

NIGERIA'S LAND BORDERS AND TRADE RELATIONS IN WEST AFRICA SINCE THE SIXTIES

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Abstract

Nigeria has occupied a central position in West African economic and trade relations since the sixties of the last century. The usual heavy reverberation the country's economic convolutions wield on the sub-region, especially countries connected through land borders is worthy of attention. It is within this premise that this paper extrapolate on not just the relationship between land borders and trade relations, but interrogates how Nigeria's land border policy, particularly border closure, had influenced the pattern of trade contacts between Nigeria and her West Africa neighbours – Niger, Chad and Benin especially. Anchoring on the geo-political perspective that touches space, territory and geographical proximity in international relations, the paper through historical fact-finding and secondary data, argues that Nigeria's most identified land border policy – border closure – all along has had little or no significant effect on trade relations, especially informal trade, from neighbouring West African states, given her porous and easily penetrable borderlands. However, the study suggest that Nigeria needs to seek other functional strategies in the development of border trade policies to effectively coordinate and regulate her trade relations in the West African sub-region.

Keywords: Borderlands, Geopolitics, International trade relations, Nigeria, West Africa

JEL Codes: F1, F13, F15, F18, F59, N97

Introduction

Nigeria's economic and trade relations within West Africa assumed a new dimension from 1984 when Nigeria under the military regime of General Muhammadu Buhari closed land borders connecting the country to neighbouring West African states. This was as a result of the envisaged challenge posed by the country's interlocked porous borders linking geographically proximate neighbours. However, the nexus between geography and international trade has influenced the dynamics of Nigeria's trade relations in the West African region, particularly those within geographical proximity. Two factors, with respect to Nigeria's land border and trade relations in West Africa, can be adduced to support this fact. First, Nigeria's trade relations with distanced West African states have not featured viable sustainability beyond what the ECOWAS regional multilateral platform offers. In this regard, geo-political perceptions seem unfavourable and the overall economics of trade relations indicate deficits, except for trade contacts with essential comparative advantage (Foroutan and Pritchett, 1993; Acclassato, 2013). Second, Nigeria's trade relations have progressed with her immediate neighbours with fewer challenges since the sixties. Similar is the case with Ivory Coast, Senegal and even Ghana which have recorded impressive trade trends within their proximate spaces, dominating the West African sub-region. This is so because geographical providence has enhanced the possibility of easy commercial contacts across borderlands. For instance, Nigeria share inter-state border with the Republic of Niger by the north, Chad and Cameroon to east, The Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic shore to the South, and Benin Republic to the West (Asiwaju, 2003), and trade relations with a number of these states have been sustained in spite of restrains associated with Francophone hegemonic influence and Nigeria's seemingly recurrent border closure policies. Concurrently, Bose Ahmad submits that:

Nigeria's relationship with her mainly Francophone neighbours, which comprise Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon Republics in the mainland and equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe at sea, is predicted on the typical ill-defined and improper delimitation of boundaries in Africa by

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erstwhile European colonial masters...purposely to separate her from her neighbours to mirror and reflect the European nation states' borders with their characteristic dual role on modern issues...(Ahmad, 2012, pp.398-399).

Based on the latter, Nigeria's boundaries in West Africa, especially her land borders are inadequately marked or demarcated. Michael Kehinde's (2010) rewarding study on Nigeria-Benin international boundary around the Yoruba geo-cultural space further provides evidence in this respect. Given the colonially determined boundaries of the West African territory, borderlands are not altogether strictly defined except for some partially or fully constructed arrangements now known as border checkpoints, toll gates and military base, adopted to regulate transnational movements of persons, goods and services as well as safeguard national defense and security. This notwithstanding, Nigeria's land borders have remained porous, contagious and active of interactions, particularly diverse sort of trade transactions with her proximate neighbours.

In geopolitical sense, geography is a critical element that shapes the nature of international relations. Thus, it is concerned with the connection between geographical space and inter-state diplomacy, about its implications on socio-cultural, political, security, and more importantly economic trends in this connection (Flint, 2006, pp.16,39). In this regard, interrogating regional trade relations in the West African space from Nigeria's orbital tends to provide useful insights on geo-political consideration in Nigeria's international trade relations in the West African region. Geopolitics thus substantially presents perhaps, a new ideal to understand the nature and dimensions of Nigeria's bilateral economic transactions, particularly trans-border trade relations with her proximate neighbours within the region since the 1960s. This paper therefore seeks to examine the relationship between land borders and trade relations with respect to Nigeria in West Africa, particularly her geo-proximate neighbours. The objective of the effort is to show how Nigeria's land border policy, border closure especially, had influenced the pattern of trade relations between Nigeria and her West African neighbours.

Nigeria's Land Borders in West Africa

In Okorie and Enwere's (2020) description of Nigeria's land border in the West Africa;

The Nigeria-Benin borders are straddled by four of Nigeria's 36 states, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Kwara States. The Nigeria-Cameroon borders in the eastern flank stretches all the way from the south to the north of Nigeria, touching six states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa and Borno States. Nigeria's third border area, the boundary with Chad, touches several Borno State towns, including Monguno, Ngala, Bama and Gwoza, and stretches up to the Lake Chad region. The fourth borderland, which separates Nigeria and Niger Republic, runs along Nigeria's entire northern brink, touching seven different Nigerian States: Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe and Borno States (Okorie and Enwere, 2020, p. 212).

The point is that Nigeria is infested with multiple border channels that have rendered her vulnerable to systemic ill-natured trade flows within the West African region. While trade relations since the 1960s had been a pivot in the dynamics of such interaction across borderlands, Nigeria's land border and trade relations with her neighbours, which are strongly tied to France's influence in West Africa, regardless, have featured relative stability and considerable progress. This further corroborates the geo-political importance and influence on Nigeria's economic and trade relations in West Africa.

The above submission, however, is not an attempt to suggest that economic and trade relations between Nigeria and her West African neighbours have not met with challenges other than the Francophone constraints. In respect of this, it is pertinent to mention that emergent security and cognate issues within the West African region had also shaped the nature and pattern of Nigeria's economic relations during the period under evaluation. Meanwhile, the extremely leaky and easily permeable condition of Nigeria's land borders had often brought about mixed experiences in the country's trade and border relations with her West African neighbours. For instance, in pursuit of the spirit of good neighbourliness and brotherliness, and more regional economic stability, Nigeria had been committed to free flow of commercial relations and trade with her neighbours across land borders; such was the case of the ECOWAS free movement of persons, and perhaps the trade liberalisation scheme. Further, Nigeria, in this regard, beyond the multilateral opportunities provided by ECOWAS for intra-regional trade and economic cooperation, had embraced bilateral channels in her economic and trade relations with her sister West African countries (D. Aworawo, personal

communication, November 30, 2023).¹ On the other hand, however, Nigeria had been pushed to renege when the outcomes of such commitment to regional economic development and self-reliance adversely draws on her domestic socio-economic stability and progress. To a large extent, the latter had influenced some of Nigeria's land border policy, especially that of border closure, which is not only of interest to the dynamics of her trade relations, but also seem to have been considered by Nigeria as one of her 'working' policy toward her border and trade relations, and regulation in the region (Ahmad, 2012; Maigari et al., 2020).

Nigeria's Land Border Policy and Trade in West Africa

Up till the 1980s, Nigerian government and foreign policy technocrats did not relished the decision to shut down the nation's land borders. This was because of her policy preference of good neighborliness toward sister West African states; more so, the need to harmonise regional economy through cross-border trade in the region. However, following the perception that the fluidity and porosity of her land borders represent a central challenge bedeviling socio-economic stability of the nation at the time, the Buhari's military administration in April, 1984 decided to close the country's land borders.

Geopolitical Interplay in Nigeria's Border and Trade Relations, 1984-1996

The geo-political undercurrents in West Africa's economic integration programmes under ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) had necessitated the adoption of a Protocol relating to the Free Movement of Persons (with goods), Residence and Establishment in 1979 (Leann, 1989). The consequent domestic economic conditions at the time had been blamed on the swelling population of illegal migrants from other West African states, massive uncontrolled smuggling of goods into the country, and the trans-border 'black market syndrome', which in turn had a crushing effect on the Nigerian Naira (Olupayimo and Olupayimo, 2021, p. 52). Apart from that, the associated economic woes that rode on the global hike in oil prices, which Nigeria had to face being an oil-based economy, had earlier informed the country's policy under President Shehu Shagari which led to the expulsion of about 2 million illegal immigrants from the country. General Muhammadu Buhari upon assuming the reins of power following a *coup* decided to explore the border closure option to address the economic difficulties confronting the country (Okoro, 2004).

The decision and implementation, which lasted till June 1986 happened to be the first official border closure policy embarked upon by the Nigerian government. Though the Nigeria-Benin land border was not the only neighbouring borderland closed down to trade and economic flows, but it was perhaps the most guarded. According to received report, this is because Nigeria's border with Benin republic seems excessively permeable for its intractable illegal trade profile. Closed land borders linking other Nigerian West African neighbours were however due to the allegation of trans-border currency trading (Africanews, 15 February 2020).

Further, the border closure policy of the Nigerian state unsurprisingly affected the dynamics of regional economic relations. The reason for this was because, Nigeria, before her border lock regimes had usually employed, and is known for her open door policy in her external economic relations in the West African sub-region. This seems to have considerably shaped a kind of partial but systemic economic dependence on Nigeria from her near neighbours especially. Above and beyond, it is necessary to quickly establish that the nature and pattern of market and commercial transactions across borders before the border closure regime were largely illegal, unrecorded and unregulated. The unstructured nature of trade flow provided opportunities for borderland commuters, while some assumed the roles of middlemen, others took up as merchants and currency peddlers.² Consequently, a system of 'intra-regional trans-border citizens trade' evolved, where citizens from various West African states, and Nigerians in the same way, transacted businesses of varying profiles across inter-state land borders within the region (Bensassi and Jarreau, 2019).

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² The Naira (Nigerian currency) before and even during the Buhari military years was illegally trafficked across the nation's land borders by currency peddlers. Trading the Naira within the region was then a lucrative business, because the Naira was of much value compared to the currencies of other West African states which was about 50 percent weak to the Dollar in the international exchange market; whereas, 17 Naira was then an equivalent of 1 Dollar.

On border closure regimes essentially, Nigeria jettisoned the Free Trade Agreement earlier signed in 1975 by Head of States and Governments of ECOWAS member states.³ Nigeria's indefinite border closure under the Buhari's military administration indicates the nation's non-compliance to sub-regional or regional pacts when it reels adverse consequences on her national economic and social stability. Sola Akinrinade (1998) was most probably influenced by this perception when he submits that "...brother[ly] posture was dropped and Nigeria was not ready to compromise its national interest even if it meant being in conflict with her neighbour(s)." It is therefore worthy of emphasis that Nigeria's trade relations in West Africa, even the open and free commerce across land borders are premised on the perception of her domestic welfare and national interests. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Gambari, the then minister of foreign affairs had disclosed that the border closure was not intended to discountenance Nigeria's commitment to her approach of good brotherliness in the sub-region but to address the nation's hailing economy and security (Matthews, 1984). Following the decision and its implementation, Nigeria land borders which were usually blooming of trade activities became frosty, and Nigeria's trade relations with different West African states receded gradually.

...the kinds of goods which were supposed to be prevented by the border closure were actually reported as those that were booming in the business around the country's border towns. For instance, ...okrika cloth(es) and the influx of other second-hand goods like 'tokunbo tyres' (fairly used tyres) and cars gained grounds during this period. The borders of the country were closed to prevent the smuggling of petroleum products. Especially since Nigeria under Buhari had refused to accept the International Monetary Fund's condition of subsidy removal. This caused untold hardship on Nigeria's immediate neighbours, especially Chad and Niger Republic both of which are landlocked countries...The harsh effect of the border closure got to a level that the United States of America and France had to plead on behalf of Chad, Nigeria's neighbor[sic] along the North-East. This became imperative because the border closure propelled an excruciating hunger in Chad (Olupayimo and Olupayimo, 2021, p. 54).

Obviously, Nigeria's land border policy at this time was not in the interest of sub-regional economic growth and stability, which accounted for clamours from various West African Heads of State, and by far, extra-regional state actors, for Nigeria to reconsider the policy. Strangely, in spite of several dialogue and appeasement, such as offering General Muhammadu Buhari the chairmanship of the ECOWAS bloc in November 1984, as a bait to reopen Nigeria's land borders for continued trade relations, the Nigerian head would not concede and did not relapse his border closure policy throughout his regime (Obi, 2006).

The border closure policy of Nigeria under the Buhari military regime was eventually brought to an end under the General Ibrahim Babangida military government in 1986. That which seem a major setback to Nigeria's economic and trade relations in West Africa for about three years (1984 - 1986) had been tackled. Thus, trade relations across Nigeria's land borders began again. It was not until 2003 that another border closure policy was implemented. However, there had been a short-term border closure in 1996, which took place under General Sani Abacha's regime, one of Nigeria's most notorious era. After Abacha had infamously charged and abruptly executed the famous Ogoni leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists in November 1995 (Arinze, 10 July 1995; Olukoshi et al., 1995; and Campbell, 2012), and the consequent reactions it generated across the international community, Nigeria declared the closure of its land borders, especially that connecting Benin Republic. Though, in tandem with international condemnation and the pariah status imposed on Nigeria due to it parade of human right abuse, Republic of Benin also declared her land border to Nigeria closed. Nigeria's explanation for closing the Benin border during Abacha's regime was that President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, granted asylum to several Ogoni refugees. This allegation has not been accorded substantial evidence in accessible documentations. Essentially, the 1996 border closure regime does not seem to have significant application to Nigeria's trade relations in West Africa except for the glaring insensitivity of the Abacha regime to the economic implications of such policy direction for the nation's domestic and regional economic interests. The border was reopened in April that same year.

³ ECOWAS Free Trade Agreement was initially signed by Heads of ECOWAS member states in 1975 at Lagos, Nigeria.

Needless to say, geo-politics has not only determined the dynamics of Nigeria's trade relations, but shaped the policy inclination of the nation in her border and trade relations within the region. Though, Nigeria's land border policy – border closure – had been used by the military also as a problem solving tactic and security strategy, it is pertinent to underscore that the crux of Nigeria's trans-border trade with her neighbours was not significantly affected by the policy due to its vast informal profile.

Nigeria's Borderland Transactions with Sub-regional Neighbours in the 21st Century

In 2003, having settled in her new 'civil-democratic' socio-political arrangement, Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo had to address the profiling trans-border smuggling and crime flow between Nigeria and her sub-regional neighbours, the Republic of Benin especially. The case with Benin Republic could be easily understood, for its nearness to Nigeria on the West. Before 2003 when border closure was again implemented, the nature of crime which were often economically driven and facilitated through illegal and dubious trading was on a phenomenal increase. Cross-border crime through trade activities was thus institutionalised so much that international robbery squadrons operated across borderlines, sabotaging and suppressing the efforts of national security structures, especially the Nigerian Customs (The New Humanitarian, 10 August 2003). In this respect President Olusegun Obasanjo, at some point, had to impose the land border closure policy. For instance, Nigeria imposed a border lock on August 9, 2003 which lasted for about a week, and was lifted following President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin release of Hamani Tijani, a notorious inter-state criminal within the sub-region, to the Nigerian government for prosecution (The New Humanitarian). However, the situation before then was such that seem beyond the control of the Nigerian customs and other allied security agents. In fact, Nigeria's one time interior minister, Aba Moro was said to have disclosed that though the nation had 84 legally recognised border entries, about 1,500 unofficial land entries linking the country had been tracked, several of which are networked via hills and forests. For instance, Adamawa state only, reportedly has about 30 illegal cross-country routes (Okorie and Enwere, 2020, p. 213). By this multi-dimensional trade route architecture, the Nigerian government border closure imposition seem to make very little or no significant effect on the nation's trade relations with her West African neighbours, at least unofficially.

In view of geo-political implications on Nigeria's trade relations in West Africa, which has bilaterally tied her business transactions with states of proximate location and land border linkage, it may however be of some relevance to disclose some extended dimensions of Nigeria's trade relations within the sub-region. The aforementioned shows a third layer of extended bilateral trade flow, which can be illustrated from two essential trade networks. The first concerns the influx of imported goods from extra-African climes through the border ways or illegal cross-country routes from neighbouring West African states. On account of this heavy import trade flow, Nigeria has become a desired market destination for grains such as wheat and rice as well as second-hand commodities ranging from clothing to electronics and digital gadgets as well as motor vehicles, particularly referred to as *tokunbo*, from Europe and Asia. On the other hand, the second touches on Benin which serves an active trade route through which Nigerian manufactured goods, agricultural products and petroleum products especially, are commercially made available not only to her nationals but to other West African countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and then into landlocked Mali and Burkina Faso (Okorie and Enwere, 2020, pp. 212, 216). A Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) report on *Measuring Informal Cross-Border Trade in Nigeria* provides helpful statistical data in this regard:

The total informal exports (i.e. goods leaving Nigeria through her immediate neighbours to the ultimate destinations other than the neighbouring countries) from Nigeria stood at N25, 937.56 million, dominated by transit exports to other countries in Africa (N23, 808.75 million or 91.79 percent), apart from Niger, Cameroon, and Benin. Of the total informal imports of N655, 612.50 million into Nigeria from Benin, Cameroon, and the Niger Republic, N464, 560.12 million were transit imports from these countries. The bulk of these transit imports (i.e. goods passing through Nigeria with ultimate destinations other than Nigeria) originated from Europe (N200, 864.12 million or 43.2 percent), Asia (N159, 420.80 million or 34.3 percent) and other African countries (N88, 132.69 million or 19.0 percent) (CBN, 2016, pp.2-3).

In essence, Nigeria's most immediate neighbour, Benin Republic, has thus assumed the position of a lucrative regional commercial hub where choice trade commodities are first imported to, and then redirected to Nigeria through illegal, unofficial and informal trade cross-country byways on one hand, and similarly, with substantial Nigerian products, distributed to other West African countries that are geographically connected to her (Benin) such as Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and some others.

Having therefore established that trade relations across Nigeria's border are substantially conducted through illegal routes, based on smuggling and dubious transactions, which are unhealthy for the country's economic interest in West Africa; more so when it clogs her national economic stability. For instance, the case of continuous smuggled petrol and other refined petroleum products to other West African states such as Benin, Chad and Niger have occasioned unwarranted domestic fuel scarcity at different times. From critical observations however, it is the opinion of the present researcher that Nigeria on account of informal and unregulated trans-border trade flow has developed an 'import dumping syndrome', such that locks the potentials of her home-based industries, whose development are central to advance the nation's quest for her economic objectives and hegemonic aspiration in Africa and the West African sub-region specifically.

In 2019, when Nigeria could no longer contain the challenges of such massive inflow of imported commodities from Europe and Asia through these routes, more so the associated huge smuggling and transnational insecurity profile. The nation again employed its typical policy option of border closure against her West African neighbours to address both the economic and security albatrosses. Thus, on August 19, 2019, Muhammadu Buhari as democratic president of Federal Republic of Nigeria imposed a strict land border closure against her West African neighbours. This decision engendered criticisms from individuals and neighbouring countries, alleging Nigeria for the non-compliance of the decision with international trade agreements.

...the ECOWAS free trade agreement and very recent African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The ECOWAS free trade agreement seeks to scrap restrictions on trade relation among [West] African countries. Nigeria is a signatory to both agreements and the recent border closure places a mark on Nigeria's commitment towards maintaining cordial relations with other African nations especially in terms of trade intercourse. In September 2019, the ECOWAS speaker of parliament Cisse Lo released a statement urging the Nigerian government to comply with ECOWAS provisions by reopening the borders as the closure is a hindrance to the achievement of the community's objective of a prosperous, borderless and peaceful West African region (Omodele, 2021, p. 196).

The implication of the above excerpt beyond non-compliance to regional international trade agreements is that Nigeria's border closure was economically unfavourable to intra-regional trade and commerce. However, from all indication, in practice, Nigeria was much more concerned about the ailing national economy, which had suffered from ill-coordinated and incoherent regional land border and trade policies. The reason for the land border closure at this time was premised on the need to resuscitate and develop Nigerian local production economy and curtail heavy importation of products, especially those which can be produced at home. For example, rice which has remained one of the major import commodity via linking corridors of neighbouring states, especially Benin, can easily be cultivated in Nigeria rather than depending on imports. Whereas, Benin Republic at the time was ranked to have topped a list of over 180 countries importing rice from Asian Thailand (Ibiroga, 15 July 2019), this was primarily possible due of her unrestricted access to Nigerian market for trade.

As far as the land border closure was concerned, foreign and public policies analysts as well as scholars seem to have generated a debate on the appropriateness of the policy by the Buhari's government. While some had criticised the Buhari administration for its parochial and cluelessness to address matters of international economic relations in perspective of its dialectical relationship with national economic imperative, others continued to hail the genius of the policy direction. The view of the latter has been more advocated by several government officials and agencies, with mainstream reports that indicate beneficial gains for the nation. For example, Hammed Ali, a Comptroller general in the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) was quoted to have said:

Customs has maintained an average of about N4.7 billion to N5.8 billion on a daily basis, more than the agency used to generate before the closure...what we have discovered is that, most of those cargoes that used to go to Benin (Republic), shipped to Benin and then discharged and smuggled into Nigeria, now that we [Nigerian government] have closed the border, they are forced to bring their goods to either Apapa or Tin Can Island and we have to collect duties on them...it is a welcome[d] situation. As a matter of fact...our revenue has not reduced, it is increasing as a result of closing the border (Toromade, 3 October, 2019).

This adequately illustrates the view on the beneficial stance of Nigeria's 2019 land border closure. In fact, President Buhari, just like the Customs Comptroller General, as well as other ranking government officials such as, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) bosses, established that the nation's land border closure is not only profitable but also functional. They claimed that it has reduced the profiling smugglings and illegal arms trafficking from neighbouring West African states, improved local rice production and essentially, resulted in a profound increase in revenue earnings from Nigeria Customs Service (NCS). In this respect, the NNPC submitted that the nation experienced a remarkable reduction in the consumption volume of petroleum products after the closure of land borders (Nnodim, 10 September 2019; Agboluaje, 19 December 2019). By implication the closure of the nation's land borders during this period halted, better still, reduced Nigeria's trans-border trade relations with other West African states.

On the former, that is the other side of the debate regarding the correctness of the 2019 border and trans-border trade closure, which in turn heaped criticism on the Buhari government for its narrow-mindedness and lack of direction on policy preferences. More so, its imperceptions of the imperative and dialectical nexus between trade related policies and the nation's international economic relations. The argument broached in this regard was that, Buhari during his military regime (1984-1986) had employed the same border lockdown due to similar reasons, which at the time had little or no effect but intensified smugglings and trafficking activities through illegal entry ports (Olupayimo and Olupayimo, p.54). Again, it has been presented that Nigeria instead of it messianic perception on its border closure policy to mitigate the obvious cross-country challenges, should seek to develop trans-border trade policies and strategies to forestall illegal trade flow and business transactions across borderlands (Omodele, p.196). In essence, this points to the adverse effect of the policy on the nation's international trade relations within the West African sub-region.

Meanwhile, the reverberations arising from Nigeria's border closure engendered untold regional economic instabilities. It threatened the concept of sub-regional brotherhood and convivial inter-state relations, which had for long been sustained in West Africa and the Africa continent at large. This informed the efforts from such multilateral diplomatic platforms as ECOWAS and African Union (AU) as well as state actors within the region to influence Nigeria to revert on the policy. Okorie and Enwere plainly illustrate this:

Many African leaders perceived the border closure as a major threat to the operation of free trade across West African and the rest of Africa. Chairman of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, who is Ivorian, said the Nigerian land border closure posed much danger to ECOWAS and threatens to undermine all the gains so far recorded by the community. Other leaders agreed that "the unilateral closure of borders goes against all the trade and free movement treaties signed by Nigeria within the framework of ECOWAS." They described the Nigerian action as "very worrying" ... (Okorie and Enwere, p. 215).

It is indeed worrying why Nigeria would not renege on the policy in spite aggregated pleas. However, the concentric driven ideology of Nigeria's foreign policy can easily provide insightful explanation in this respect (Ashaver, 2014). All the same, it has been suggested that the decision of the nation to halt sub-regional trans-border trade through her inimical border closure policy had been responsible for the nature of inflations experienced following the border lock implementation (Okorie and Enwere, p. 214). Food prices had taken a geometric rise and cost of basic welfare services had increased dramatically. As a matter of fact, Nigeria had since experienced more of economic inflation than stability. In fact, according to a 2019 report from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's GDP growth, inflation rate and poverty rate increased from 1.9% in 2018 to 2.3% in 2019, 6% in 2018 to 11.3% in 2019 and 23.1% in 2018 to 69% in 2019 respectively; meanwhile, the nation's public debt profile had risen astronomically to \$83.9 billion which was 14.6% higher than what it was in 2018 (NBS Report, 2019). This was just about six months after the border closure imposition.

Though the different standpoints regarding the 2019 border closure are not altogether inconsistent with the causes, nature and immediate impact of the policy, what is worthy of note is that the arguments were created and anchored on two central perspective. One tends to interpret the policy direction from a purview of national socio-economic stability, while the other pitches its argument in context of the geo-political trade advantage accrued to the nation in her international economic transactions within the region, which the policy seem to overlook. There have also been suggestions that Nigeria had used her land border closure policies to exert more influence on West Africa and her immediate neighbours in particular (Bello, 2017). In this respect, there is indeed no controversy on Nigeria's interest

to exert her influence in the West African sub-region, however, such submission with regards to the country's border closure regimes since 1984 may be considered weak. This is because such perception most probably does not consider the internal economic and security crisis within the country, which is mostly linked to the unkempt nature of trade relations across the nation's land borders and illegal cross-country trade routes.

Conclusion

It follows therefore, based on the above discussions and analysis that Nigeria's land border and trade relations in West Africa is not only of historical relevance, but also of immense geopolitical significance. Land borders and borderlands have remained primary routes and byways through which inter-state trade relations are facilitated in the region. Hence, the imposition of the Nigerian land border policy option - border closure - at different times since the 1980s had remained a critical factor and strategic instrument through which the country had determined the nature and pattern of her trade relations with other West Africa countries, especially her near neighbours. Through findings arising from analysis and discussions here in, it is suggestive that border closure all along has had very little or no significant effect on trade relations, especially informal trade, from neighbouring West African states to Nigeria given her porous and easily penetrable borderlands, owing to the inherited artificial construct of colonial borderlines in West Africa. It may therefore be of some relevance here to suggest that Nigeria needs to seek other functional strategies in the development of border trade policies to effectively coordinate and regulate her trade relations in the West African sub-region, rather than depending on her over-flogged, unfriendly and non-compliant international trade policy –border closure-, which has not delivered the desired outcome on Nigeria's economic interests and hegemonic aspiration in the region.

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