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Impact of Border Closure on Economic Growth and Development in Nigeria during the Period of 2019-2023: Qualitative Systematic Review

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Abstract

This paper examined the benefits and drawbacks of border closure for Nigerians' economic development and quality of life. It specifically investigated the effects of the border closure on socio-economic development. Trade is crucial for a nation's economy to grow since it enables the emergence of markets, generates employment, lowers the poverty rate, and dismantles monopolies by discouraging the monopolistic control of the market by a small

number of individuals. Nigeria's border with its neighbours was shut down by former Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, to stop the importation of smuggled goods, particularly rice and other household commodities. Nigeria's border closure policy under Buhari generated mixed reactions, while some believed that it was a good policy to boost domestic production and eradicate smuggling, others argued that such action could hamper socio-economic development and strain diplomatic relations between Nigeria and her neighbours in that region. The need to investigate these mixed reactions and ascertain the extent to which Nigeria and her citizens have suffered from or been affected by the policy motivated this research. Drawing on the secondary method that was sourced through desktop reviews, this paper examined the likely positive and negative outcomes of the border closure under the former president of Nigeria, Buhari. The results showed that the policy was haphazardly selectively implemented, as some borders in northern Nigeria were not closed, unlike those in southwestern Nigeria. It also revealed that the policy not only hampered Nigeria's socio-economic growth and development, but also strained her relations with her neighbours. It concluded that the border closure was more of a selective tool specifically designed to enrich some selected farmers or traders from northern Nigeria.

Keywords: *International Trade, Trade Restriction, Economic Growth, Border Closure, Standard of Living*

1.0 Introduction

The closure of Nigeria's borders in August 2019 has had significant socio-economic impacts, particularly on trade and the local economy (Mbaye, Golub & Gueye 2019). This decision is aimed at curbing the smuggling of goods, especially rice, and boosting local production. Nigeria imposed limitations on cross-border trade with its neighbours a few years ago, but there are conflicting indications as to whether the strategy was advantageous to Nigeria or not. On August 19, President Muhammadu Buhari abruptly halted trade with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger across Nigeria's land borders, citing the necessity to save the country's economy (Heilbrunn 2019). Since no country on earth exists in isolation or is capable of meeting all of its citizens' needs on its own, almost everything we do today, especially in this era of globalisation, requires the exchange of something of value, such as money, ideas, products, and technology. This has a direct impact on any country's economy, which can be either favourable or negative (Abughalian 2013).

Trade originated from the necessity to exchange resources, both human and material, and progressed from the barter system, in which one commodity or service was swapped for another, to the monetary system. However, trade in Nigeria gained popularity with the arrival of colonial rule, which brought in their goods and turned Nigerians into middlemen (Ebo 2017). Nigeria also served as a market where they could obtain inexpensive labour and raw materials for their rapidly expanding industries, as well as a place where they could sell their surplus goods. Nigerians realised the importance of both internal and foreign trade as a result the barter system, in which one good or service was exchanged for another, and the monetary system, which values both human and material resources. However, colonial rule brought in their commodities and transformed Nigerians into intermediaries, making trading in the country more popular (Benjamin & Mbaye, 2020). Nigeria also acted as a marketplace where they could sell their surplus commodities and buy low-cost labour and raw materials for their fast-growing industries. As a result, Nigerians came to understand the significance of both domestic and international trade. Produce for other countries that have a competitive and financial advantage in producing these goods so they can produce them; the goods are then traded between the countries. This promotes global trade and makes it possible for a country to export its domestically produced items to foreign nations. A given economy's success as measured by the growth rates of its output and per capita income concerns regarding international trade have been discussed and well-documented by economists and policymakers (Arodoye & Iroha, 2018). The ability to buy goods that cannot be produced domestically or that can only be produced at a higher cost is what gives it its significance. The costs of manufacturing other commodities, which will incur large costs for other countries, can be produced at the lowest feasible cost. The necessity to exchange resources gave rise to trade, which is now based on both domestic production and consumption as well as the global interchange of goods and services. International trade was viewed as a growth engine by classical and neo-classical economists because of the significance they placed on it in a nation's development (Babalola 2019). The advantages of a policy or choice must be carefully weighed before adoption. Because of this, several nations utilise the comparative cost advantage technique, which allows nations to produce things that they have a comparative advantage in.

Trade is seen as a key driver of economic growth. For developing nations like Nigeria, trade makes a significant contribution to overall economic development. This is largely due to the fact that, due to insufficient domestic supply, the majority of capital goods, raw materials, and technical know-how are imported. The massive importation of capital goods, raw materials, technology, and expertise raises the nation's costs, which worsens the gap in the country's balance of payments and the rate of inflation in Nigeria (Adelowokan & Maku, 2013).

It is crucial to remember that internal trade complements exterior trade because imported commodities are spread across the nation, often even to outlying (rural) areas, whereas locally produced items are gathered for export. Additionally, it makes it easier for different enterprises and geographical regions of the nation to divide up the workers according to internal specialisation. Comparative cost and absolute advantage were mentioned earlier when this topic was covered. As a result, increased specialisation and increased internal trade lead to increased production and efficiency across all economic sectors (Anderson 2018). In Nigeria, the gross domestic product (GDP) is used to gauge economic growth. GDP measures the total market value of a nation's output of goods and services that are traded or exchanged for cash over a set period of time. GDP can also be defined as the total monetary worth of all goods and services produced in a nation over a specified time period, often a year, regardless of whether they were created by citizens or foreigners. This suggests that commerce and trade are crucial components of economic expansion. This may have made the IMF (2023) report that Nigeria has earned a lot from trading along its borders, and this has greatly contributed to Nigeria's gross domestic product earnings. For instance, in 2023, Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) stood at $1.277 trillion in purchasing power parity terms. This invariably goes to show that Nigeria is a big player in trade with its neighbouring African states, especially across Nigerian borders.

Nigerian policymakers are looking into other areas where the nation can increase revenue, increase its productive potential, and where the populace can be actively engaged and benefit from in order to address its overdependence on the oil sector. This results in a number of measures being presented and partially or fully accepted by the government, including an import substitution strategy, an export promotion strategy, the protection of emerging sectors, imposing embargoes on certain items, and a complete limitation on imports. The capital-intensive oil

sector is too reliant on the economy, contributing 20% of GDP, 95% of foreign exchange earnings, and roughly 66% of total government revenue in 2005 (World Bank, 2019). Nigeria, which used to be a sizable net exporter of food, now imports part of it because the agricultural sector, which consists primarily of subsistence farming, cannot keep up with the country's rapid population growth. Unbalanced trade and fluctuating economic conditions are brought on by an overreliance on oil output. In 2008, the prices of several items in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which can be affected by political considerations that may not be friendly to Nigeria's economy, collapsed, which exacerbated Nigeria's disastrous economic impact on the global economy (Golub & Hayat, 2008). Diversification of the economy and commerce could be used as a tactic to lessen Nigeria's economy's susceptibility to external shocks related to the production and trade of commodities.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian government partially closed its borders under President Buhari's administration in a bid to boost domestic production of rice and other commodities. This policy was implemented to eradicate the dumping of rice and other household goods that could have been produced locally. The policy was met with mixed reactions, as it tends to favour some and disfavour others. It is imperative to note that this policy was implemented without due consideration for the production capacity of local rice farmers (Nwosa, Saibu, & Fakunle, 2020). This is because it led to high prices for rice and other commodities, which in the long run affected the standard of living of Nigerians. However, the goal of the policy's enforcement was to increase local rice production. Even so, imports of rice were flooding the Nigerian market at deeply discounted prices, making locally produced rice extremely unappealing to consumers. This raises doubt about the sustenance and utility of the policy. It brings to the fore the need to investigate the positive and negative outcomes of the policy. Research in this direction is necessary because it would advance new knowledge on how successive Nigerian governments can effectively enforce similar policies in the future (Nwosa *et al.* 2020).

In order to improve output and satisfy local demand, this study analysed and explained the effects of the border closure policy on local

producers of goods including rice, vegetable oil, palm oil, and other agricultural products. Additionally, the consequences of the policy on the provision of public services to the populace, which is a vital contributor to raising the standard of living of the populace. According to Soludo (2005), Nigeria has been identified as having "The Resource Curse Syndrome," also known as the "paradox of plenty." In comparison to regions and nations with fewer natural resources, those with an abundance of point-source non-renewable resources, such as minerals and fuels, tend to experience slower economic growth and inferior development outcomes. This is predicted to occur for a variety of reasons, such as a decrease in the competitiveness of other economic sectors (caused by an increase in the real exchange rate as resource revenues enter an economy), volatility of natural resource sector revenues due to exposure to fluctuations in the global commodity market, government resource mismanagement, or weak, ineffective, unstable, or corrupt institutions (possibly due to the easily diverted actual or anticipated resource revenues) (Soludo, 2005).

The most recent border policy of the federal government, which affected the flow of goods both legitimately and illegally, especially through the Benin Republic, has immediately impacted some economic fundamentals.The federal administration asserts that doing this will reduce the amount of rice and other products that are smuggled into the nation, citing the surrounding nations' violations of ECOWAS protocols regarding the passage of goods (Balagner, Florica & Rippoles, 2016). Despite the case for the strategy, Ehinomen & Damilola, (2018) on the impacts of trade openness stated that the nation's inflation rate has been the first victim of pressure brought on by the policy, rising by 0.22 percentage points to 11.24 percent in September from 11.02 percent in August. September saw an increase in average prices of 1.04 percent on a month-over-month basis for both food (13.5%) and non-food (8.9) goods, mainly for bread and cereals, oils and fats, meat, potatoes, yams, and other tubers, fish, and vegetables. In fact, the vast majority of these items—if not all—pass through Cotonou, the commercial hub of the Benin Republic, with a significant fraction of them being smuggled into the nation and providing no economic benefit to Nigeria's budgetary predictions. Additionally, the policy announcement increased rumours and made them worse by increasing supply constraints due to the implementation of the border post-order, leading to a broad increase in consumer prices. Agricultural output in the nation is still at low levels,

generating availability issues. This study explores the immediate (short-term) implications of the border closure on the economy and people of the nation, as well as the long-term effects on diplomatic relations (Olaifa, Subair, & Biala, 2013).

Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is primarily qualitative. The study used secondary data, which is the investigation of already published works and publications that are pertinent to the topic. The secondary data used were collected from trustworthy and reputable sources such as government publications, books, journals, the internet, and academic literature to elicit relevant information on the closure of the Nigerian border during the review period.

Conceptual Clarifications

International Trade

The exchange of money, goods, and services across international boundaries or regions is referred to as international trade. Such trade accounts for a sizeable portion of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the majority of nations.

Trade Restriction

Trade restrictions are unnatural barriers to the exchange of commodities and/or services between two or more nations. It is an outcome of protectionism. The phrase is contentious, however, because what some may view as a trade restriction, others may view as a measure to safeguard customers from subpar, harmful, or hazardous goods. Germany, for instance, had a purity rule that applied to beer manufacturing.

Economic Growth

Economic growth is the rise in the market value of the goods and services an economy produces over time, adjusted for inflation. Traditionally, it has been calculated as the real gross domestic product, or

real GDP, growth rate in percentage terms. In order to remove the inflationary distortion on the price of produced items, growth is typically calculated in real terms, or terms adjusted for inflation. (Wallerstein, 2016) opined that economic growth is measured using accounting. national earnings. Economic growth has both the benefits and disadvantages of GDP growth because it is calculated as the yearly percent change. Typically, the GDP to population ratio, or per capita income, is used to compare the economic growth rates of different countries.

Border Closure

Neighbours and proponents of regional integration have harshly criticised Nigeria's recent announcement that it is sealing its borders to stop the passage of all goods. The Buhari administration has defended the choice as a measure to stop the smuggling of items like rice, for which the nation seeks to enhance production domestically (Omoju & Adesanya, 2012). Due to the extensive economic ties between Benin and Nigeria, the border closures will have a particularly devastating impact on traders, particularly unauthorised ones. Indeed, this illegal trade supports a sizable portion of Benin's economy in terms of employment and money, and the government of Benin earns sizable profits via entrepot trade, which involves the legal importation of commodities and their subsequent legal export to another country.

Standard of Living

A standard of living refers to the amount of money, comfort, material possessions, and necessities that a certain socioeconomic class or region has access to. Basic material elements, including income, GDP, life expectancy, and economic opportunity, are all part of the standard of living. The quality of life is directly linked to the level of living and might include things like safety, climate, political and religious freedom, environmental quality, and economic and political stability.

Findings

The first victim of the pressure brought on by the approach was the country's inflation rate, which increased by 0.22 percentage points from

August to September to reach 11.24 percent. September saw an increase in average prices of 1.04 percent month over month for both food (13.5%) and non-food (8.9) goods, mainly for meat, potatoes, yams, and other tubers, fish, and vegetables, as well as for bread and cereals, oils and fats, and other food products (Jude, 2019). In fact, the vast majority of these goods—if not all—pass through Cotonou, the commercial hub of the Benin Republic, with a significant fraction of them being smuggled into the nation and adding nothing to Nigeria's budgetary predictions in terms of economic value.

Additionally, the policy announcement increased rumours and made them worse by increasing supply constraints due to the implementation of the border post order, leading to a broad increase in consumer prices. Agricultural output in the nation is still at low levels, generating availability issues. Shortages and thus higher costs are anticipated in the near future, especially given the supply-demand gap for certain commodities and the time needed to close it (O'Dowd, 2020).

The recent border closure would widen the supply-demand gap, according to analysts at FSDH Merchant Bank Limited, despite the fact that rice output has expanded dramatically over the past four years (Jude, 2019). Estimates from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were used to show that while local production is only 4.8 million metric tonnes a year, demand is 7.3 million metric tonnes. Additionally, the analysts at Afrinvest Securities Limited call the food inflation "unsurprising," as it increased to 13.5% year-over-year in September from 12.5% in August. This was due to a faster increase in the food index from 1.2% to 1.3% in August 2019 (World Bank, 2019).

Food inflation rose year over year and month over month for the first time in four months, which was notable since it contrasted with the customary reduction seen at the start of the harvest season. We worry that the partial border closure's negative effects on trade, which primarily involves food products, may have cancelled out the respite that the harvests of food offered," they stated (Adenugba & Dipo). They pointed out that informal cross-border trade across land boundaries, which was estimated to have reached $6.9 billion between mid-2013 and mid-2014 by the Central Bank of Nigeria, is still sizable. During the same time period, food accounted for 75.7% of informal cross-border trade, and we don't think that number has significantly altered since (IMF, 2016).

We anticipate a persistent downward trend in consumer prices in the upcoming months as a result of the Federal Government's recent order

to completely close the border, thus halting commerce in both legal and illegal goods. This would cover up the reduction in food costs that occurs in the fourth quarter of the year, particularly during the holiday season, as a result of harvest. The inflation outlook is currently negative for the remainder of the year, which is a marked change from the first nine months of 2019. This was revealed in research by the Empirical Economic Review in 2020.

Increased government spending, a probable tax hike, and the further closure of the land borders are likely to be the causes of these pressures. But in 2019, it's anticipated that the real interest rate will continue to be positive. The fourth quarter of the year is predicted to see an uptick in consumer demand, particularly as the holiday season draws near. Inflationary pressures will result from this and the border closure, especially in the months of November and December, according to the bank's analysts (Jude, 2019).

Findings on the argument against border closure in Nigeria

Hungarian economist Bela Balassa states that "export-orientated policies, aside from providing similar incentives to sales in both domestic and foreign markets, lend to resource allocation according to comparative advantage, allow for greater capacity utilisation, generate technological advancement in response to competition abroad and in labour-surplus countries, and contribute to increased employment." In 2015, the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) ranked export-oriented policies as having the highest level of economic complexity (Adenugba & Dipo, 2013).

Nigeria's economic expansion is mostly attributed to the export of raw materials like crude oil, which has greatly increased the country's export commerce. Additionally, it has demonstrated Nigeria's competitive advantage in the area of mineral fuels. While the import of other goods into Nigeria (such as machinery, plastic, rubber, and motor vehicles) may be out of proportion and result in a trade imbalance, mineral fuels may be a national asset and have a beneficial impact on net export. A driving force for sustainable economic growth is export trade (Balanguer *et al.*, 2016). Nigeria gains essential foreign currency through export commerce, expands its source of income, and may prevent trade deficits. Additionally, it reinforces economic diversification.

Most importers of perishable products worth millions of naira had their shipment stranded in Cotonou, the capital of the Benin Republic, for several weeks as a result of the unexpected closure of the Seme and Idiroko crossings (Adenugba & Dipo, 2013). There are several perishable items among those that the Nigerian government has levied tariffs on. The cost of food consumed by common Nigerians has increased, as predicted. According to reports, the price of food commodities such as frozen foods, climbed by 65% over the period under review.. Additionally, the cost of imported parboiled rice increased by 50%, from N22, 000 to N33, 000. The price of local rice increased from N18, 000 to N27, 000 due to the demand and lack of foreign rice (Sarkar, 2017). Due to Nigeria's inability to produce enough rice to satisfy local demand, many people now doubt the wisdom of closing the borders to rice imports. According to estimates, the nation produces 3.7 million metric tonnes of local rice annually, whereas over 7 million metric tonnes are used. Imports bridge the substantial gap between the item's production and consumption. However, the Federal Government had agreed that investing $35 billion in the importation of food annually was not healthy for the economy, as stipulated by the Empirical Economic Review (EER, 2020).

The joint security exercise also threw up unexpected revelations from countries whose products were not allowed free entry into Nigeria. Although the border closure affected all six geopolitical zones in the country, the impact was not as visible and audible as the one felt at the Seme border, the closest border with Benin Republic, and Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria. Reports had it that recently, in the Benin Republic, many people called for the resignation of President Patrice Talon (Heilbrunn, 2019). Thousands of women and youths allegedly gathered in Cotonou to register their frustration and displeasure with the government, shouting, 'Talon, you must go.' Accounts of trade dealings between Nigeria and the Benin Republic have explained why the people acted in that manner.

Data from 2018 showed that Benin was the top importer of rice from Thailand among the 184 countries. Additionally, Nigeria had long held the suspicion that its neighbour used its port as a transit point for rice and other imports from Asia. Approximately 20 million metric tonnes of rice were stuck in Benin for the seven weeks the border was closed, according to Ali's testimony. There are 11.8 million people living in the tiny nation of Benin Republic. Ali questioned how 20 million

metric tonnes of rice could be devoured by such small people (Heilbrunn, 2019).

The Director-General of Benin's Customs Administration, Moussa SacaBoco, also met with Ali over the border closure on October 9, 2019. Boco's colleague, the Minister of State for Planning and Development, Abdoulaye Bio Tchane, expressed the fear that, if allowed to linger, the closure could reduce Benin's tax revenue and impact its expected economic growth for 2019 and the forecast for subsequent years. Since the closure of their borders with Nigeria, Niger and Benin have reportedly banned the importation of rice. Although the Benin Republic's annual exports to Nigeria are supposedly only three percent of total exports, the World Bank discovered that informal trade between the two countries accounts for twenty percent of the Benin Republic's GDP, including that the rice's final destination was Nigeria. Talon's meeting with Buhari in Japan before the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama, where he begged with him to reopen the borders and spare his people from more misery, lends validity to these assertions about their countries (Heilbrunn, 2019). Talon explained that this was done to honour the ECOWAS terms between his country and Nigeria and to get the latter to change its mind and open its borders. Many Nigerians who commended the closure of their country's borders with neighbouring countries also expressed some reservations.

Findings on the argument in favour of border closure in Nigeria

According to him, available statistics indicate that Nigeria consumes 30 per cent of the 100 per cent total food importation in Africa, while over 50 per cent of the food importation to Cameroun, Ghana, Benin, Chad, and the Niger Republic targets Nigerian markets. Baba-Shehuri said, "We are a nation of 200 million people; there is no nation on earth with the size of our population or even less that relies on importing everything that it will eat; it is absolutely impossible". "In this country, we even import tomatoes, cabbage, eggs, and everything else that we eat. The minister stated that in order to feed its projected 200 million people, Nigeria could not continue to rely on food imports. The minister continued by saying that the action will increase domestic production and give more women and young people in the nation jobs (Heilbrunn, 2019).

Baba-Shehuri called on Nigerians to support the government's policies and programmes for sustainable social and economic development. Also, in Nigeria, we must ask ourselves, "How long can our economy support it? What is our people's focus?" Even if there are around 80 million young people in our country, we continue to create jobs elsewhere. We have young people who are extremely motivated, patriotic, capable, and healthy on both a physical and mental level, eager to give their all to the advancement of the nation. The minister remarked, "It cannot go on this way; the kids were denied the opportunity because, as leaders, we lost focus and crucial decisions were not taken.

Baba-Shehuri stressed the importance of Nigerians comprehending the rationale behind the government's decisions, stating that the action was taken in the best interests of the nation. However, the minister emphasised that the federal government had introduced workable plans designed to generate jobs through the efficient use of agricultural resources. He continued by saying that the plans would be centred on reviving agriculture, encouraging products for self-sufficiency, value addition, and enhancing farmer entrepreneurial abilities, as well as creating markets and promoting exports (Heilbrunn, 2019). Baba-Shehuri, the minister of food and agriculture, further stressed that the strategy was intelligent and would be very beneficial to Nigerians due to its positive effects on the social and economic development of the country. Customs Service and some members of the public have endorsed the Federal Government's decision to close the borders, describing it as the most successful and effective measure so far adopted in terms of curtailing the influx of smuggled rice and other goods into the country.

Col. Hameed Ali, the Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Custom Service, claimed in 2020 that since the closure, the agency's daily income has increased to nearly N5 billion. Additionally, he continued, more than 200 illegal aliens were detained across the border, and thousands of bags of rice and other contraband were seized. The effect of the closure on fuel smuggling was taken into consideration. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's Group Managing Director, MeleKyari, tweeted in September 2019 that the closing of Nigeria's borders as well as other actions have managed to stop the smuggling of Premium Motor Spirit (petrol) outside of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Over the years, Nigeria has benefited from foreign trade. However, if the economy and the production structures had been more sensitive and adaptive to changes both internally and externally on the basis of the international economic system, the benefits of trade might have been greater. In order to create appropriate policy strategies that can produce the greatest possible national benefits in the context of identified issues, Nigeria must constantly re-examine, revise, and re-evaluate sources of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis).

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the study's findings:

1. Since exports and economic growth have a positive long-term relationship, the Nigerian economy should focus on exporting finished goods rather than primary goods, which will eventually be imported as finished goods. This will help to improve domestic manufacturing industries, boost productivity, and create more jobs, all of which will have a positive long-term impact on the country's economy.
2. The government is advised to effectively revive the non-oil export sector in order to broaden the diversification of the economy's export sector and also to increase employment opportunities, both of which would favourably impact the balance of trade.
3. According to the study's findings, trade openness is associated with slower economic growth; consequently, it is strongly advised that the government impose quotas and raise tariff barriers to stop the dumping that results from trade openness.
4. The study's results demonstrate that imports and economic growth are negatively correlated, so it is advised that public policies be created to support effective innovation management rather than relying solely on well-established technological possibilities. This would result in a high level of technological endowment, high levels of finished goods production, and a decrease in finished goods importation.

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