several goods have found their way into Nigeria. Therefore, the continued closure of the border may severely affect the economy of some of Nigeria's neighbours, which may ultimately have a negative impact on Nigeria itself. (Omodele 2021)

The border closure disrupted the agreement of ACFTA and ECOWAS urged the Nigeria government to reconsider her decision and to facilitate a dialogue between the affected countries to resolve the dispute. In a bid to solve the problems, ECOWAS established a committee to investigate the impact of the border osure on the sub-regional trade and integration. The border closure was seen a violation of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of person, goods and services, which is a key pillar of sub-regional cooperation. (EJPSS)

The border closure strained the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and her neighbours especially Benin and Niger who relied heavily on trade with Nigeria.

Implications of Nigeria's Border Closure on Regional Security in Africa

Economic Implications

In a bid to address smuggling, Nigeria closed all its land borders to the movement of goods unexpectedly, giving taders and communities little time to prepare. Nigerian land borders are closed to exports and imports to ensure that all goods coming in are under control. Nigeria border closure led to drastic increase in food commodity prices and a shutdown of Nigerian businesse in neighbouring countries. First Security Discount House [FSDH] reported that some textile companies in Kano have closed.

Also, the closure of the land borders has resulted in high production costs for firms that are dependent on imports through the land borders, which will impart Nigeria future outputs. Although 99% of Nigeria's formal trade is conducted by air, and land borders mainly involve informal trade, the closure of the border is expected to impact food prices and core inflation (Nzekwe, 2019).

Following the closure of the border, Nigerians need to emphasise the consumption of locally made goods, especially food, as evidenced by the widespread consumption of rice throughout the country. Increasing the quality of rice produced by local farmers, ensuring the quality of their product to meet the demand, and ensuring a competitive price for commerce are major challenges for them (Osunbiyi, 2020). There has been a negative impact on livelihoods in local border economies as a result of the closure. There are also many Nigerians who are affected by the closure. For example, local rice prices in most of the cities in Nigeria increased by nearly 9% in the month following the closure, which was the largest increase from month to month since 2012.

The supply side (local producer) is in favor of the border closure. In the light of the rising consumer prices, suppliers of locally produced goods with substantial processing and storage capacity, such as Onyx Rice Mill or Quarran rice, benefit from higher profits. According to the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), the closure of the country's land border by President Muhammadu Buhari has resulted in a significant boost in agricultural sector in the country. A study conducted by the association has indicated that the closure of the border has affected up to 80% of Nigeria's food supply (This Day, 2022). During his statement, Mudi (2022) stated that the level of food production in Nigeria was only 25% before the closure of the land borders, adding that wheat production, which had been just 2% back then, has now reached 10%. Furthermore, he stated that the closing of the land border had resulted in better than harm, as many young people have taken up farming and become self-sufficient.

With the closure of the land border and the high price of foreign rice, locally-produced rice has become a favorite among a large number of people. As stated by the President of the Rice Farmer Association of Nigeria (RIFAN), Aminu Goronyo, the rice industry has gained more than \$52.21 billion since the closure of the border. Despite this, the fall in rice supplies has resulted in food price inflation, which has been a significant burden on consumers. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Nigeria alone has a demand for rice of 7.3 million metric tons each year. Presently, local production amounts to 4.8 million metric tons per year. When and if food imports are prohibited, an inability of domestic supply to meet local demand will result in an inflation of food prices. (Abia, 2020).

As part of Swift Response, customs, immigration, police, and army officers collaborated on a partial border closure in August 2019. The government blames rice smuggling and illicit exports of cheaper, subsidized petrol from Nigeria to its neighbors, as well as 10-20% of Nigerian fuels being smuggled abroad. Furthermore, the closure of the border has resulted in shortages of Nigerian materials in neighboring countries and concerns about trade liberalization. This border closure violates Nigeria's multilateral commitments, including those under ECOWAS and AfCFTA, and disrupts the entire region. The momentum towards removing trade barriers across Africa and the region will be frustrated. The system agreed to is undermined, and goodwill is destroyed (African Business, 2019). The authorities want to promote local production by closing the land border.

Nevertheless, critics argue that demand is often greater than domestic production, requiring vigorous cross-border trade. Rice has not yet reached Nigeria's capacity to meet demand, so reducing imports will encourage smuggling and result in higher prices for local consumers. Furthermore, there has been a rapid decline in the sale of used clothing, used cars, charcoal,

frozen poultry products, and grains. Petrol prices have doubled, motorcycle taxi drivers have tripled, and small stores relying on cross-border traders are closing.

National Bureau of Statistics reports that food inflation topped 15% in November 2019. Over 2.6 million Nigerians live in food insecurity in the northeast region, and the poorest spend over 60 per cent of their income on food. Food prices in Nigeria are high, so smugglers buy at low prices in neighboring countries and sell them at higher prices in Nigeria. Domestic production of staples like rice has increased recently, but it won't keep pace with Nigeria's growing population in the near future. The government does not offer compensation to Nigerian consumers of any kind, especially the poorest, due to the border closure (Ojewale, 2022). Ede Dafinone, chairman of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) Export Promotion Group (MANEG), said that many companies are in dire straits as a result of border closures. He added that significant losses have been recorded while many businesses are about to collapse. It is his opinion that many companies rely on the West African market to increase sales for profits, while those who manufacture locally for export have unsold inventory in their warehouses; some companies that manufacture here export 100% of their products.

Due to the border closure, they suffered significant losses and their businesses

collapsed. Different data sets show that Nigeria not only lost money from trade within the region but also faced worsening security. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's trade with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declined from N2.24 trillion in 2019 to N841 billion in 2020 and N1.24 trillion in 2021 (Ojewale, 2022). By not trading with neighboring countries in 2020, Nigerian exports declined more than they would have without COVID, and livelihoods were lost as a result. In 2016, Nigeria exported N576.59 billion in goods to ECOWAS, followed by N782.65 billion in 2017, and then N1.04 trillion in 2018. Growth accelerated in 2019, reaching N2.24 trillion in 2019.

In 2020, following the closure of the border and COVID-19, Nigeria's exports to the subregion dropped to N841.33 billion. Observations of foreign trade data were also peculiar. The first quarter of 2019 exports to ECOWAS were N300 billion and the second quarter was N217 billion. When the border closure was announced in the third quarter, trade was already at a record high (Ojewale, 2022). The Nigerian exports to ECOWAS by the end of that quarter exceeded even the previous year's outcome. As a result of the border closure, a shooting star in Nigeria's trade history ended. As at the third quarter of 2022 (before this article), Nigeria's exports to other ECOWAS countries have not returned to the peaks of 2019. Nigeria's imports from ECOWAS barely reached ten percent of its exports in all these years (Ojewale, 2022).

Political Implications of Nigeria's 2019 Border Closure on Neighbouring Countries

The 2019 border closure in Nigeria had profound political implications on neighboring countries, particularly Benin and Niger. Here are key aspects of its impact:

Diplomatic Strain

The closure strained diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, leading to tensions and disputes over the sudden restrictions on cross-border trade. Benin and Niger expressed concerns

about the unilateral nature of the decision, as it affected their economies and trade routes (Akinleye, 2020).

Economic Disruption

Neighboring countries heavily reliant on cross-border trade with Nigeria faced economic disruptions, as the closure impeded the flow of goods and commodities. The economic fallout prompted these countries to seek diplomatic resolutions to mitigate the adverse effects on their economies.

Regional Cooperation Challenges

The border closure highlighted challenges in regional cooperation, particularly within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS raised concerns about the impact on regional economic integration and urged diplomatic solutions to address the trade barriers.

Cross-Border Security Concerns

The closure affected the dynamics of cross-border security, with implications for joint efforts to combat transnational crimes and illegal activities. Collaborative security initiatives were disrupted, posing challenges for addressing shared security concerns in the region. The border closure increases the security risk and Humanitarian challenges in the border areas, where smuggling, trafficking and insurgency activities were rampant. In summary, the political implications of Nigeria's border closure in 2019 on neighboring countries were characterized by diplomatic tensions, economic disruptions, challenges to regional cooperation, and shifts in cross-border security dynamics. Resolving these issues required diplomatic engagement and collaborative efforts to restore economic ties and address shared security concerns within the West African region.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that:

- i. Nigeria's government should engage in open and constructive diplomatic discussions with neighbouring African states to address the concerns and consequences of the border closure and find mutually beneficial solutions.
- ii. Implement measures to improve border infrastructure, streamline customs procedures, and enhance trade facilitation to ensure the flow of goods and services while addressing security and regulatory concerns.
- iii. Conduct a comprehensive impact assessment of the border closure on neighbouring African economies to understand the challenges and adapt policies accordingly.
- iv. The government should encourage regional economic blocs, such as ECOWAS and the African Union, to be more active in mediating and resolving trade disputes to promote stability and economic growth in the region.
- v. The government should Promote diversification of Nigeria's economic relations by exploring new markets and trading partners to reduce overreliance on a single route and mitigate the vulnerability of border closures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigeria's border closure in August 2019 had far-reaching economic and political implications for neighbouring African states. While security and regulatory concerns were valid, the approach had significant repercussions. Nigeria should adopt a more diplomatic, cooperative, and consultative approach to navigate these challenges effectively. It should consider the broader regional implications and work closely with its neighbours and regional organisations to find balanced solutions that foster economic growth and security.

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