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REGIONAL TRADE AND NIGERIA'S BORDER CLOSURE:IMPLICATIONS ON ECOWAS MEMBER COUNTRIES

Eberechukwu Faith Obani*

Department of Political Science, Federal College of Education Eha-Amufu Enugu State

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Abstract: Countries are integrated for economic and political development by establishing a formal organization within its region. The principal foundation of ECOWAS is to encourage and boost the economy of member states through free trade policy. Border closure on the African continent is nothing unusual; Sudan closed its border with Libya and the Central African Republic, Kenya suspended cross border trade with Somalia both for security reasons. Rwanda briefly closed the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in response to Ebola outbreak. However, Nigeria's border closure speaks volume since it was adopted to respond to trade-related concerns, which arose because of economic sabotage which has drastically affected the Nigerian economy. The paper being a qualitative research is anchored on the dependency theory and argued that, most countries within ECOWAS depend on Nigeria for economic growth and stability. Therefore, the border closure has caused untold hardship to countries that relied on Nigeria for trade within and around the border region. Findings revealed that, the border closure by Nigerian government defies the provisions of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which Nigeria is a signatory to. Also, the border closure by Nigeria is inconsistent with its 44 years long commitment to the ECOWAS. In conclusion and recommendation, the paper notes that ECOWAS member states ought to understand that countries adopt protectionism in order to build its economic base internally. Also, there should be political will to resolve trade conflicts through dialogue rather than trade restriction.

Keywords: Regionalism, ECOWAS, Border, Closure, Economics, Political

INTRODUCTION

The rationale for regional trade integration is that small states need to get together to build and integrate their economies, to provide larger markets to attract domestic or foreign investment, and have more political and economic weight in trade negotiations. Trade is part of ECOWAS' objectives and is a key part of its 1975 founding treaty. This sets out the purpose of accelerating and sustaining economic development of their member states and the creation of a homogenous society, leading to the unity of the countries of West Africa, by eliminating all types of obstacle to the free movement of goods, capital and persons. Trade facilitation is therefore also a key part of the regional trade agenda.

Nigeria's economy is unparalleled in Africa for its complexity and dynamism. It is potentially the engine of growth for the entire region, both as a centre of production and as a consumer of neighbouring countries' exports. On account of its size and its geographical location between Central and West Africa, the country is at the core of the economic transformation of the sub-Saharan region. Situated on the Gulf of Guinea between Benin in the west, Niger in the north, Cameroon in the southeast and Chad in the northeast, and with an 853-km coastline and 4,047-km land border, Nigeria is directly connected to a burgeoning global market. Its population of perhaps 200 million, the largest on the continent, acts as a magnet for transnational flows of goods and people in the region. For the many communities that straddle the country's long and porous land borders with neighbouring states; and for which shared ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties transcend national boundaries; cross-border trade is a fact of life (Hoffmann & Melly, 2015). A large volume of goods from around the world enters Nigeria across these borders. Such trade movements, as well as those in the opposite directions, and the flows of money that finance them, some of them unofficial, are mostly unrecorded, untaxed, informal, and difficult to regulate, This level of opacity presents serious policy challenges for Nigeria as the government finds itself grappling with reduced revenues in the wake of the decline in global crude oil prices, and the weakening of the local currency, the naira.

To grapple with the above challenges, Nigeria closed its land borders. The closure of Nigeria's land borders before the COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns about the validity and essence of the ECOWAS Treaty which permits the free movement of people and goods across West Africa. The agreement among the ECOWAS member states on goods coming into a country, states that, the goods must be containerized and taken through the border where they can be assessed and attested that they are not smuggled items **(**Anjorin, 2019**)**. However, some ECOWAS member countries failed to meet with the agreement. The Nigeria border closure was therefore, as a result of the failure of the neighbouring countries to fulfill their obligations.

***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani

But, border closure as a means of fighting smuggling and crime could be a daunting challenge, especially Africa, where the long porous borders, as is the case with Nigeria, are inhabited by communities of the same ethnic groups, who survive on trans-border commerce and smuggling. Based on this premise, this paper examined the regional trade and Nigeria's border closure, its implications on ECOWAS member countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regional Economic Integration

Regional integration has been an evolving process over many decades now and different regions have embraced it. Its evolution was very much in the form of integrating actors concerned with economic and security issues to the inclusion of other concerns such as social, cultural, environmental and other developmental needs. It is however, the commitment and the achievement of set goals by the member states in the various regional integrating bodies that have determined how far they have gone with the process, and have distinguished very successful regional integration organisations from others. Regional integration has been defined as the process through which independent national states "voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among themselves Claar, Simone and Noelke Andreas (2010), De Lombaerde and Van Langenhove (2007), describe it as a worldwide phenomenon of territorial systems that increases the interactions between their components and creates new forms of organization, co-existing with traditional forms of state-led organization at the national level. Some scholars see regional integration simply as the process by which states within a particular region increase their level of interaction with regard to economic, security, political, or social and cultural issues. In short, regional integration is the joining of individual states within a region into a larger whole. The degree of integration depends upon the willingness and commitment of independent sovereign states to share their sovereignty.

Furthermore, regional integration is a process in which neighbouring countries enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules. The objectives of the agreement could range from economic to political and even to environmental, although it has typically taken the form of a political economy initiative where commercial interests are the focus for achieving broader socio-political and security objectives, as defined by national governments. Regional integration is an arrangement to promote economic growth and national welfare through efficient allocation and optimal utilization of resources in the integrated economy (Jovavonic, 1997; Stanley, 1977). Regional economic integration has enabled countries to focus on issues that are relevant to their stages of development, encourage trade and investment among member countries**.** Economic integration takes place in stages and in different dimensions. According to Balassa (1961), there are four stages of economic integration. The first is the free trade area (FTA), the second is Customs Union (CU), follows by a Common Market (CM) and finally an Economic Union. Free trade area arrangement entails the elimination of trade barriers among the participating countries and each country member charges different external tariffs to non-members of the trading bloc. Customs union is an extension of free trade area where members of the union charge same external tariff to non-member countries. A common Market is a Customs Union which further allows the free movement of labour and capital among member countries. The most advanced form of economic integration is the Economic Union, where the monetary and fiscal policies of member states are harmonized and sometimes completely unified (Izilein, 2011).

The study of regional integration in the third world has indicated that little success has been achieved largely due to limited authority of their institutional structures. Nye (1970) cited in Komla (2007) argued that, strong extra-regional actors have played a tremendous role to either promote or hamper progress towards integration in the third world countries, since it is a truism that third world countries are highly dependent upon industrialized states for development capital, markets for raw materials and technology. It is good to note that, regional integration arrangements are part and parcel of the present global economic order. Regional integration arrangements are mainly the outcome of necessity felt by nation-states to integrate their economies in order to achieve rapid economic development, decrease conflict, and build mutual trusts between the integrated units. The international scene has witness various regional integration schemes aimed at improving the welfare and forging unity among the member states; such as European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS).

Trade Protectionism and Free Trade Policy

Protectionism consists of managing the international exchanges of goods and services between national and regional economies. This falls into regulation of imports and the management of exports, which itself is divided into export promotion and import controls. Recent studies have documented that trade restrictions are designed to protect domestic interests threatened by foreign competition. As a result, national governments have resorted to a growing range of measures aimed at supporting both small and large exporting companies, whether through technical assistance, or trade incentive. This, however, has generated a lot of debate in the academic arena on whether trade protectionism policy really promotes local industry and at the same time spur economic growth. Notable empirical studies in this debate are (Grossman & Helpman, 1991; Matsuyama, 1992; Walde & Wood,

***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani

2005; Rodriguez & Rodrik, 2001; Yannikkaya, 2003) and most of these studies involve trade measures regarding export and import volumes or shares, trade policies regarding tariffs or custom barriers, and related measures of trade openness. Indeed, little or no attention has been given to the trade protectionism policy in the developing countries like Nigeria (Okere & Iheanacho, 2016).

Protectionism, an economic policy of restraining trade between nations, through methods such as tariffs on imported goods, restrictive quotas, and a variety of other restrictive government regulations is designed to discourage imports and prevent foreign take-over of local markets and companies. This policy is closely aligned with anti-globalization. This term is mostly used in the context of economics. Protectionism refers to policies or doctrines which "protect" businesses and "living wages" within a country by restricting or regulating trade between foreign nations. Adam Smith famously warned against the 'interested sophistry' of industry, seeking to gain advantage at the cost of the consumers (Fouda, 2012).

In support of the above definition, (Wikipedia accessed on 13/5/2023) described protectionism (trade protectionism), as economic policy of restricting imports from other countries through methods such as tariffs on imported goods, import quotas, and a variety of other government regulations. Proponents argue that protectionist policies shield the producers, businesses, and workers of the import-competing sector in the country from foreign competitors; however, they also reduce trade and adversely affect consumers in general (by raising the cost of imported goods), and harm the producers and workers in export sectors, both in the country implementing protectionist policies and in the countries protected against.

Trade protectionism is opposite of free trade in which a government allows its citizenry to purchase goods and services from other countries or to sell their goods and services to other markets without any governmental restrictions, interference, or hindrances. Free trade, encourages a higher level of domestic consumption of goods and a more efficient use of resources, whether natural, human, or economic. Free trade also seeks to stimulate economic growth and wealth creation within a nation's borders Chappelow (2019). However, no nation has all of the commodities that it needs. Some countries are abundant in certain resources, while others may lack them. A country might claim that it has more than enough particular items to meet its needs and enough technology to manufacture or transform its natural products, however, this country might be consuming more than it can produce internally and thus will need to import from others depicting equilibrium in trade.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Dependency theory, which was developed to explain the continued underdevelopment of the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asian and Pacific, was adopted as a tool of analysis of this study. The theory was developed in the late 1950s under the guidance of the Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, Raul Prebisch. Dependency can be defined as an explanation of the economic development of a state in terms of the external influences - political, economic, and cultural, on national development policies. Theotonio Dos Santos (1997). cited in Ferraro (2008), emphasizes the historical dimension of the dependency relationships in his definition. He defined dependency as an historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favours some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economics, a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which their own is subjected. Dependency theory belongs to the Marxist political economy paradigm. It focuses on the socio-economic dynamic of the relationship between the former imperial or metropolitan countries and the former colonial countries-periphery.

However, the theory is necessary in understanding the topic under investigation, which is the relationship between Nigeria and ECOWAS member countries, vis a vis the Nigeria's border closure. The economic growth of ECOWAS is primarily driven by Nigeria, the community's largest economy, which in 2014 accounted for nearly 79.1 per cent of the combined GDP, followed by Ghana (5.3 per cent) and Côte d'Ivoire (4.7 per cent) (Mensah, A. & Sirimanne, S. 2018). ECOWAS export is highly depended on the strength of Nigeria and some other countries. Nigeria accounts for 73, 5% of total ECOWAS exports, primarily as a result of its petroleum exports but also due to its larger economy. It is followed by Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, which represent only 8% of total exports each. ECOWAS agricultural exports are mainly led by Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, which account for 50% of the total agricultural commodities exports of the region (Torres, C. & Seters, J. 2016).

On the other hand, ECOWAS imports are more diversified than exports, but are nevertheless dominated by a select number of products. The top three imports are crude and refined petroleum and cars, representing 20% of total imports. The top three agricultural and food products imported are rice, wheat and edible preparations, which represent 42% of the total food imported in the region. Huge disparities between ECOWAS member states exist, as in the case of exports. Nigeria absorbs 52% of total imports and 54% of

***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani

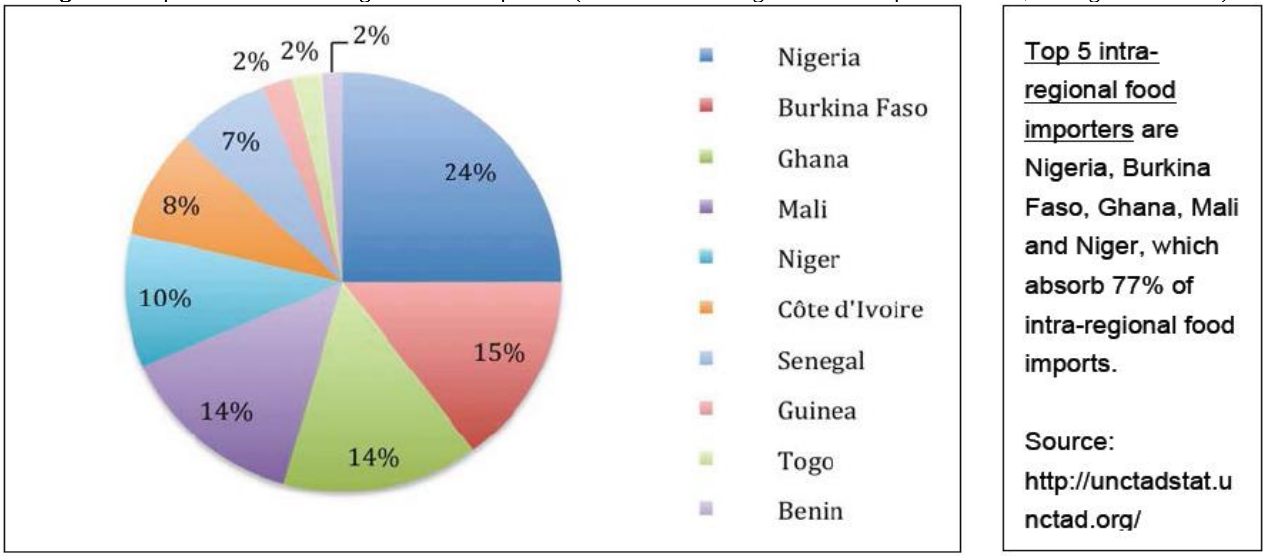
agricultural imports. Nigeria is also by far the largest food importer in the region (51% of total food imports) (Torres, C. & Seters, J. 2016).

A large volume of goods from around the world enters Nigeria across these borders (Hoffmann & Melly 2015) Hence, the land border closure has greatly affected the economic strength of countries that share border with Nigeria within the West Africa region but, improve local industries in Nigeria as well as revenue generation.

Inflow of Staple Food in Nigeria through informal Trade Route

Food imports in West Africa enter through the region's coastal ports and are shipped by trucks to their final destination. The importers, who regularly act as wholesalers also in some cases, have their own distribution networks. Generally, Nigeria is the main food importer in the region due to her population size and flair for goods not produced in the country. This notwithstanding, other countries in the region substantially import food items. That is why Torres & Seters (2016), aptly stated that among the top five food importers are two of the three largest economies (Nigeria and Ghana) and the three land-locked countries (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso). The figure below shows the degree of food importation among ECOWAS countries.

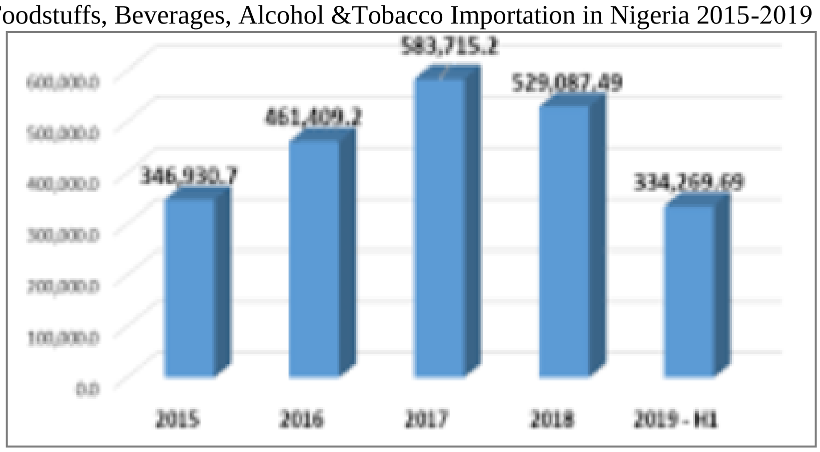
Figure 2. Top ECOWAS intra-regional food importers (% of total intra-regional food imports in value, average 2010-2014)



Source: http://unctadstat.unctad.org/

To this extent, Nigerians, as put by Adesoji (2019) citing the publication of the **National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)** spent a total of ₦334.3 billion to import prepared foodstuffs, beverages, spirits and vinegar and tobacco in the half-year (January – June) of 2019. **The Bureau's report** further stated that the importation of foodstuffs and the other items in the first half of 2019 increased by 47% when compared with the corresponding period of 2018. Specifically, in the first half-year of 2018, the importation of prepared foodstuffs, beverages, spirits and vinegar and tobacco was put at ₦227.1 billion while the figure rose to ₦334.3 billion in half-year 2019.

Figure 3. Foodstuffs, Beverages, Alcohol &Tobacco Importation in Nigeria 2015-2019 (N'Million)



Source: nairametrics.com (2019)

***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani

The most staple food largely imported into Nigeria due to its high demand, is rice even though it is produced in certain quantity in the country. That is why the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that local demand for rice in Nigeria alone is at 7.3 million metric tons (Abia, 2020). Generally, trade in rice within the region is actually trade on imported rice. Flows of imported rice in West Africa occur nearly everywhere in the region. According to Campbell and others (2009) as cited in Torres & Seters (2016), this trade is very significant: "for example, as much as 800,000 MT of rice are formally imported into Benin in some years, but the bulk of these imports are parboiled rice, which enters the Nigerian market through informal channels."

Currently, local production of rice in Nigeria stands at 4.8 million metric tons yearly (Abia, 2020). This suggests that the inability of domestic supply to meet local food demand will cause an inflation of food prices when and if food imports are proscribed. With Benin and Togo posturing themselves as entrepôt states to Nigeria; where Nigeria's manufacturing and agro production distortions are actively exploited. Nigeria's consumption habits over the last three decades have been shaped by its over-dependence on imports from the re-exports of these two neighboring entrepôt states (in particular) into the country (Abia, 2020). According to Alagbe (2019). the data from the Customs, between August and October 30th 2019, show that the agency seized items worth over N2.3tn, including 32,814 bags of rice in 50kg packages. Between January and November 2018, the spokesperson for the Customs, Attah, submitted that the Service seized 238,094 50kg bags of smuggled rice across the country. The goods were reportedly worth over N4bn. Between 2015 and 2017; the Customs also reported that it seized 497,279 bags of rice, with a duty paid value of N3.8bn.

Evidence shows that, these goods entered Nigeria border through informal routes within the ECOWAS regions. This undermines trade agreement and ECOWAS conditionality for bilateral trade between and among member states. It is worthy to notes that the driving forces are the existence of areas of excess supply and excess demand that cross national borders facilitated by porous borders—linked with weak governance. In such circumstances, traders have a strong incentive to informally bring producers and consumers into contact. Informality has therefore become the outcome of efforts to avoid regulatory and transaction costs and of the deep fragmentation of supply chains. Arguably, the most important regional economic axis in West Africa, the Lagos–Cotonou corridor is the funnel through which much of Nigeria's informal trade flows through Sémé border. Apart from the informal routes in through Lagos-Cotonou routes, large flows of activity fan out to the north through a host of mainly informal border crossings on tracks through the countryside (Hoffmann, L. & Melly, P. 2015). Numerous entrepôts and markets, several among the continent's largest, support this flourishing two-way traffic. Beninois analysts who have studied the trade estimate that as many as 700,000–800,000 people, mainlyin the Cotonou area, depend on the cross-border trade for their livelihoods (Hoffmann *et al*., 2015).

The Growth of Local Industries in Nigeria and Trade with ECOWAS's Member State

The World Bank ranked Nigeria as one of the worst countries in the world when it comes to ease of trading across borders, ranking 182 out of 190 countries. To address this trend, one of the major goals the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari on assumption of office was to improve the growth of the agriculture sector to decrease dependency on the oil sector by enacting a policy to restrict the Nigerian Central Bank from distributing funds to facilitate the importation of food, especially rice. The government has thus, pursued a range of protectionist economic policies on the note that allowing cheaper imports will undermine efforts to push Nigeria towards self-sufficiency in local production. One of such policy is that the Central Bank, since 2015, has placed restrictions on the sale of foreign exchange for the importation of 41 products, including rice, palm oil, beef, toothpicks, textiles, tomatoes and cement (Unah, 2019).

According to Nelson (2019), Nigeria produces about 6.9 million metrics tons of rice annually, but the country is expected to import rice worth $4 billion USD to meet the rising consumer demand, yet Nigeria has closed its borders. The border closure has spiked food prices, causing inflation to increase to 11.24 per cent in September, against 11.02 in August. The average prices month-on-month basis, rose by 1.04 per cent in September, in both food (13.5 per cent) and non-food (8.9 per cent) items, particularly the prices of bread and cereals, oils and fats, meat, potatoes, yam, and other tubers, fish and vegetables (Nelson, 2019).

However, it is important to note that apart from the formal importation of petroleum from Nigeria, Benin also imports poultry, rice and vegetable oil, accounting for about $100 million USD in revenue to Nigeria's GDP. But, Benin will be heavily hit by the closure because of its informal trade dependence on Nigeria, which accounts for 70 percent of Benin's GDP. The border closure has negative consequences for traders, especially informal ones, along the Benin-Nigeria border, as the two economies are closely intertwined (Golub *et al.,* 2019). This informal trade generates substantial income and employment in Benin, and Benin's government collects substantial revenues on entrepôt trade; goods imported legally and either legally re-exported to Nigeria, or illegally diverted into Nigeria through smuggling. Due to the border closure, communities in areas close to the Sémé border and near the sea, or further up north near the Owode border, largely depend on Nigerian markets for their sustenance have heavily suffered loss of their means of livelihood.

Furthermore, political leaders in Ghana grew impatience with the border closure due to the negative economic consequences on their economies, which could result in potential political tensions between the two countries. Ghana depends on the Abidjan-Lagos Highway for overland access to markets in West Africa, which has been closed due to the Nigerian-Benin border closure. In a discussion in Abuja, Nigeria, between Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister and Ghana's Foreign Minister, Nigeria assured Ghana that they would open the border by January 31, 2020. However, the Nigerian government reneged on her promise and extended the border closure until mid-2020, prompting Ghana's Information Minister, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, to condemn the plan, citing risk to the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). According to the Minister, it was very important for ECOWAS as a bloc to engage Nigeria on the closure of the borders because such practice has a way of negatively impacting the West African Economic Integration project. While the Nigerian border remained closed, the Ghana Union Traders Association (GUTA) petitioned to the government of Ghana to also close its trade borders in retaliation to what they call, "unfair treatment" from Nigeria.

However, Nigerian government's intention was not to perpetually close the border, but to streamline the abused protocols for the intra-country trades. That was why Emefiele (2019) cited in Adenekan (2019), averred that Nigeria's intention was not to have her borders closed in perpetuity, but that before the borders are reopened, there must be concrete engagements with countries that were involved in using their ports and countries as landing ports for bringing in goods that are smuggled into Nigeria. Hence, the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Geoffrey Onyeama highlighted a list of strict conditions that all ECOWAS members must meet to be accepted as Nigeria's trade partners. These conditions are the ECOWAS protocol on transit, which demands that when a transit container berths at a seaport, the receiving country is mandated to escort same without tampering with the seal to the border of the destination country. He lamented that experience has shown that Nigeria's neighbours do not comply with this protocol rather; they break the seals of containers at their ports and trans-load goods destined for Nigeria (News Agency of Nigeria, 2019).

Nigeria's Border Closure and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Bye and large, no matter how Nigeria paints the picture, despite it benefit to the economy, her border closure was inconsistent with her long commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which she spearheaded its formation in 1975 and one of the eight building blocks of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Under the ECOWAS Protocol, member states are committed to the establishment of a common market, including "the liberalization of trade by abolition, among Member States, of customs duties levied on imports and exports, and the abolition, among Member States, of non-tariff barriers in order to establish a free trade area…" Specifically, all 15 ECOWAS countries are committed to eliminating customs duties, quotas and quantity restrictions and accord each other most favoured nation treatment (Signe & Colette, 2019).

In May 2019, the (AfCFTA) came into effect after Nigerian President joined the rest of Africa members to sign the treaty which marked a critical milestone in the Pan-African trade journey. The AfCFTA is predicted to boost the combined consumer and business spending and increase intra-African trade by at least 53.2% (Signe & Coletta 2019:1). AfCFTA projected to add a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of more than $3.4 trillion USD to Africa's economy; focuses on creating a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African Customs Union. It also has the intension of expanding intra-Africa trade through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization and facilitation. The treaties intend to facilitate smooth intra-regional trade to ensure regional growth. Reflecting Agenda 2063, the AfCFTA aspires to create a continental market with the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services" (Signe & Coletta, 2019) but, Nigeria's trade restrictions threaten to achieve this goal. The closure of the Nigerian border therefore, goes against the spirit, and the letter of the AfCFTA.

Furthermore, being a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since 1995; Nigeria is bound to comply with similar commitments at a multilateral level. Its most recent border closure is thus inconsistent with Nigeria's key multilateral commitments. By defying regional and international trade treaties, Nigeria's border closure demonstrated the implementation gap that continues to exist between the texts of regional or international trade agreements, and the actual measures that some African governments adopt. The closure sets a negative precedent to other countries at a crucial time when African countries were trying to boost regional trade, as mentioned previously. It contravened the rules of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which provides for a common external tariff on goods imported outside of the bloc. Although Nigeria closed its border by exploiting loopholes in the ECOWAS rulebook (by claiming exemptions to justify its actions), the unilateralist, parochial border closure negated the possibility of cooperation or forging stronger economic ties in the future. This would be a major setback for the move to create a common currency; the Eco, in the West African sub-region. The shutdown also highlights the unforeseen hurdles ahead of the single market to be created by the AfCFTA.

***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani

Moreover, the border closure could have significant political and security implications in the sub-region. For instance, Nigeria relies on regional military cooperation with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to fight the Boko Haram insurgency, which has claimed thousands of lives. Since Nigeria has turned its back on such strategic partners for economic reasons, these countries may be reluctant to offer the assistance Nigeria needs to tackle its domestic challenges in the future. This may be detrimental to the much-needed economic, security-related, and political cooperation that the sub-region requires to achieve a sustainable economy.

CONCLUSION

Most of the goods imported from European countries to West African countries are transported to Nigeria through Cotonou -Sémé, border, navigating the official trade route. This has caused Nigeria to lose so much revenue through this informal trade existing within the ECOWAS borders. Fuel is being smuggled out while polished rice, poultry and others are smuggled into Nigeria thereby causing a negative impact on local industries.

Thus, Nigeria's border closure on her neighbouring countries was an act to protect and improve the local industries especially the agricultural sector since the country is trying to diversify her economy away from oil dependent. Though, the motive is contrary to regional trade agreement of ECOWAS, AfCFTA and WTO which Nigeria is a signatory to and founding member. Looking at the economic and market strategy of Nigeria and the countries that have border with her; one would see that the border closure caused untold hardship to the region.

However, every country in the world tends to fortify her domestic industry especially when those goods imported can be locally produced and create jobs opportunity for her citizens. Since, informal trade account for over 80% revenue to Benin's government but trade deficit to Nigeria's government because the revenue generated is not accounted to Nigeria government, the border closure could be considered germane.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the paper made the following submission; -

- Nigeria and her neigbhouring countries should fully implement the common ECOWAS External Tariff enforces of 2015. This would make all goods imported from abroad be subjected to the same tariffs and would go a long way in eliminating the gaping price disparities that incentivise smuggling. Hence, ECOWAS and the recently signed AfCFTA are the appropriate platforms to conduct such work, but unilateral border closures undermine their credibility. The introduction of joint border patrols between Nigeria, Benin and Niger would indicate a growing realisation of the importance of cross-country collaboration to address smuggling issues.
- Nigeria government should avoid volatile policy such as border closure which is not favourable to economic growth, investment and development within ECOWAS regions.
- ECOWAS members States should establish conducive business environment which can stimulate sustained production growth instead of border closure within her region.
- Nigeria government should strengthen its institutions to be more efficient in facilitating mutual trade with the rest of the world. This would involve tackling corruption and the weak enforcement of trade protocols by customs officials, deploying technology such as scanners at the border, and overhauling the ports infrastructure to improve ease of trading through sea borders.
- West African countries should require a regional industrial policy that builds on the comparative advantages of individual countries to boost industrial production and stimulate intra-regional trade. African economies can grow quicker together when both parties diligently commit to regional trade agreement.

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***Corresponding Author:** Eberechukwu Faith Obani