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Insights into the Benefits and Drawbacks of Nigeria's Land Border Closure Policy 2019–2021

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Abstract: This research analyzed Nigeria's Land Border Closure Policy and the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Goods, and Services between 2019 and 2021. Over the years, the Nigerian government has unilaterally closed its land borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon in reaction to economic, security, or diplomatic violations. Increased smuggling operations, occurrences of illegal cross-border crime, security concerns, and cases of undocumented migrants had affected the government's strategy on industrialization of the country, as well as the continuation of its agricultural program. As a nation governed by laws and a member of international and regional organizations, noncompliance with ECOWAS protocol, transit of commodities, and liberalization of commerce would significantly erode confidence and goodwill in the area. The decision to restrict her borders damaged the recently agreed African continental free trade area (AFCFTA) Agreement by 54 of 55 African nations. This descriptive research relies primarily on secondary sources for data. The analysis demonstrates that severing commercial ties without eliminating the incentives that drive smuggling is detrimental to Pan-African efforts. However, the policy should address the dysfunctional economic policies that have contributed to the situation and stick rigorously to collaborative policies that address regional concerns for intra-regional growth.

Keywords: Policy, Security, Industrialization, Commodities, economy, Liberalization

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1. Introduction

Typically, international commerce is utilized to give a nation with items it lacks or cannot produce in adequate numbers in return for those it produces in vast amounts. These are international transactions conducted between nations. When paired with other economic measures, such trade/transactions have the ability to increase a country's quality of living. Efforts to promote freer commerce between states have dominated most of the recent history of international relations. No country, however, abandons its border to the whims of foreign nationals, allowing them to bring in items without inspection. As a result, nations enact legislation or employ policy measures to restrict inter-national commerce. According to Ani, Bajon, and Samuila (2020), government officials, philosophers, and economists have discussed the variables that impact cross-national trade, whether trade is beneficial or detrimental to a country, and, most significantly, what trade policy is optimal for every particular country. There has also been a dual perspective on international trade, which combines an acknowledgment of the benefits of international exchange with a fear that some domestic sectors (artisanal or cultural) may be harmed by foreign competition. Depending on the impact of foreign trade policies on a country's economy, the government of that country takes rapid action to save lives, property, and the economy. The state of Nigeria's economy prompted the country's government to take action in 2019 to protect the lives and property of its citizens and to mitigate inflationary effects by diversifying her economy away from a reliance on oil production and toward agricultural production and industrial development.

On the 20th of August, 2019, Nigeria, which shares borders with (Benin Republic, Niger Republic, Chad, and Cameroon,) issued a circular reference number NCS/ENF/ABJ/058/S.24 dated 20th August, 2019 through the controller General of Customs officially closing its entire land border to all of its neighbors in an effort to curb the unbridled smuggling of goods such as rice, used vehicles, tomatoes, textile food stuffs, and other (Kassa & Zeufack, 2020).Republic of Benin's entrepot economic situation enables it to import products legally and then illegally export them to Nigeria via smuggling, therefore making it the largest importer of Thai rice. These disturbing trends prompted the government to restrict the illegal supply of unwholesome items such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, money laundering, arms, and light weapons into the country through all the major border corridors and to strengthen government policies by bolstering domestic agricultural production in order to diversify the oil-dependent economy into the non-oil sector of the economy through a strong commitment to production. The circular suggests the deployment of a combined task force for the EX-SWIFT REPONSE border security exercise, which is scheduled to take place in all the geopolitical corridors (Kassa & Zeufack, 2020).

According to Aniukwu (2020), President Buhari reverted to his protectionist policies of the 1980s after regaining office in 2015. Between February 1984 and 1986, the current government, while in power, closed all land borders to prevent the smuggling of contraband into Nigeria. However, the result was abysmal, as smuggling activities increased due to the porous borders, which contained more illegal routes than official entry points. Therefore, it is plain that the current strategy of closing land borders would not have a reasonable effect on the economy, but will instead result in retaliation from neighboring nations. These restrictive trade policies of the 1980s, such as foreign exchange controls and import prohibitions on household products, aggravated the crisis by driving up costs, so promoting smuggling. The border shutdown was critical because it affected all the neighboring nations, and it occurred at a time when African nations were attempting to eliminate border barriers.

In Nigeria, border closures, notably on commerce (including cross-border trade) and contraband, have established a reoccurring policy, with each administration blocking land crossings or labeling specific items as contraband. It is not uncommon for the government to disregard the economic and social consequences of such closures. Border closure in 2019 was forced by the smuggling of rice and other illicit commodities, as well as the unlawful entry of humans into the nation, which has led to an increase in the danger to life and property (Abia, 2019). Olatunji (2019) argues similarly that the closing of Nigeria's land borders was intended to ensure ultimate control over what enters the country via these avenues. Rice and other illegal and subsidized petroleum goods were trafficked from Nigeria to its neighboring states, as 10 to 20% of Nigeria's gasoline was smuggled abroad.

According to Ajuzieogu (2019), in an August 2019 press release, President Muhammadu Buhari stated that the border closure was necessary to allow Nigeria's security forces to develop a strategy for combating smuggling (of prohibited foods, arms and ammunition, and other contraband goods) and its broader implications. Particularly, he noted that the operations of rice smugglers have compromised the agricultural self-sufficiency previously established by his administration's agricultural policies. The Buhari government defended the move as a plan to minimize smuggling of goods, such as rice, for which the country intends to increase domestic production. Border closures have a particularly negative effect on traders, particularly informal traders, along the Benin-Nigeria border due to the close economic ties between the two nations (Larsson, 2019).

The studied literature reveals that ECOWAS Protocol border closure and free movement of goods and services are distinct notions. Abia (2019), Abdulahi (2019), Adepoju (2019), United Nations (2019), Rodrik (2012), Masinjila (2011), Larson (2019), Bouillon (2019), Wolf (2014), ECOWAS Treaty (1975), Singh & Jaipur (2020), Essessiaon, Degla &Hounsa (2020), Ghins&Heinrings (2019), Golub, Mbaye & Golubski (2019), and a Prior to 2019, none of these research have examined the border closure policy and the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Goods and Services in Nigeria. Consequently, this study aims to fill the void.

According to Anyamga (2014), the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Goods, and Services within the sub -region was aimed to minimize or lessen bottlenecks in transit between two locations. He continued by stating that the Protocol's objective is to encourage liberal professions to enter the labor field. Consequently, a Member State may legitimately impose trade restrictions or prohibitions on other Member States if they are established for the reasons or to achieve the goals outlined in sub-paragraphs (a) to (d) (e). A Member State may not rely on the exclusions, however, if its only intent is to impede the free circulation of commodities. Therefore, the Nigerian border closure might be ineffective if the underlying concerns of border security by the country's Customs Service (NCS) and adherence to ECOWAS Trade Protocols are not resolved prior to the implementation of the policy. In light of this, the research investigated the positive and negative effects of Nigeria's border restriction policy on the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of Persons, Goods, and Services between 2019 and 2021.

The Land Border Closure Policy

A closed border is one that forbids, with few or no exceptions, the free movement of people, commodities, and services between various jurisdictions. These limits generally exist have walls or fences along which all entrances and border crossings are locked, and if these border gates are opened, individuals are normally only permitted to pass beneath them extra Probably the most well-known example of a closed border is the Great Wall of China

According to the International Monetary Fund, Nigeria's GDP declined by 1.6% in 2015 compared to the previous year. According to Ani, Baaja, and Samuila (2020), the worldwide decline in crude oil prices in 2014 had a considerable impact on Nigeria, since crude oil accounts for almost 95% of the country's exports and 90% of its foreign exchange earnings. They also reported that foreign direct investment inflows to Nigeria decreased by 55% and that the naira declined by 30% against the dollar, resulting in a foreign exchange deficit. The crude oil accounting indicated that Nigeria looked to have disregarded other areas of the economy, compelling it to diversify.

In an effort to ease the shortages of previous years, the federal government of Nigeria enacted a budget for Economic Recovery and Growth in 2017. According to Ani, Baaja, and Samuilo, Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan of 2017 revealed the objective of expanding investments and increasing the sector's contribution to economic growth from 5% to 8.4% by 2020. (2020). To reinvigorate domestic agriculture and minimize food imports, which amount more than $22 billion annually, the idea was conceived. As a result, the idea accelerated the Nigerian government's implementation of a border closure policy designed to protect local farmers against cheap food imports.

In 2017, Nigeria's rice consumption increased to 6,7 million tons, nearly doubling the country's rice production of 3.7 million tons. Since the shutdown of the border, the price of 50 kilos of rice has increased from 9,000 to 22,000 naira ($24 to $61) Farmers may applaud the move, but the majority of the financial burden fell on consumers. Similarly, in 1984 and 2003, the government closed its border with Benin to prevent the smuggling of products into the country. In 1987, the military leadership also placed import limits on barley in an effort to stabilize the currency, reduce the loss of foreign exchange reserves, and stimulate economic growth.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), Nigeria's actual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2019 is anticipated to be 2.3%, up from 1.9% in 2018. Transportation, the improvement of the oil sector, and advances in information and communications technology were the primary growth factors. Infrequent flooding and conflicts between ranchers and local farmers damaged agriculture. A shortage of funds has continued to impede manufacturing. In 2019, final household spending was the dominant growth driver, maintaining its contribution of 1.1% to real GDP growth from the previous year. Efforts to reduce inflation to 6–9 percent were impeded by structural and macroeconomic restrictions, such as rising food costs and arrears payments, resulting in a ratchet effect.

In addition, Ajuzieogo (2019) highlighted that with fiscal receipts below 7% of GDP, rising government expenditure widened the deficit, which was mostly supported by borrowing. At the end of June 2019, the total public debt was $83.9 billion, an increase of 14.6% over the previous year. In 2018, debt was 20,1% of GDP, an increase from 17.5 percent in 2017. $56.7 billion was the domestic public debt, whereas $27.2 billion was the external public debt (CBN, 2019). The proportion of bilateral debt to total debt is 12.1%, while Eurobonds account for 40.8%. High debt servicing requirements, which were predicted to exceed fifty percent of federally collected revenue, posed fiscal difficulties. As a result of increased imports and decreased exports, the current account surplus dropped significantly.

Additionally, poverty was and continues to be widespread. During this time, the poverty rate was greater than the national average of 69 percent in more than half of Nigeria's 36 states. Increased unemployment, which was projected to reach 23,1 percent in 2018, up from 14,4 percent in 2016, contributes to high poverty. In the formal sector, work opportunities are restricted by a lack of skills. The government launched N-Power and other youth empowerment programs to address unemployment issues. Real GDP growth is anticipated to reach 2.9% and 3.3% in 2020 and 2021, respectively. It is dependant upon the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017–20) of the National Bureau of Statistics, which supports economic diversification. The Nigerian central bank has ordered that banks maintain significant cash reserves.

Concurrently, Olatunji (2014) asserts that cutting government borrowing and lowering the risks associated with financing to small firms might reduce interest rates and improve private sector bank lending. Although the objective of increasing the value-added tax from 5% to 7.5% in order to raise domestic non-oil income was admirable, organized labor and businesses are concerned about cost hikes. The administration also planned to evaluate the country's tax incentives for investment. Prior to the border shutdown, oil exports had been increasing, accumulating foreign exchange reserves and compelling the central bank to intervene in the foreign exchange market.

Nigeria has several opportunities to strengthen its economy, especially in the agriculture processing industry. Special agro-processing zones might assist with agro-industrial expansion and employment generation. Insecurity, on the other hand, discouraged foreign investors, shrunk the local economy, and eventually hindered the possibility for economic progress. The high unemployment rate led to the emergence of social tensions. As a result of the failure to make planned modifications, the public debt and related funding requirements escalated, creating fiscal challenges. Changes in the Middle East have an effect on Nigeria's oil exports. Trade conflicts between the United States and China have delayed global development and diminished demand for Nigerian commodities, particularly oil.

Prolonged Nigerian border restrictions to curb smuggling hampered trade with neighboring West African nations and drove up import prices, especially for basic goods (rice, flour, and cereal crops). In lieu of closing borders to goods from other African nations as a solution, these hazards emphasized the need to expedite structural reforms to enhance economic diversification and modernization in order to lessen susceptibility to external shocks.

Ghins & Heinrigs (2019) propose that the country's land borders must be closed in order to support the local agriculture sector and accelerate national productivity growth, hence decreasing the rate of commodity smuggling and drastically cutting illegal imports of foreign rice. In addition, the government's justification for the border closure includes blocking the shipment of inexpensive petroleum to Niger Republic, Benin, and Cameroon. The Nigerian government has thus opted to block the border. As a result of the policy pronouncement on the Nigerian border land closure, which has been completely enforced since the 20th of August, 2019, the trade of several West African nations has slowed.

According to Kunle Folarin, the Council for the Regulation of Freight Forwarding in Nigeria (CRFFN) (2019), Nigeria discovered that its neighbor Benin Republic, which has a population of only 12 million, is the fifth highest rice importer in the world. In 2018, Benin Republic bought rice worth $996 million US dollars, of which 98.2% was shipped to Nigeria without payment of appropriate Customs Duty, Tax, and other payments, rather than through smuggling. In Nigeria, these served as economic sabotage. Nonetheless, it is relevant.

These land boundaries consist of the following, as shown in the table below:

Nigeria Land Borders with Niger Republic

State-to-State Official Borders Quantity of Borders

1. Borno Gashagar, Damasak, Malam Fatori, Baga Doro (Doron-Baga), Wulgo, Gamboru-Ngala, Rigal, Jilbe, Kumshe, Banki, Kirawa and Ashiga-Shiya --12
2. Jigawa Maigatari -1
3. Katsina
4. Jibiya-Magama, Jibiya-Maje, Mai-Adua, „Yardaji, Kongolom, BabbanMutum, Zango, Birnin Kuka and Dankama -9
5. Kebbi Bagudo, Maje, Lolo, Dole-Kaina, Kamba, Kangiwa and Bachaka.- 7
6. Sokoto Illela, Gada and Sabon Birni - 3 –
7. Yobe Nguru, Machina, TeloTulao and Geidam - 4

Source: Customs Service of Nigeria Nigeria-Niger Land Border Ports Map, 2019

However, Ibrahim and Jasipur (2019) found that around 440,800 vendors were conducting business beyond of Borno's 12 recognized boundaries. The rate has declined because of the insurgency in the state. Jigawa has around 20,630 traders crossing the Maigatari border, whereas Katsina has about 185,730 traders passing the 9 official crossings. In contrast, Kebbi has seven official borders via which around 280 000 traders undertake cross-border commerce. Sokoto state has around 60,000 traders over its three official borders, whereas Yobe state is estimated to have 220,000 traders across its four official boundaries, for a total of $1,200,000.

In addition to the aforementioned, Gordon, Moore, Park, and Richardson (2009) noted that border closures hinder international trade, namely cross-border trade and travel. Therefore, shutting the border is an extreme policy that might put many people in risk, especially those who live along the border. In addition, the economy has suffered and is declining. According to Adeola and Oluyemi (2012), the Federal Republic of Nigeria implemented a Border Closure Policy for the benefit of national security. Between Nigeria and its neighbors, including the Niger Republic, Benin, Chad, and Cameroon, there is unrestricted movement of goods and persons.

Inasmuch as contemporary mobility has a detrimental effect on national security, it is progressively becoming an issue requiring government action (Nigeria). This promotes international violence and crime, which extends beyond national borders. Consequently, the Nigerian government enacted the Border Closure Policy (Golub, Mbaye & Golubski, 2019).

Effects of the Border Closure Policy on Nigeria and Her Neighbors

To reduce the smuggling of illegal goods into Nigeria, the Nigerian government has announced that the country's land borders with the Benin Republic and other neighboring countries will be partially closed on August 20, 2019. For the same reason, the government ordered the complete closure of all borders on October 14—two months later—and forbade any product trade (Foyeku, 2020). In order to carry out the current administration's border closure, the Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Nigerian Police Force, and the Armed Forces formed a joint task force known as "Ex-Swift Response."

The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari claims that the closure of Nigeria's borders was caused by neighboring nations' disregard for the agreement and ECOWAS protocols between Nigeria and the other countries on transit goods. The administration added that it would hold off on reopening the borders until it had a firm guarantee from the neighbors that they would uphold the agreement. Approximately 80% of imports into the Benin Republic are headed for Nigeria, with the majority entering the country illegally, according to a World Bank study from 2020.

The socioeconomic climate of the nation and the general populace are both positively and negatively impacted by the border closure. However, as will be discussed below, our study evaluated both impacts analytically. The advantages of closing the border and the drawbacks of closing the border

Positive Effects of Closing the Border for Nigeria and Nigerians

Since August 20, the border blockade has reduced the Nigerian government's subsidies. According to Ghins & Heinrigs (2019), gasoline imports dropped 20%, reducing Nigeria's fuel subsidy costs. After the border was closed, Bouillon (2019) reported that Nigerian gasoline sales fell 12.7%. Millions of subsidized liters are being trafficked and resold in Nigeria's bordering nations. Success will reduce consumption.

Foyeku (2020) says the border closure has reduced rice, gasoline, and vehicle smuggling. The policy has dealt a severe blow to the thriving smuggling business along the Nigeria-Benin border, forcing businesses in Cotonou that specialize in importing vehicles and rice into Nigeria to close. The constant flow of motorcycles, taxis, trucks, and passengers that keeps the border areas bustling has decreased significantly.

The Nigerian government closed its land borders on August 20, 2019, including for rice and cars. This decision prompted a response from Cameroon, Togo, and Benin. This embargo led to a meteoric rise in rice smuggling over Nigeria's land borders as Asian markets, Thailand in particular, expanded rice shipments to Nigeria's neighbors: Benin from 805,765 tons in 2015 to 1,811,164 tons and Cameroon from 449,297 tons to 774,297 tons (TREA,2020). By importing more than they needed, these countries smuggled surpluses into Nigerian markets through porous borders. Observations

Benin (and Togo) maintain low import taxes to promote their position as Nigerian entrepôts (Igué and Soulé, 1992). First, Benin's domestic consumption cannot explain some Nigerian-protected imports per capita (Golub et al, 13).

Benin imports mostly parboiled rice, which Nigeria prefers but not Benin. This shows that most of Benin's rice imports go to Nigeria (Golub et al, 13). Border closures have hurt Benin-Togo traders, especially informal ones. Corridor Nigeria (Mbaye et al, 2019). Nigeria and Benin have interdependent economies (Golub & Mbaye, 2019).

On February 10, 2020, ECOWAS Heads of State established a commission under Burkina Faso's President Roch Kabore to investigate Nigeria's closing of land borders with her neighbors, which breaches ECOWAS and AU standards. The Nigerian government said closing the border was good for the economy because local rice production increased and gasoline demand decreased. Nigeria threatened to restrict land borders until Benin, Niger, and Chad controlled theirs.

According to Foyeku (2020), citing Lai Mohammed, "since the closure, Nigeria's monthly import revenue has increased by 15%, contrary to what was expected in many quarters, while local fuel consumption has decreased by 30%, presumably due to decreased smuggling into neighboring countries." He continued, "Nigerian rice production and processing have increased." Nigerian rice producers are expanding their crops and hiring more laborers. The Minister of Information and Culture said that 95% of illegal drugs come from the U.S.

The border blockade prevented the smuggling of rice, agrochemicals, and other agricultural inputs (Singh & Jaipur, 2020). The border blockage has helped local rice millers in all federated states, and Nigerian markets are flooded with local rice. The border closure has also benefited the rice value chain, particularly the production, processing, packaging, marketing, and storage of processed rice and padding rice, according to Singh and Jaipur (2020).

The positive impact, especially the improved value chain or value addition, has kept local farmers and indigenous Rice Mills operational, causing the Rice Mills to hire more unemployed youth and improve their living standards.

Negative Effects of Closed Borders on Nigeria and Nigeria

Residents of border settlements and local regions who rely on border markets for survival and income are suffering as a result of the closure of the land border. Thousands of citizens and farmers were also affected by the closure of the border, including the residents of the Seme Border between Nigeria and Benin Republic, who wept loudly. The uproar resulted from the loss of their primary means of subsistence and income. Due to the closure of the border, the price of rice in Ibadan, the capital of the Nigerian state of Oyo with a population of over three million, has increased by 9 percent (Singh & Jaipur, 2020).

Due to the closure of the land border through which the majority of food, commodities, and grains were imported into Nigeria via the Republics of Niger and Benin, food inflation has increased to 13.51 percent. Lagos and other coastal crossings remain ports of entry for products and 234 other commodities due to the land border embargo. According to Bouillon (2019), the congestion at Lagos Port has rendered the processing of imported goods impossible. To receive on-time delivery of one's products, one must pay an excessive amount of bribes. However, it contradicts the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. Persons who invested in agricultural, machinery, storage, or transportation infrastructure that requires long-term amortization are cited as an example by Larsson (2019). Consequently, the closure disrupts these types of investments, particularly if they were designed for international trade. The policy is consequently unsettling.

Between 2010 and 2016, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) identified twenty-three (23) changes in Nigeria's food import restrictions, with an emphasis on anomalies in tariff rates and prohibitions (the policy of contraband). This inconsistency and policy changes reflect poorly on Nigeria and are crucial factors for international businesses deciding whether or not to conduct business there (Council for the Regulation of Freight Forwarding in Nigeria (CRFFN), 2019). Ten to twenty percent of Nigeria's manufactured products, including pasta, cosmetics, and plastics, are exported to West African countries.

In order to achieve this objective, the Land Border Closure Policy has affected the current trend of a globally interconnected economy based on the concept or model of comparative advantage, which enables a nation to determine what it cannot provide its population in sufficient quantities. Keeping the border closed, particularly the land border, has a significant impact on the economic growth and development of Nigeria and other emerging economies (Bouillon, 2019).

2. Conclusions

This study determined that any nation with porous borders should adopt a policy of border closure, especially if the actions of neighboring countries establish a pact with the host nation. Even though it is of the utmost importance to uphold regional agreements, the management of such a sub-region should be contacted prior to implementing harsh measures to avoid damaging the sub-source region's of income.

The researcher concludes that neighboring countries' disregard for the ECOWAS protocol necessitated Nigeria's border closure. The ECOWAS protocol provides its citizens with valid travel documents, as well as the right to reside and regional development through economic integration.

3. Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations based on the results of the problems with the ECOWAS protocol and the subregional nations' signed treaty:
Article 4 of the ECOWAS Protocol on the free movement of goods and services regulates the policy of border closure among the region's governments through ratification, implementation, and enforcement. This will permit the signed agreement to comply with the ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of goods and services within the subregion.

Engaging Policy Experts from the outset of Policy Formulation, Implementation Analysis of the Policy's Outcomes, and Evaluation prior to its adoption will aid in mitigating its effects.

Regarding the import ban list, the CBN should provide the micro sectoral impact of the policy, not necessarily in terms of a decrease in foreign exchange use, but on the specific sectors and/or businesses affected by the regulation. This will guide a thorough evaluation of whether the objective has been achieved. Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that the products on the restricted list are the ones dumped in Nigeria through land borders.

To keep the strategy effective, the government must participate in ongoing personnel exchanges. Every three months, the personnel responsible for enforcing the policy should be rotated. Border patrol agents are frequently accused of corruption and collusion with economic saboteurs and jobbers.

To combat subversion, it is necessary to implement a mechanism for proper implementation and adequate training of security agencies, as well as a system for the proper inspection and detection of fraudulent travel documents. This will aid in combating the scourge of illegal smuggling of goods and services, allowing the Protocol on free movement to achieve its goal of promoting integration in the sub-region of West Africa.

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