

# The Effects of the 2019 Nigeria Land Border Closure on Informal Traders in the Border Communities in South-West States of Nigeria

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## Abstract

**T**he 2019 Nigeria's land border closure with its immediate neighbours has generated intense debates on the impact of the policy on the people, especially informal traders in border communities who largely depend on Cross-Border Trade (CBT) for their survival. The study examined the effects of Nigeria-Benin border closure on informal traders in border communities in South-western states of Nigeria. In doing that, the rationale behind closure was examined. Data from both primary and secondary sources were utilized in the study. Primary data were gathered through in-depth interview with fifty (50) informal traders in border communities purposively selected. Secondary data were extracted from textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines and documents on Cross Border issues. Data were analysed through descriptive and content analysis. The study discovered that, the rationale behind border closure by Nigeria was for security reason, political godfatherism, economic malice and retaliation, as well as to curb smuggling activities, which had negative consequences on economic growth and development of the country. The study also buttressed that smuggling of goods was reduced, production of locally made goods was enhanced and helped in tackling security challenges. The study also revealed that many informal traders in border communities lost their jobs and became indebted, leading to rise in prices of foodstuffs which automatically made life hard for the masses or poor citizens in the area. The study therefore concluded that, both farmers and indigenous industries should be supported to improve in their respective products in order to avert the pain that the implementation of policy caused.

**Keywords:** Border closure, Border communities Nigeria-Benin, Informal traders, South-western states.

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## Introduction

The persistent closure of Nigeria's land borders with her neighbouring states has raised concerns about the validity and essence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) otherwise known as *Communaute Economique des*

*Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEDEAO)*. ECOWAS promulgated a Treaty which permits the free movement of people and goods across West Africa. Since its formation in 1975 by Nigeria and Togo, through their respective Heads of State, General Yakubu Gowon and General Eyadema, ECOWAS has become a model regional body with several common institutions such as the ECOWAS Parliament, Court and Regional Force ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Golub *et al*, 2019). The ECOWAS Treaty on the movement of goods and people has been violated and abused, smuggling of firearms and drugs, human trafficking, trans-border insurgency, and other infractions that have posed serious threats to the peace, stability, and economies of member states, particularly Nigeria, have all been obstacles on the long road to regional integration. In an effort to address these persistent issues, Nigeria's land borders were closed in August 2019 (Adibe, 2019).

Since no nation is self-sufficient, cross-border trade between Nigeria and her neighbours is intended to be advantageous to both parties. To offset their shortfalls, Nigerian traders buy meats, vegetables oil, grains, and tubers from Benin, Togo, Niger, and Chad. Nigeria exports a number of manufactured goods to these nations, including building materials and home goods. These regional trade exchanges are crucial components of economic integration. The border closure appears to be a sign that these violations, which accompany these commercial transfers, won't necessarily bring down the entire system. Nigeria and numerous West African and African nations have enjoyed peace for many years, and some of its residents have completely migrated into their host countries (Duhem, 2019).

Nigeria borders Benin, Niger Republic, Cameroun, and Chad by land. The Nigerian government closed the borders to enable a coordinated operation known as "Swift Response" that involved Customs/Douane, Immigration, Police, and Army personnel on those borders. The Nigerian government gave specific reasons for the border closure, including reducing the amount of goods smuggled into the nation (like rice and poultry products) and stopping the illegal export of subsidised petrol to neighbouring countries, especially Benin Republic. Though, all nations have an inherent right to close their borders to all forms of external influence, including trade but the unexpected nature of the announcement gave traders and communities little time to prepare for the economic shock that followed. On this basis, the border closure has been

generating intense debates among scholars, Nigerians and others especially countries affected by the policy.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Border Closure**

In Africa, border closures are not new, for example, on September 26, 2019, Sudan closed its borders with Libya and the Central African Republic, and on October 11, 2011, Kenya banned cross-border trade with Somalia. Both nations justified their actions by citing security concerns. In reaction to the Ebola epidemic in the DRC, Rwanda likewise temporarily closed its border with that country in August 2019 in an effort to stop the disease's spread within Rwanda. However, Nigeria's border closure is different in that it was primarily motivated by worries about smuggling (Adibe, 2019, p 3). It is pertinent to recall that, from February 1984 to February 1986, Nigeria closed down petrol stations within 20km of the border with Benin in attempt to curb smuggling of petroleum products out of the country (Golub, *et al* 2019, p 6). Due to a political disagreement with President Soglo of Benin about the latter's military collaboration with the United States, which Abacha saw as a threat, General Sani Abacha blocked the border in 1996. The harbouring of a suspected Nigerian criminal in Cotonou in August 2003 led to a conflict between the governments of Nigeria and Benin, which resulted in a week-long closure of the border (Duhem, 2019). The border was only reopened after the suspected criminal was turned up to the Nigerian government after President Obasanjo and President Kerekou of Benin met in Badagry. The two presidents put an end to crime and smuggling and released the "Memorandum of Badagry" after their meeting. In March 2008, Nigeria initiated a crackdown on imports of used cars, holding up car convoys at the usual border points such as Krake and Igolo (Bensassi, *et al* 2018, p 92). In August 2019, President Buhari, through the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), entrenched in the circular reference Number NCS/ENF/ABJ/058/S.24, dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 2019, declared border closure as measure to curb smuggling from Benin Republic (Golub, *et al* 2019, p. 6).

According to Gline and Baeten (2006, p 7) border is described as a real dividing line or as an artificial demarcation. It could be fluid or rigid border. Fluid border implies border which is physically and geographically easy to cross which is not perceived as a separation as such while rigid border is characterized by geographical and natural elements which create a physical separation such as

mountains or water by heavy administrative access procedure which hinders in flow of informal trading activities. Gardon *et al* (2009) describes border closure as preventing movement of people and goods between different jurisdictions with limited or no exception associated with the movement.

### **Informal Trade**

Definitions of Informal Cross-Border Trade have not always been overwhelmingly successful. But a lot of thought has gone into this, not just in the African context but also in terms of a concept that might be used anywhere. Trade in goods and services that may be lawfully imported or exported on one side of the border and illegally on the other due to not being included in official trade statistics or subject to mandatory border formalities like customs clearance, immigration documents, quality documents, and other financial details is referred to as "informal cross-border trade," according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2014). It is necessary to distinguish between "Criminal Cross Border Trade" (CCBT) and Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) in this regard. In this instance, ICBT refers to the import and export of "legal goods" through unofficial channels, whereas CCBT refers to the trade in "illegal goods" such as hard drugs, firearms, and human trafficking, which are considered socially undesirable by the general public and constitute serious crimes (Meagher, 2003). In both rural and urban areas, the kind of cross-border trade that involves legal goods but is conducted through unofficial channels or official border crossings is vital to economic growth, employment creation, and the eradication of poverty. It also adds to the dynamic nature of production systems. However, this type of economic activity is greatly misunderstood by policymakers, which sometimes lead to decisions, and actions that impede rather than facilitate the formalization of trade relations in the region (World Bank, 2001).

Within the framework of this investigation, the phrase "informal cross-border trade" will designate merchants who import and export goods to and from retail and wholesale establishments in neighbouring countries, mainly the Benin Republic, without having to pay applicable taxes or register those goods with customs.

### **Why Informal Trade?**

Several reasons have been advanced to influence informal trade in Nigeria and Africa in general, the factors are discussed below:

- i. **Geographical and Economic Factors:** Across the region, the characteristics of informal trade flows reflect West Africa's geographical, climatic and economic realities. Meanwhile, farmers in Benin produce more grain than home demand requires, selling a substantial surplus into Nigeria, much of it moving informally direct to urban consumption centres without official oversight (Golub *et al*, 2019, p13). Nigeria's seaports, on the other hand, have clearly failed to match the cheaper prices and greater efficiency of Cotonou and Lomé. Additionally, government's decisions on trade policy have had the effect of encouraging some suppliers to land goods in other countries before exporting into Nigeria (Torres and Jeskevan, 2016). International economic factors, regulatory costs, governance issues and competitiveness are all drivers behind informal flows of goods that sometimes originate from outside the West African region but then circulate through informal routes. Government's decisions such as the imposition of bans or restrictions on goods like rice or pasta have contributed to informal trade and created a well-entrenched market, particularly for smuggled rice, which meets the huge demand for the product that cannot be satisfied through local production alone (Golub, 2015, p. 12).
- ii. **Tariff Regimes:** The tariff regime differs significantly from the national tariff rates applied by countries outside West African Economic and Monetary Union known as *Union Economique et Monetaire Quest Africaine (UEMOA)*. For example, Nigeria, which applies higher tariffs on a range of items including vehicles, rice and tomatoes concentrate (Golub *et al*, 2019, p. 8). This tariff difference combined with the huge size of Nigeria's domestic market and its high imports profile, make it a magnet for businesses looking to take advantage of the surrounding lower tariffs and better shipping-related infrastructure. It creates a powerful incentive for traders to channel imports from the rest of the world into Nigeria via Cotonou Port, the main port in Benin Republic, which has consistently recorded higher efficiency rates than Nigeria's seaports in Lagos. Typically, goods are landed in Cotonou and formally declared as imports into Benin Republic itself, and thus tariffs are levied at the lower UEMOA rates. However, after the goods have entered Benin, they are smuggled into Nigeria informally, where they can be sold more cheaply (Hoffmann and Melly, 2018, p. 13).

- iii. **Social and ethnic affinities** have also stimulated informal trade, for instance, the Yoruba people reside in West Africa on the borders of Nigeria and Benin. The prevalence of individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds or even family members living in border regions between two adjacent nations greatly promotes cross-border informal trade as well as stronger community integration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study used Thomas Mun's (1518–1641) mercantilism thesis to illustrate why government involvement is necessary to control international commerce, safeguard home industries, and encourage trade surpluses. Nonetheless, additional proponents include Mirabeau (1715–1789), Antonio Serra (1600–1699), and Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). The predominant economic system from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries was mercantilism. The theory's foundation was the idea that global wealth was static, meaning that governments had to control trade to strengthen their position of power and wealth by raising exports and lowering imports. This was done by increasing the output of agriculture and new homes industries, which led to a glut of goods and raw materials being sold on the open market by merchants. In order to promote growth, the government must also create monopolies and provide funds to boost local industry. These measures, which take the shape of economic protectionism, are intended to promote self-sufficiency and stand in stark contrast to the free-market principles of trade and globalization (Donald, 2020; Lars, 2011). Protectionist policies that restrict imports to encourage homegrown industries, as in the case of Nigeria and Benin Republic through closure of border have given way to mercantilist policies in recent times. Huge import duties, support for homegrown businesses, currency depreciation, and restrictions of the movement of foreign labour are all forms of neo-mercantilist policies (Ballinger, 2011).

Several scholars, like Adam Smith and David Hume, challenged the notion, arguing that, in contrast to Mun and other proponents, the theory did not take into consideration the benefit of comparative economic advantage and free trade, which help countries obtain goods they cannot produce domestically from other nations that specialise in producing those goods at reasonable prices and with affordable means of production (Donald, 2020) It was also stressed that consumers will have less options at greater prices due to import restrictions. However, consumers gain from reduced pricing in a free trade environment

since there is more competition and easier access to goods from around the globe. This is the beginning of the unpleasant experience that people in communities in southwest Nigeria had when border closure policy was implemented (Ballinger, 2011; Donald, 2020). Though, there is nothing bad for a nation like Nigeria to execute the policy of border closure to protect its local industries and encourage the use of locally produced goods to expand its exportation, but the government needs to intensify effort in making sure that the products are sufficiently available in the nation to avoid adverse effect the policy might have on the people trading across the border and the country at large.

### **Methodology**

The paper adopts descriptive research design using qualitative approach. The primary data were generated using semi-structure interview. The study locations are Saki, Irawo, Aiyegun, Itasa, Iwere-ile (Oyo State), Igokofi, Ipokia, Idiroko, Kajola and Atan (Ogun State) border communities in South-west, Nigeria. These communities were all selected based on geographical closeness and active involvement in cross-border trading. A total of 50 cross-border traders with 5 each from selected communities were purposively selected on the basis of their involvement in informal trading activities. Secondary data were extracted from books, magazines, newspapers, journals and conference papers. Data gathered were analysed using content analysis.

### **Justification for Border Closure in Nigeria**

The Nigerian government has enumerated the basic reasons upon which the country closed the land borders with neighbouring countries. As Former Comptroller General of the Nigerian Customs Service, Col. Hameed Ali explained, some goods are not allowed to be exported and imported so as to ensure total control over what comes in and goes out. This includes the sale of petrol to filling stations within 20-kilometre radius around the country's border. In addition, the border was closed to end smuggling of goods and illegal commercial activities in the country (Mbamalu, 2019, p 2). In corroborating Ali's opinion, Anthony (2019) expressed that Nigeria closed its land borders with neighbouring countries because of high level of smuggling of goods into the country especially staple food commodities such as rice, vegetable oil, poultry, tomato, flour and pasta. Similarly, Ghin and Heinrigs (2019) opined that the border was closed to reduce the smuggling of goods and stop illegal inflows of Asian rice and out flows of subsidized fuel, more importantly, the policy was

justified by the need to support the domestic agricultural sector and accelerate national productivity growth. In a contrary opinion, Beninese President, Patrice Talon strictly argues that:

Nigerian government asserts that the closure of the border with Benin was necessary to stop smuggling, but it also notes that the president of Nigeria has been adamant for a variety of reasons, including political godfatherism, economic malice and retaliation. In an attempt to curb massive operations smuggling, especially of rice, which Nigeria also manufactures, Buhari, who introduced a protectionist plan, claims that Benin Republic is not performing enough. Nonetheless, Buhari acknowledged that he was under increasing criticism from the business sector and that several Nigerian corporate executives had been dissatisfied with Cotonou's strategy. Their trucks are allegedly overtaxed at the border on their way to Benin. For example, entrepreneur Aliko Dangote, who purchased the Nigerian government's stake in the Lafarge Company, wishes to sell cement in Benin, but this is forbidden because our cement plants are already operating at full capacity. How can a member of the ECOWAS group, which is based on the principle of free movement, decide to seal its borders with its neighbours overnight and without consulting anyone beforehand? (Duhem, 2019, p. 2).

The above view explains what the President of Benin Republic thought should be the secret behinds sudden closure of the border such as economic malice and retaliation as well as political godfatherism by business communities, particularly Dangote, who mounted pressure on Mr president to initiate the policy as a result of his cement industry that is not allowed to export into Benin. As Golub, *et al* (2019, p. 274) revealed, Nigeria discovered that although Benin Republic only has a population of 12 million, it ranks fifth in the world for rice imports. that the Benin Republic purchased \$996 million worth of rice in 2018 alone, and that 98.2% of this rice was imported to Nigeria by smuggling through porous borders rather than paying the proper customs duties, taxes, and other fees. These act as economic sabotage for Nigeria. Correlating with Golub's opinion, former Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed observes, "the border closure is not only aimed at restricting the trade of all goods across the land borders but also at preventing weapons and drugs from entering the country because that is where ammunition and drugs come into the country" (Nuhu, 2019).

In buttressing Ahmed's view, Adeola and Oluyemi (2012) maintained that, for the purpose of national security, the Nigerian government embarked on border closure. That, the movement of goods and people within ECOWAS sub-region without visa as a result of existing principles made cross border movement between Nigeria and her neighbours to be less monitored. This propels external aggression, criminality that grows across borders and diversion of about (10-20%) of subsidized petroleum product to neighbouring nations, particularly Benin Republic where fuel smuggled from Nigeria to Benin (*Kpaya*) represents about 85% of the fuel consumption in Benin. *Kpaya* is largely used by local moto taxi drivers, given the large price differential (20-25%) from the official fuel at the pump (IMF Report, 2022, p. 246). Hence, Nigerian government adopted the policy.

### **Effects of the 2019 Border Closure on Informal Traders in Border Communities in South-West, Nigeria.**

The closure of Nigeria-Benin border has both positive and negative effects on the socio- economic aspects of the country, on one hand, and on the informal traders in border communities on the other hand. The study examines the effect of the closure from the data generated using both primary and secondary sources.

#### **a. Positive Effects**

The Kwara State Coordinator of the Joint Border Operations Drill (JBOD), Comptroller Mohammed Uba Garba revealed that:

The operation has confiscated contraband items and goods worth over 135 million Naira, the smuggled items include: 57 vehicles of various brands, 1355 bags of foreign rice, 20 bags of dried yam flour of 1000kg, 1728 jerry cans of PMS and engine oil, 155 drum of petroleum products and lubricant oil. About 68 jerry cans of 25-liter groundnut oil, 322 cartons of tin-tomato sauce, 12 bales of used clothes and textile materials, and Bajaj motorcycles that are reportedly used to smuggle rice are among the other items. Furthermore, border closure policies have decreased smuggling, increased the productivity of locally produced goods, and assisted in addressing security issues such as kidnapping, banditry, and illegal migration. They have also increased revenue generation and decreased the daily consumption of petroleum products by preventing illegal imports and exports (Olanrewaju, 2020, p. 2).

In support of Garba's view, President of National Cotton Association of Nigeria (NACOTAN), Anibe Achimugu specifically clarifies that, the border closure has not only reduced the amount of illicit textile materials imported into Nigeria but has also helped the cotton, textile, and garment (CTG) sub-sector recover and giving its members more motivation to return to work. As a result, the policy placed a responsibility on Nigerians to close the gap and begin building internal capacity in order to meet Nigerians' needs (John, 2020, p. 7). In line with Achimugu's opinion, the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Sabo Nanono, consistently maintains that, the policy has yielded positive results due to increase in demand for locally produced rice and other commodities like fish, chicken and textiles. In addition, former Comptroller General of Nigeria Customs Service, Hameed Ali, emphasised that Nigerian customs has started generating huge income compared to what was obtainable previously (Mbamalu, 2020, p. 5). In a similar view, former Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari specifically stated that: "Through the decision made by the federal government, the nation has seen a decrease in banditry, and our farmers are now able to sell their crop. The government is also taking advantage of this to revive the agriculture industry" (Quoted in Onyirioha, 2020, p 2).

These beneficial effects, particularly the enhanced value chain, have kept local farmers functional and the local rice mills operating more efficiently, which forces them to hire more of the unemployed youth and raises the standard of living of those employed youth in the rice mills and related industries.

### **b. Negative Effects**

The land border closure badly affected the livelihood of people particularly informal traders living in border communities because they relied on border markets for their survival and earnings. For instance, some residents of border communities in South-western states particularly Oyo and Ogun states lamented seriously. A participant lamented that:

The border closure is affecting our business, for instance, locally produced rice would have been a better alternative for us, but they are not available. Even the type of local rice available are not good enough. We rely so much on Benin for Okra rice that is why its price has also shot up since the border was closed (IDI/Saki/Oyo State/ 2024).

To buttress the above view, other participants from Saki community emphasised that the situation has become so tough because one cannot carry a single bag of

rice in through border not to talk of used vehicle (*Tokunbo* vehicle) which accrues a lot of gains. In fact, the security operatives are everywhere working day and night to prevent exportation and importation of goods. Explaining the situation of the business activity before and after the closure of border, a participant who imports rice, said:

when I joined the business around 2010, the business was moving and border was not closed, I could import about 500bags of rice at a time. Then, a bag of rice was sold to our customers less than 5000 naira then, since closure of the border in 2019, even when we manage to bring about 50 bags, we have to bribe several custom officers. This makes us to run into debt because all our profits have been used to settle the officers (/IDI/Atan/Ogun State/2024/).

Supporting the above view, another participant said:

Some of us had to stop the business because of financial issues. Imagine someone buying about 100 bags of rice before, and now buying 10 bags; such persons will not be happy to continue the business. It is either the person quits the business and looks for another means. (IDI/Iwere-Ile/Oyo State/2024).

Based on the above opinions, the policy seriously affected the traders on the ground that they were unable to access preferred quantity of goods and huge cost of importation. This has been asserted by previous studies (Bouillon, 2019; Awoyinfa, 2019). While describing how tight the border post was, a participant who imports used vehicle stated that: “We stop the business because customs officials are not cooperative again unlike before border closure, which we do have our way after We have settled them, but if We are caught now, the vehicle and our life may go for it” (/IDI/Ipokia/Ogun State/2024/).

In relation to the above view another participant who specialized in rice and groundnut oil importation lamented that “The custom officers are plenty at the border and they are not ready to permit us. In fact, we are suffering together with our wife and children because, they have blocked our only mean to survive” (IDI/Idiroko/Ogun State/2024). Corroborating the above opinion, about three participants lamented that:

There is no room for the continuation of the business because one of our members who went to get loan from bank, went to Benin to purchase rice on their way coming, the rice and the vehicle that convey

the goods were seized. They are not in the town again; They have run away for fear of being arrested by the bank (IDI/Idiroko/Ogun State/2024).

The above responses showed the commitment and efficiency of custom officers at the border posts in making sure that the policy achieve the desired objectives especially increasing the local production and decreasing import goods as it was espoused by Mun's theory of mercantilism (Lars, 2011; Ballinger, 2011). Explaining the state of their living, after the trading activities have been stopped as a result of border closure, a participant said "The situation was hard now to the extent that most of us have started selling some of the properties (such vehicle, land and uncompleted building) acquired when the business was moving before closure of the border" (IDI/Kajola/Ogun State/2024).

The above views also align with the earlier studies (Bouillon, 2019; Ibrahim & Singh, 2020) who emphasised on economic pain of the policy on several Nigerian. Though the study was not empirical but very relevant to establish the suffering people trading across the border are passing through. Underlying some of the mechanisms used to bring in goods like rice, soaps groundnut oil and other material despite border closure, a participants stated thus:

We have several ways of bringing in our goods without passing through where custom officers are standing, but we cannot carry plenty because we do use motorcycles to bring it in, presently the business is stopped because of exchange rate which make the price to be too expensive. Presently we are doing nothing. To feed the family now a big problem no to talk of paying children school fees (IDI/Irawo/Oyo State/2024).

Buttressing above opinion, a participant who also specilises in importing rice said We have our ways of bringing in rice the issue is that we cannot import plenty rice unlike when border was opened but we stop it because business was too risky and expensive to trade, before border closure a bag of rice was below 5000 but presently over 40000 naira (/IDI/Aiyegun/Oyo State/2024/).

The above views pointed out the participant's unwillingness to disclose the information on how they bring in their goods, they only emphasized on "*having their ways*". This could be through porosity of border as suggested by previous studies (Abegunde& Fabiyi, 2020 and Gulub *et al*, 2019). Underlying role played

by their association after their goods are intercepted prior to border closure, another participant said: “We have an association, but we cannot fight government and customs officials; we used to settle them to get our goods back before. Since closure of the border, they don’t want to listen to us again” (IDI/Itasa/Oyo State/2024). This expression of having an association that solicits on their behalf, particularly when their goods are seized by custom officers, proves the collaborative approach of the traders. But right from the 2019 border closure, the association has become meaningless, unable to act on behalf of the member. Similarly, four participants from Irawo community have the same opinion when they stressed that border closure is badly affecting their livelihood because many of them are into the business for long time; they realise a lot of money to take care of their family and other expenses. Since the business has collapsed, they could not meet up with home responsibility again (IDI/Irawo/Oyo State/2024).

While the closure of Nigerian border against Benin Republic certainly has many benefits accruable as claimed by Nigerian policy makers (Mbamalu, 2020; Olanrewaju, 2020; Onyirioha, 2020), the policy has increased price of both foreign and local food stuff as they are not sufficiently available. This was affirmed by most participants in Aiyegun, Itasa and Iwere-Ile communities in Oyo State who expressed that the risk and cost importation have made them to distance themselves from the business since the border closure. Similarly, a participant complained that:

The policy has caused social and emotional distress as well as anguish and dislocation of families. Some of us are now plunged into absolute poverty and many have incurred debt which has forced many of our colleagues to run away from homes for fear of being arrested by financial institutions that gave us loans to run business prior to the closure of border. In fact, it is very difficult to pay school fees of our children (IDI/Igbokofi/Ogun State/2024).

Corroborating the above opinion, three participants from Aiyegun community of Oyo State lamented that the price of food stuffs, especially rice, has become high to the extent that many of community members could not afford to buy rice for consumption let alone to cook it for ceremony. Local rice, which supposed to be an option, is not adequately available as well. Presently, yam is the main food for them. In a different opinion, a participant stressed that:

The border closure had crimped supplies via Benin. The Lagos port, which supposed to be an alternative, is too slow compared to Cotonou Port, and one needs to pay too much bribes before they get their goods out. Though the intention of the policy may be good but the measures have an adverse effect on them (IDI/Igbokofi/Ogun State/2024).

In relation with the above view, nearly all the respondents in Ipokia, Idiroko and Kajola communities in Ogun State complained that, things are too difficult and tight for them since border closure; that vehicles, foreign rice, and vegetable oil are not allowed at all by custom officers to come in. They supported above opinion on how Lagos Port was described. This work, therefore, aligns with previous studies (Bouillon, 2019; Golub *et al*, 2019; Ibrahim & Singh, 2020) on the idea of Lagos Port contradicts the efforts of the government of the President Muhammadu Buhari, which claimed to be fighting corruption. In order to critically explain the situation of border station in South-western Nigeria, a participant expressed that.

We are increasingly finding it difficult to operate in this environment, and those who wanted to try their luck were apprehended and sent to a correctional centre. The Joint Task Force troops have entirely shut off our ability to function. Rice, vegetable oil, turkey, chicken, and other things may no longer enter through any of the borders in Saki, Shikanda, or Kabo since they have closed everywhere. Actually, security personnel park rice from our stores by driving around in pick-up vehicles (IDI/Saki/Oyo State/ 2024).

To show that the situation surrounding many traders in Nigeria-Benin border communities is not peculiar to them alone, a senior member of the Association of Nigeria Licensed Customs Agents, Fanu Bisiriyu, revealed that, over 500 trucks loaded with perishable goods were stranded at Seme border following the border closure, and that the stranded goods belong to genuine importers who had paid government duties but got stuck. This is impacting negatively on the nation's economy to the extent that some markets in Lagos like Balogun, Idumota and Oyingbo, people from neighbouring countries who always patronise them are no more coming (Awoyinfa, 2019, p. 3).

### **Discussion of Findings**

No doubt, Buhari's policy of border closure has been criticised by many for not respecting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) agreement signed

by 54 African countries and ECOWAS principles of intra-community free trade and movement (Ibrahim and Singh, 2020, p. 234). In real sense, the study found that, Nigerian government has justified reasons behind the policy, which include high rate of smuggling goods through its land borders thereby affecting domestic food production and productivity in all sectors. In addition, the study showed that, borders were also closed in an attempt of Nigerian government to develop local production of agricultural and industrial sectors as well as to secure lives and properties of the citizens especially from terrorism, kidnapping and banditry.

The study affirmed that, the policy has positively enhanced locally made goods in all states of the federation, though they are not sufficiently available in the market (Mbamalu, 2020; Olanrewaju, 2020; Onyirioha, 2020). In addition, the policy has kept the local farmers functional, the indigenous rice mills operational, and compel those rice mills to employ more potential unemployed youths, thereby increasing the living standard of those employed youths in the rice mills and related industries. The study also revealed that, there is increase in patronage of Lagos Port thereby increasing daily-generated revenue by Nigeria Customs from 4.5bn naira to 6.8bn Naira (Mbamalu, 2020p5; Olanrewaju, 2020:2) In addition, bandits and terrorists are finding it hard to procure arms and ammunition thereby reducing the cases of herdsmen, kidnapping and armed banditry.

In fact, it is difficult to ascertain which one (positive or negative effects) outweighs the other. For the study discovered that, the policy is badly affecting the livelihood and business of traders living in selected border communities which relied largely on border market for their survival and earning. This is supported by 85% of respondents interviewed in selected border communities in Ogun and Oyo states. More so, the study showed that many of these traders have lost their sources of income, become indebted and run away from home for fear of being arrested by the financial institutions that gave them loans. This is affirmed by 65% of participants in selected border communities in Oyo and Ogun states. In addition, many of them have failed in their home responsibilities, unable to pay the school fees of their wards because the major source of income has been blocked. This is established by 75% of respondents interviewed in selected border communities in Ogun and Oyo states. The findings align with previous studies (Awoyinfa, 2019; Anthony, 2020; Ibrahim, & Singh, 2020; Mbamalu, 2019) which talk about pains attributed to the policy of border closure.

The study revealed that, in various nooks and crannies of the communities, the price of goods especially rice have risen, the price of one (1) bag of 50 Kg of rice in border communities was less than (N8, 000) before closure of border but presently it has risen to about (N50, 000), more than entire monthly salary of Nigerian who receives the minimum wage of N30, 000, thereby making lives difficult for poor citizens. Thus, manufacturers and industries that produce and export their products to neighbouring countries are also affected. The question is whether the policy's apparent benefits (such as increased government revenue) are sufficient to outweigh a number of the adverse effects on the informal sector, which accounts for the greatest portion of the economy in sub-Saharan Africa at 65 percent of the national GDP. (Ibrahim & Singh, 2020; Golub et al., 2019). Consider the question: do the benefits of the policies outweigh the suffering endured by common Nigerians, the majority of whom are in abject poverty? In November 2019, for instance, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) demonstrated that the annual rate of food inflation rose from 11.6% in August 2019 to 13.51% in September 2019, and 14.1% in October 2019 (NBS, October, 2019). As at March, the inflation rate has reached 33.20% (NBS, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024).

There is no doubt that Nigeria has the inalienable right, as a sovereign state, to take all necessary precautions to guard against smuggling and to let its sense of national interest guide its policy choices. The question is whether closing borders is the best way to address the issue. For example, the trade liberalisation protocols of the ECOWAS and the AfCFTA both have several provisions that could be used to combat border smuggling, such as measures to improve customs cooperation and trade facilitation. In an effort to combat crime and smuggling, the government also budgeted 53 billion naira in April 2019 for electronic monitoring of 86 border stations and more than 1400 illegal routes (Koroma, et al 2019). The concern is whether the use of technology, enhancing border agents' ability to perform their duties effectively, and fostering customs cooperation with surrounding nations won't result in a better result than the brusque measure of border closure (Anthony, 2020, p. 5). The people cannot be forced to pay for the government's inefficiencies indefinitely. Government security and protection of land borders is its responsibility; therefore, negligence on the issue should not result in steps that negatively affect the populace, particularly when there is not enough notice to allow for proper preparation for the closure.

## **Conclusion**

It is imperative for government to reconsider its border closure policy and its partial opening, as Nigerians are already suffering from the negative effects of the land border closure. This is because, the current policy fails to adequately address the underlying causes of the high rate of smuggling and the declining national productivity in the nation. The study discovered that, the cost of items, particularly rice, was within the means of the average person before the border was closed. It was also established that policy has made life so difficult for cross border traders in Nigeria who largely relied on trading across borders as means of earning a living.

In view of the above findings of the study, the paper recommended the following:

- i. That government should allow more access to loan and support for traders and entrepreneurs so that they can improve in their respective occupation. These loans provide more entrepreneurial and economic to involve in different trade.
- ii. That poor people who experienced suffering as a result of the closure of cross-border trade should always be taken into account when implementing border closure policies.
- iii. That farmers should be empowered to improve in agricultural products so that they can make locally goods and raw materials sufficiently available in the markets for domestic use.
- iv. That government should intensify effort in supporting indigenous industries to improve in their productions in order to avert pain and suffering the implementation of border closure might cause.
- v. That Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) ought to provide its officers and men of service with extensive training, seminars, and workshops on border management techniques using cutting-edge technology both locally and abroad.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Where do you live?
2. What kind of business do you do?
3. When was the last business transaction you had?
4. What are the business out comes in term of profit and loss?
5. Can you explain how border closure is affecting your business?
6. Has border closure resulted to your business lost?
7. Are you still gainfully employed after the border closure?
8. If no, how do you live?
9. Do you have any association?
10. If yes, what are the roles play by your association before and after border closure?
11. What do you think are the causes of border closure?
12. What do you think should be the alternative to the loss of your job as result of border closure?