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## An Assessment of the Impact of Border Closure by the Nigeria Government on Regional Integration in The West Africa Region

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### Abstract

Nigeria is the acclaimed giant of Africa in specific ramifications. The country is bordered by four African countries namely Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger, and emphatically the hub-nub of economic survival of many African nations such as Togo and Ghana. However, Nigeria's government recently announced the closure of its borders with these neighboring countries albeit, temporarily, and cited illegal importation of goods and services from these countries which has a consequential damaging effect on her economy. This paper interrogates the reasons and consequences of Nigeria's Government's action on border relations with neighboring countries. Adopting the descriptive design method, the research work relied heavily on secondary sources of data collection. Proximate stakeholders such as importers and exporters, Nigerian farmers, and relevant government agencies on border control were also interacted with. Using protectionist theory to analyze trends of actions, the theory argues that protectionist trade policies will always lead to an improved economic result. Findings reveal that despite short-run socio-political and economic gains, protectionism negates the principle of globalization and free trade principles which both the Economic Community of West African States and Africa Union promote among its member states including Nigeria that are signatories to the free trade protocols. The paper recommends among others, that the Nigeria Government should address her internal challenges within its border security apparatus to avert the double jeopardy of violating border relations principles and creating a trade war with her neighbors

### Key Words

Border relations, Protectionist, ECOWAS, Globalization, Integration

### 1. Introduction

Protectionism as a policy is pursued to protect the internal economic institutions that influence local production most especially as it relates to infant industries (Khaler, 1985). In this global age, protectionism is basically to protect the economic interest of developing countries from assumed exploitative economic relationships with the Western world which used the global south as testing grounds for all sorts of products. This singular act is to improve Nigeria's socioeconomic potentials and prospects that are dampened by the border economic crisis (The Punch newspaper, 2020). Experts, especially in political and economic fields believe that one of the reasons why Nigeria is backward economically is because of business that goes on illegally through our borders. (Hoffman and Melly, 2019).

A country that opens its market to all and sundry foreign goods is bound to have a series of problems of which unemployment and poverty are included. In addition to these aforementioned

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points is the security threat that comes with smuggling and closely related to that is the loss of huge volumes of income through informal border trades common to our porous borders.

Nigeria played a significant role in the evolution stage and the eventual actualization of regional integrations and various trade and economic paths of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and Africa Union (A.U). Based on the Afro-centric foreign policy pursued by many Nigerian heads of state and presidents, but the yearnings of many experts that this economic relationship is at the detriment of the core economic interest of Nigeria. The Central Bank of Nigeria Governor Godwin Emefiele stated that “ before the border closure, the chairman of the Rice Processors Association, called him and said that all the rice millers and processors were carrying in their warehouses’ restricted figure of less than 25,00 metric tons of rice. And that this rice had been unsold because of the smuggling and dumping of rice through the Republic of Benin and other borders. Also closely related to the plight of rice farmers was that of the Poultry Association of Nigeria which is also suffering from informal trade from the Benin Republic. Relating such yearning to public policy was the sudden border closure with her neighborhood countries i.e. Cameroon, Benin, and Niger implemented by President Buhari’s democratic administration basically to checkmate the asymmetric economic relationship with her neighbors. (Signé and Van Der Ven, 2019). This sudden action was after the same administration reluctantly signed the Africa continental free trade agreement (AfCFTA).

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The Africa Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) was a trade agreement signed by 54 countries out of 55 African countries, aiming at establishing a single more solid able market for goods and services; with a one customs union force movement for capital and persons (Africa Union Commission, 2019 ). This pact aims to create a self-independent African continent, and its operation came into force on 30 May 2019 at the Kigali summit kicking off the ratification process of the AfCFTA with 22 member states ratifying the agreement in their national parliament (Tribune,2020). The Free Trade Agreement was to create hope for a large number of unemployed youth and women in Africa, enhance economic development, health security, education, peace, and security in Africa; and to paves the way for a laudable pact for continental integration for better trade and development that will also cover the gap between the rich and the poor (Africa Union Commission, 2019; Tribune, 2020). On July 7, 2019, Nigeria and Benin finally committed to signing the Africa Free Trade at the extraordinary session of the assembly of the union (Witschge, 2019).

A few months after Nigeria signed the agreement; the Nigerian government close its borders. The federal government asserted that the closure of the borders is to check smuggling, enhance local production, and for security purposes. But from another perspective, many Nigerians and scholars go against it as it is against the spirit of AfCFTA and detrimental to the policy. The closure of the borders by the Nigerian government is an ill-time policy for the economic integration of Africa (Daily Trust, 2020). This can lead to mistrust in future policy negotiations and agreements. This scenario has generated debates even though border closure is not a new phenomenon in Africa. A fundamental question to ask is whether Nigeria is a sycophant to the AfCFTA pacts it signed or whether Nigeria's decision has the intention of making a mockery of the AfCFTA agreement after signing. It was against this background, the study sought to assess whether protectionism through border closure influenced positive economic results for Nigeria and examine whether Nigeria violates the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Africa Union Protocol on a free trade pact with the closure of the borders.

## 2. Analytical Framework

This work adopts the protectionist theory to explain the recent action of the federal government concerning the border closure. According to Chappelow (2010; cited in Abboushi 2010), **protectionism can be defined** as a policy of shielding local industries from foreign competition through the use of tariffs, subsidies, import quotas, or other means of restrictions or handicaps placed on the imports from foreign competitors.

The protectionist theory has been used to show why many countries adhere to protectionist principles even though virtually all mainstream economists concurred that the global economy generally benefits from free trade. by a kind of upward review of the price of foreign products, lowering the cost for local producers and manufacturers, and reducing or eliminating foreign producers' access to the domestic market. The theory advocates protection methods which include tariff taxes on imported goods and services which continue to be in existence despite great opposition by the world organization trade, Quota level on the number of foreign products sold in the domestic market, which limits the supply chain raises the price of imported products and lastly regulatory obstacles that place blockage in the way of imported products such as product classifications and seemingly endless lists of standards and specifications.

The relevance and argument of the theory are to showcase how a country can improve in some core spheres of socio-political and economic life like defense management, tackling trade deficit, employment, protection of infant industries, and mostly actualizing trade fairness. (Cole,2008; Luttrell;1978, Picus,1977; cited in Abboushi,2010). Many scholars and theorist like renowned economist Magee, Lee, & Kim (2019) criticized the protectionist theory of advocating principles that influences distortions in International Trade and strongly advanced the point that free trade is of great benefit as it promotes competitive global trade. He also pinpoints that free trade allows the transfer of technology which are not available with protectionism.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1. Border Closure versus Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The concept of development can be traceable to the 19th century and has been adopted in many fields including natural sciences, social sciences, and physical sciences. Accordingly, the concept has been associated with several disciplines such as economic development (Tarado, 2010), social development (Seers, 1969), human development (UNDP, 1990), and sustainable development (Sen, 1999). Seers (1969) asserted that the question to ask about a country's development is, What is happening to unemployment? what is happening to poverty? What is happening to inequality? If there is a decrease in all these indicators to a reasonable point such a country is experiencing development.

However, some scholars asserted that border closure is positive for the development of sustainable development of Nigerians as it boasts the morale of local production in the particular agricultural sector. These viewers believe that Nigeria's border closure had solved the problem of poverty and unemployment to some extent. From the antagonists' perspective of border closure, there is no significant development in Nigeria since the closing of borders. According to the Nigerian government, the border closure is to check smuggling, enhance security, and encourage local production. But, this policy recorded no benefit in those areas as smuggling was on the high increase, and the records of insecurities in the country were so high, the local farmers cannot meet the production of consumable foods items which result in survival of the fittest and high level of inflation on food items (Tribune,2020; Adekoya, Salau & Dake, 2020). The poverty situation became helpless and the low standard of living surfaces at the higher level. The concept of Nigeria's closure of borders experiences two different points of view from economic

philosophy. As some Nigerians are in support of border closure such as the Nigerian Association of Farmers. While other viewers question the policy of border closure when it has not achieved any significant sustainable development.

### **3.2. The Benefits of Border Closure to Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Border closure signifies a situation that prevents the movement of goods, services, and persons. In a world of tripod fluidity i.e. movement of persons, goods, and services, border closure or 'barrier' appears to be a simple and efficient method of control. Moreover, it exhibits the sovereignty of a state to exert its statehood and 'independence' in a controversial global system. Border closure is a logical step that springs up whenever a State suspects risky consequences of trade relations. (Beck,1992 cited in Salmi, 2010). Aligning the above assertion with the thought of Ulrich Beck, border closure signifies a new perception of political and social agencies in a country to readjust its borders about its neighbors. These may come with trade barriers symbolizing a perception dominated by fear and desire for control (Stephane, 2011).

Before the recent border closure, Nigeria has been the major victim of informal trans-border trade which has hampered genuine economic growth. This scenario is a plot of economic sabotage, as the country is huge in population and desirably a readymade market for goods sent from her West African neighbors through various entry points. (Igue and Soule, 1992; cited Golub,2012). Nigeria's economy experienced a downward review in 2015 and further constricted by 1.6% in 2016. This was largely due to a global drop in the price of crude oil in 2014. The country has since experienced hard times as Foreign direct investment inflows in the country during this time have plunged by 55%. Closely, related to this is the shortages of foreign exchange which have devalued the naira currency, leading the government to implement stringent foreign exchange controls (2019, Onyeiwu,). In Nigeria, oil exports claim over 95% of Nigeria's total exports and 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings which is in line with the nomenclature of being a monoculture economy. The recent global oil glut springs up the need for the country to diversify and readjust its economy. The result was increased attention being accorded to the agriculture sector, which had declined significantly since the late 1960s ( 2019, Onyeiwu, 2019)

Nigeria's 2017 Economic Recovery and Growth Plan aimed to reawake investments in agriculture and increase the sector's contribution to economic growth from 5% in 2017 to 8.4% by 2020. The idea is to revive domestic farming and save on food imports (over \$22 billion a year). It is this national response that previews the border closure. The national government wants to protect Local farmers from extremely cheap imported foodstuff. It was on this background that President Muhammadu Buhari on October 14 of 2019 ordered closed of Nigeria's land border with Benin, majorly to restrict the import of goods. The move significantly impacted trade in foodstuffs, which had already been affected by various past import restrictions. This recent move is a sequence of efforts to deal with smuggling and associated corruption, but most importantly to energize the domestic agricultural industry. (Oxford Analytical, 2019). The uproar from the academic circuit is that the border closure negates the principle of free trade which is the advocacy of globalization based on the foundational principles of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Most importantly the policy of border closure may be detrimental to the African spirit and Brotherhood and may strain the relationship with fellow African countries lastly Nigeria's commitment to the implementation of ECOWAS protocol and Africa Union's recently signed Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

Aligning with the above assertion is that the principle of sustainable development which is based on development that meets the needs of the present with the compromising ability of the

future generations to meet their own needs is somehow jeopardized because border closure should be a long-time and strategic agenda which should take the interest of all players like importers, exporters, manufacturers, and others. However, one of the significant aspects of this border closure is that there is an upswing in the consumption of local products among Nigerians. As it is a known fact that Nigerians don't appreciate local products because of the availability of cheap new and second-hand foreign products which are globally sourced and somehow smuggled into the Nigerian markets is gradually experiencing lower patronage due to scarcity and high price. Another common staple food is local rice which is in high demand because of the stoppage of rice imports through the land borders. (2019, Adebayo).

Idris Abini, the chairman of the Niger State chapter Of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN), made the call in Minna that the federal government should sustain the border closure during an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). Abini asserted that the closure has increased local rice production in Niger state in particular due to increased demand by marketers and consumers. He said "Although we are yet to meet local demand for rice. "We have embarked on the journey to produce more rice due to the closure of our borders because efforts will be made by both government and farmers to produce enough food. "The border closure is a right step in the right direction because it is already increasing wealth among farmers as consumers are beginning to patronize our local rice," (Adenekan, 2019). Also in a similar vein the national chairman of RIFAN, **Aminu Goronyo, says the closure of Nigeria's land borders is not to enrich rice farmers but to encourage patriotism (Pulse Nigeria, 2019)**. He said "*We have realized many successes by the border closure resulting to the saving of about N300 billion from the annual rice importation to Nigeria. "Today, we are no longer dependent on the rice we consume in the country with only N80 billion to produce locally on an annual basis". He further explained that "Before 2015 Nigeria, spent nothing less than N368 billion for rice importation but today that same money is in circulation within the country's business community. "Moreover, the border closure is part of President Muhammad Buhari's patriotic gesture and encouraging Nigerians to follow suit. He, however, said that "the closure is not to enrich rice farmers but a devotion to the welfare of the country and commitment to compete with other nations," (Pulse Nigeria, 2019).* Goronyo, urged Nigerians to continue to be encouraged by the border closure, saying it would eventually be for the development of the country.

Another positive aspect of the border closure is the reduction of the quantum of oil imported and consumed in Nigeria. Experts are of the view that a significant number of refined oil products also known as premium motor spirit are sold to countries like the Niger Republic and Benin Republic through illegal routes. Complementing this fact is the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, who backed the claim during the joint Senate and House of Representatives Committees on Petroleum to defend the budget proposed by the ministry for 2020. (2019, Alechemu). He further said that "Definitely, we are beginning to see the numbers reducing, from over 60 million liters, it has already come down from the last account to about 52 million liters per day. That means the figures are coming down. We are beginning to restore orderliness. "We are trying to block other leakages and we believe that we can bring down the figure to about 40 million which will be more manageable by the government." The minister also confessed that a reduction in the consumption rate should reflect in the financial details presented for subsidy payment during budgetary discussion. (2019, Alechenu).

Aligning with the views of the Minister of State for Petroleum, is the Group Managing Director, NNPC, Mele Kyari, who tweeted that the closure of Nigeria's borders towards the end of August last year, as well as other interventions, had helped in reducing the smuggling of petrol. He asserted that there is a sharp practice of shipping petrol products meant for the Nigeria market to The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) had also stated in July that petrol

was being smuggled to neighboring Ghana and Benin Republic, which is due to the price disparity of Price Motor Spirit (PMS) between Nigeria and the West African countries. (2019, Alechenu). Notable of mentioning as the positive aspect of the border closure is the claim made on 3rd October 2019, by The Comptroller-General of Customs, Hameed Ali, who told members of the National Assembly that more revenue has been trooping in for Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) and they have been able to make 115 billion in September which is the highest revenue made by the Nigeria Customs Service (Premium Times, 2019)

Ali stated this before the Senate and House of Representatives joint committees on Finance and National Planning, working on the 2020-2022 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP). The NCS boss had this while responding to the lawmakers and he confirmed that the border closure was a blessing to Nigeria. The custom Number One personnel said, "When we closed the border, I feared that our revenue was going to drop. To be honest, our revenue kept increasing. There was a day in September when we collected N9.2 billion in one day. It has never happened before. "This is after the closure of the border and since then, we have maintained an average of about N4.7 billion to N5.8 billion daily which is far more than we used to collect". Another significant aspect of the border closure is the improved internal security arrangement as part of the operations of the Boko Haram insurgents. This claim was backed by the assertion of The Director-General, Department of State Services, Yusuf Bichi, who linked the closure of Nigeria's land borders to the improvement in internal security. He further said the decision of the Federal Government to close the borders had led to a decline in illicit firearms trafficking, the influx of criminals, as well as the activities of smugglers. (2019, Alechemu). Bichi said this during a security conference titled, 'Transhumance and International Migration: Challenges on Governance, Peace and Sustainable Development in Sub-Sahara Africa. The conference was central to enabling participants how to brainstorm and enable participants to update themselves on efforts to checkmate the uncontrolled cross-border activities, especially those that impacted adversely on the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Many Scholars, shared their thoughts and concluded that Nigeria did not violate the aforementioned trade agreements. They asserted that the closure was made on security grounds which was covered by article 27 of the AFCFTA pact and most importantly to protect the domestic markets, amongst other reasons. Nigeria's land borders are reported to have been used as an easy path for smugglers and the government has repeatedly noted that there is a need to tackle illegal and informal trade activities and the importation of contraband goods. As such, the land borders had to be closed to develop a strategy on how to curtail the same. These reasons are envisaged and provided for in these trade agreements. States retain their sovereignty and are permitted to apply protective measures as it relates to the traffic in arms, ammunition, and implements of war and such traffic in other goods and materials taking place either directly or indirectly to supply a military establishment. However, requisite notice must have been given to the relevant body and the affected Countries before the closure could be implemented following agreements.

### **3.3. Impact of Unilateral Nigeria's Border Closure on Nigerians and Regional Cooperation**

A State like Nigeria questing for sustainable development must take into cognizance that the border closure is like one dose of treatment to a disease that needs complementary prescriptions. Border closure would only influence short-term gain at the expense of more tangible gains that comes with trade liberalization an aspect of globalization that allows the exchange of goods and services, technical expertise, and foreign direct investments. Though Nigerian rice farmers are full of joy, as the government's decision to close the land borders is on the purported claims of the breeding ground for local production and encouraging more

consumption of local products, especially Rice. A step backward to 2017, provided the fact about the quantum of rice demanded in Nigeria which reached 6.7 million tons, with local production pegged at 3.7 million tons.

The vacuum created by the local markets and consumption is bridged by imports. The border closure has caused the consignments of many importers of perishable goods to be trapped across the various borders with Nigeria's neighbors, thus incurring losses amounting to several millions of naira. Therefore, due to the inability of Nigerians to buy these imported products, there was a consequential increase in demand for local products, like rice and poultry, making the price of locally made rice skyrocket. Since the border closure, the price of a 50-kilogram bag of rice has increased from 9,000 nairas to about 25,000 nairas. (2019, Afe). As acknowledged by experts, there has been an upswing in the prices of goods and services. Nonso Obikili, the Director at the Turgot Center for Economics and Policy Research noted that already we are seeing effects on prices and inflation and I'm sure that there were effects on Q3 Gross Domestic Product GDP based on data provided around November of 2109. Exports through the land borders were also restricted, which stop the movements of cocoa and sesame seeds via land borders. "On his part, the Director-General of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) thought that "it is important to reckon with the costs, supply chain disruptions and losses that business and individuals have suffered as a result of the closure Jobs have been lost, prices have skyrocketed, legitimate exports to the sub-region have been halted, intermediate products for some manufacturers have been cut off, some multinational companies have been de-linked from their sister companies in the sub-region" (Adekoya, Salau & Dake, 2020)

There is a need to relate the border closure to the issue of good neighborliness and the economic and security effects of the closure on fellow States in the West Africa sub-region. There are great concerns that Nigeria's border closure is a big blow to the economy of many West African states most especially the Benin Republic. Moreover, the continued closure of the border may boomerang as the economy of some of Nigeria's neighbors, is gradually turning sour as they don't have a market to sell their products. This in the long run may generate security concerns that will logically affect Nigeria ( 2019, Afe) When the case of insurgency was at its worst height, Nigeria seeks the help of some of the neighboring States especially Niger Republic and Chad, two counties that share cultural tieswith Nigeria, assist in the fight against Boko Haram and they readily lent their support through their membership of a Joint Task Force created for that purpose. However, with the recent closure of our borders despite pleas from the government of some of the countries whose economies are being impacted negatively by the closure, their will or zeal to readily lend their support towards future collaborations on security issues may come with stringent and unbearable conditions.

### **3.4. Critical Areas to be Focus in Border Management in Nigeria**

A bit of sympathy followed by significant strategic thinking is required for a realistic or pragmatic and rewarding foreign policy especially as it regards dealing with trade deficits and other vices from smuggling. Nigeria's decision could set a trade war in motion by triggering rogue counteractions by other countries. It could, therefore, be a scenario of a man shooting himself in the foot. A simple and similar example of this misdirected policy is the propagandist trade war between the United States of America the and Republic of China. The war was kickstarted by the Trump administration on the pretense that China is gaining economically more from the economic relationship between the two countries. This led to a trade war which is to tax the hell out of China. (Bolt, Mavromatis, and Wijnbergen,2019). . However, instead of Chinese products being driven out of the market through inflated prices, US importers and consumers are bearing

the brunt of tariffs, according to a study by the Massachusetts-based National Bureau of Economic Research.

The bottom line of the above assertion is that extreme protectionism like the border closure in this global era does not pay in an era where countries can't pronounce isolationism without proper planning. The economic strength and the technology stage of Nigeria State are not sufficient for Isolationism due to poor institutional fragility, inadequate technology, and human resource development, corruption, and poor implementation of policies. The border closure is an implicit admission of the ineptitude and inefficiency of Nigeria's customs and immigration officers. Border closures also have consequences for legal Nigerian businesses that sell goods to neighboring countries through which is pass through the closed land borders. For example, a recent investigation carried out by FSD Hout Merchant Bank found that some textile firms in Kano have closed businesses because they cannot export to clients across borders. Following won from this; those who countered the border closure are baffled whether border closure is a credible solution to the problem of smuggling or whether it can simply complicate the problem. (Africa, 2019). The cumbersome cargo clearing operations in Nigerian ports make importers pay more demurrage and start patronizing ports in the Benin Republic. This act by Nigerian importers is caused by the corruption by officials of Nigeria Customs Service and Nigeria Ports Authocouple double with the infrastructural defects around areas closed to the various ports that need to be checked ( The Premium Times, 2021).

Another similar issue is the double taxation on importers by customs and sister agencies like the Federal Inland Revenue Service and Lagos Inland Revenue Service and even street urchins and touts who are always on the neck of importers for money.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Conclusively, Nigeria should use such a protectionist policy for a short time and strategically use the gains from this to complement developmental efforts for sustainable development which take cognizance of the past, present, and future. Also, the institutional decay currently bedeviling our dear state needs to be given good attention. Therefore, the Nigerian state should improve its institutional framework in charge of board management with competent hands, well-trained personnel with utmost good faith, and honest characters. Likewise, to prevent smuggling, the country should empower the customs officers and immigration officers to administer the country's trade policies and laws. Nigeria should key into the strategies used by Hong Kong Custom System on all goods vehicles and private cars passing through the border; where comprehensive inspections are carried out by the officers out on high-risk vehicles. Scanners and sophisticated equipment are used to x-ray hidden or cover concealed compartments of vehicles. Lastly, there is the need to consult and liaise with our neighbors before taking such unilateral decisions even if the border closure is drawn on the basis that their trade relations with fellow West African countries come with various threats to our sovereignty.

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