



THE POLITICS OF NIGERIA'S CLOSURE OF INTERNATIONAL LAND BORDERS WITH IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURS: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract: *Notwithstanding the Economic Community of West African States protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods, the Muhammadu Buhari led administration in Nigeria on the 22nd of August, 2019 ordered the closure of international land borders with her immediate African neighbours. This paper is therefore designed to appraise the gains or otherwise derivable from such unilateral action of the government of Nigeria. Utilizing the concept of National Interest as a framework of analysis, the paper revealed that the closure of borders have led to substantial reduction in smuggling of rice and equally small arms and light weapons into the country, saw a reduction in insurgency attacks in the North East and also the increased demand on local rice by Nigeria, a development which had brought skyrocketed prices of the staple food. The paper is however of the opinion that the duration of the closure should be for a short period as indefinite closure can necessitate trade war with her neighbours thereby undermining the objectives of the ECOWAS protocols on Free Movement of Persons and Goods and the African Continental Free Trade Areas. The paper recommends strong policing of our land borders with incorruptible security officials to curb smuggling activities and close illegal routes which are the beehive of activities of these miscreants rather than unilateral border closure.*

Keywords: Border closure, Smuggling, Insecurity

Introduction

Nigeria has lots of fundamental problems and situations which the government appears to be helpless in addressing. It is crystal clear that over the decades there have been rising cases of insurgency, kidnapping, armed robbery, smuggling of illegal small arms and light weapons and other goods into the country, the influx of illegal immigrants through our land borders and other unwarranted activities which impede development of the country. This development has led to sustained insurgency in the North East that has consequently led to the increase in internally displaced persons (IDP) especially in the North East, the rise in

consumption of foreign goods especially rice and staple food products, the high level of unemployment especially that of artisans and the flooding of the country with low quality foreign products.

The government of Muhammadu Buhari came on board in 2015 with the three prong objectives of eradicating insurgency, fighting corruption and revamping the economy. As a way of achieving some of these objectives especially in the light of seeming sustained insurgency, smuggling and other illegal activities which have been encouraged and sustained as a consequence of our porous borders, the federal government of Nigeria on the 22nd of August, 2019 slammed a



temporal border closure with her immediate African neighbours.

This action of the government has elicited and avalanche of reactions from the citizens of Nigeria and even Nigeria's immediate African neighbours as well as other foreign economic experts.

Commenting on the border closure, a member of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Mr. Victor Akande opines that Nigerians will praise the President Muhammadu Buhari-led Federal Government later over the closure of the nation's land borders. In his words:

It is more beneficial to close our borders than to allow it open for now. Nigerians might not understand this now, maybe because of the little pains it has brought, but the positive effects that will soon follow will make Nigerians to praise the President for doing so. Security of our country is key and germane; if this step is not taken now, it may be difficult to control movement of people, arms and ammunition into the country and win the war against insurgency. We need the closure also to battle problems of unemployment in the country. Our appetite for foreign goods and services is to our detriment as we create jobs for citizens of other countries. The border closure will make us look inward and see what we can do for ourselves and even go back to agriculture. Nigerians will praise the government later for this step. (www.pulse.nig/news of 29th October, 2019)

In a message to the National Council for Women Society (NCWS) organized National Unity food fair, President Buhari speaking through the Governor of Kebbi State, Atiku Bagudu opines that Nigerians are happy over the closure of land borders as the decision was part of measures designed to protect indigenous producers and Nigerians being relieved of infectious goods being imported into the country. In the words of the President;

Nigeria has hardworking men and women across the 36 states, with a committed government to support them earn more values for what they

produce. So, we are not ending trade with countries or organizations with genuine intentions but taking steps to ensure that it is done in accordance with global best practices and trade laws (Nwakaudu, 2019: 16)

Also supporting the closure of land borders, the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria (RIPAN) sees the action of government to be in the best interest of the country and therefore solicited for both national and international support for this popular policy. The president of the association in a press briefing in Abuja states as follows:

We came to let the whole world know that we support this action and we are with government in this journey. We will support them with all what we can, in terms of information, statistics. Whatever they need from us, we are ready to do it. We want the whole nation to support the government in this fight; it is for the benefit of Nigeria. I want you to know that the insinuation that we cannot feed ourselves with rice is not true. By this action of government, it has opened many things within this week of closure of borders as all the mills are now open, producing at almost 100% capacity, procurement of paddy has resumed by the millers and farmers are happy because they are expecting new harvest in November. (Emejo, 2019, pp. 19-20)

While the first school of thought heap praises on the government over the land border closure, the second school sees nothing good in the closure of borders, prominent among those who hold this view is Mr. Femi Falana, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). He was of the view that the closure of borders is inconsistent with the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment as well as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCTA). He was further to state that:

Nigerian government should ignore the endorsement of border closure by the International



Monetary Fund (IMF) as it is a deliberate design to weaken ECOWAS regional integration agenda. Instead of resorting to unilateral closure of borders, the federal government should drag Benin Republic and Niger to the ECOWAS Court of Justice for breaching the ECOWAS protocol by allegedly encouraging the smuggling of petrol, rice and other products. In the alternative, smuggling should be addressed like terrorism, which is being jointly combated by Nigeria and her neighbours. (Nwannekanma, 2019:12)

Also corroborating the vies and positions of Falana, the Economic Community of West Africa States opposes the action of the Nigerian government stating that closing Nigeria borders with other neighbouring countries cannot prevent the smuggling of goods and products into the country. According to ECOWAS:

The closure of borders would also affect the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area Act signed by Nigeria and therefore the need for compliance with the community provisions and the reopening of borders and a coordinated fight against smuggling in the region and that the root causes of this recurrent situation must be studied with a view to finding a permanent solution. (www.saharareporters.com of 17th September, 2019, p.3)

From the positions of the various people and organization over the appropriateness or otherwise on the closure of land borders by Nigeria, it can be deduced that there exist positive and negative impact the closure of the land border has done not only to the citizens of Nigeria and her immediate, it has also affected the economy of the countries involved especially Benin Republic and Niger whose economy have been greatly affected negatively be the action of the Nigeria. However, the fundamental question remains “what are the major reasons for Nigeria’s closure of her land borders with her immediate African neighbours despite the country being a signatory to the

ECOWAS protocol for the free movement of people and goods within the sub-region.

Theoretical Explication.

As a sure way of having a better grasp and analysis of the subject matter, the paper utilized the concept of National Interest as its framework of analysis. It is axiomatic that in the pursuit of international objectives, countries are usually guided by the happenings in their domestic environment and as a result decisions and goals in her international dealing are usually influenced by her national interest and purely for the benefit of her citizens.

The premium placed on national interest in the foreign policy objectives of states has led to varying interpretations of the concept by scholars that saw to the emergence of schools of thought, the Marxist school, the Realist school and the Behavioural school. The Marxist espoused by Karl Marx sees national interest as purely the class interest of the dominant class. To them there is nothing like national interest in character taking cognizance of the fact that every interest is serving the purpose of the ruling or dominant class in the society that determines it.

The realist school represented by Morgenthau (1948) opines that “National Interest aim at promoting national image, prestige and respect at home and abroad. It is the sum total of interest pursued, projected and defended internationally”. Lending credence to this, Asogwa (2009:33) stated inter-alia that:

From the political realist perspective, the concept of national interest has been used to refer to the prudent use of power by a country to promote its vital interest abroad. The assumption was that a country’s national interest was usually fixed and unchanging and that national decision makers could discover what this was.

For the behavioural school, the national interest of a state is nothing other than what political actors say it is, since they set agenda for national interest of the state. However, there are certain core values that are regarded



as important by states, though, interest vary; which may amongst others include preservation and protection of national integration and the defense of her sovereignty. Akindele and Ake (2000:2) corroborated this assertion when she stated that:

The concept of national interest covers category of values that are regarded as important on the part of sovereign nation-states. This core value consists of what is referred to as the vital interests for whom a state is normally willing to fight either in the short or long run. Such vital interests include the protection and preservation of a state as a corporate entity and the preservation of its prestige.

From the foregoing, it is a fact that national interest has to do with those core values that a nation protects domestically and defend internationally for the overall interest of her citizens. In this connection, there is no gainsaying the obvious that the concept of national interest best explains the subject matter of this study. It is a fact that Nigeria is experiencing numerous challenges ranging from security, economy and the unabated smuggling activities within her borders with her immediate neighbours. To stem this tide, the country had no choice than to close her border against her immediate African neighbours and this is purely in her national interest as it helped in reducing her security challenges while also curbing the smuggling activities within her borders.

Predisposing Factors for Nigeria's Closure of Border

Africa has continued to remain the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy and the country has over the years continued to play the big brother role in all affairs that concerns countries within the African sub-region. With the central and fundamental role played by Nigeria on issues concerning Africa in the global stage, one cannot but imagine the rationale behind the closure of her land borders taking cognizance of the

fact that such action can negatively affect her neighbours and its citizens.

Be that as it may, certain reasons have been adduced for the temporal closure of Nigeria's land borders with her immediate neighbour and they include but not limited to the following: boosting rice production, curb smuggling activities and combat insecurity.

a. Boost local production and consumption of rice:

The development of the agricultural sector is one of the major cardinal objectives of the Buhari led administration in Nigeria. With Nigeria's sole dependent on petrol production for revenue, the government felt that developing the agricultural sector will go a long way in developing other sources of revenue earnings to the country. The production of rice which is a staple food in every home no matter her economic status was given a priority by the government.

As a sure way of encouraging rice production in the country, the Buhari's administration on assumption of office in May 29, 2015 did not hesitate in prioritizing rice production as the president in November, 2015 launched the Central Bank Anchor Borrower Programme (ABP) in which farmers in cooperative societies get loans at single digit interest rates far lower than those offered by conventional lenders as the loans were given at 9% interest rate as against the 14% by conventional bank lenders. According to Egbejule (2019:17) the programme in the outward appearance is a huge success especially in the eyes of the government judging from the comments of government officials as stated below:

- ❖ In 2018, Godwin Emefiele, governor of the Central Bank announced that more than 2.5 million jobs have been created since the advent of the scheme, with more than 862,000 farmers participating.
- ❖ Also in 2018, Agriculture Minister Audu Ogbeh also sensationally claimed that Nigeria's rice revolution had led to a



drastic fall in imports from Thailand, leading the Thai Ambassador to come to his office bemoaning the closure of seven rice mills. The diplomat denied this, accusing Ogbeh of distorting the facts.

- ❖ Equally Ogbeh's colleague in the information ministry, Lai Mohammed, also claimed rice imports were declining. He refuted a US department of agriculture report that claimed Nigeria had imported 3million tonnes of rice in 2018, 400,000trillion more than the previous year. "I want to say categorically again without fear of contradiction that the Anchor Borrowers' rice programme is working. Nigeria has been able to reduce by 90% the \$1.65billion it was paying on rice importation. The number of integrated rice-processing mills increased from 13-25.

However, despite this laudable efforts of government in this area that equally saw to improved production of local rice and the ban on foreign rice importation, smuggling of rice especially through land borders into the country still thrives. This is due principally to the preference of the foreign rice brand by majority of Nigerians and the real fact that the foreign rice brand is cheaper and more affordable than the local rice. The government therefore reasoned that in order to encourage local production, stiff off competition and encourage local consumption, the closure of land borders is the most effective way of achieving the objective in this regard.

- b. **Curbing smuggling activities:** Smuggling especially within the porous land borders of Nigeria with other countries is also the major reason for the action of the Nigerian government. The activities of these criminals within the borders are better imagined. This has consequently resulted in Nigeria being a favourable environment for the

dumping sub-standard and most cases goods that are dangerous to the health of Nigerians. The most terrifying situation where smaller countries bordering Nigeria imports goods more than their local population can utilize, a development which naturally see most of these goods finding their way to Nigeria illegally. Prominent among items that are smuggled into and out of Nigeria include rice, frozen chicken, petrol products, guns etc. The most striking is the known situation where a country like Benin Republic with a population of 12 million importing more rice from Thailand than the Republic of China lending credence to the view or argument that Benin has done a lot of damage to the Nigerian economy through smuggling. According to Ibiroga (2019: 48) Benin Republic is responsible for the large volume of foreign rice being smuggled into Nigeria and he used the following statistics to buttress his point:

- ❖ Benin Republic, with a population of about 12 million people, imports more than China, for instance, data obtained by the Guardian from the Thailand Rice Export Association indicates that Benin Republic has consistently been the largest importer of rice from Thailand from 2017 to May, 2019.
- ❖ When compared with the most populous country in the world, Benin Republic imported nearly two million metric tonnes of rice in 2017 (1,814,014) while China imported 1,204,911.
- ❖ In 2018, Benin Republic imported 1, 603, 285 tonnes while China imported 1,003,062; and it imported 695,854 tonnes from January to May, 2019 while China
- ❖ The second most populous country, India imported 481 tonnes in 2017, 695 tonnes in 2018 and 362 tonnes in 2019 so far. Nigeria, which is larger than Benin Republic almost 20 times, officially



imported 23, 192 tonnes of rice in 2017, 6,537 tonnes in 2018 and 2,380 tonnes so far in 2019.

Ibiroga concluded by asserting that the large volume of the tonnes of rice imported by Benin Republic are allegedly repackaged and smuggled into Nigerian citizens through the land borders. This has consistently posed threats to efforts of Nigeria to become rice sufficient.

Apart from rice, frozen chicken and small arms and light weapons are being smuggled into Nigeria through the land border while petroleum products are consequently being smuggled out of Nigeria to other African countries thereby bringing the continued increase in local consumption of petrol. Boulilion (2019: 22-23) observed that since the border there been a drop in the local consumption of petroleum products. In his words:

Sales of gasoline in Nigeria fell by 12.7% after the border closure, which indicates that millions of subsidized litres are being secretly taken abroad for resale. The reduction in consumption, if sustained could lead to subsidy savings of around 13.5 billion naira (\$37 million) monthly and 162.1 billion naira annually.

Also lending credence to the drop in the consumption of petroleum product locally, the Group Managing Director of Nigeria National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) Malam Mele Kyari disclosed that the volume of petrol evaluated from depots in the country for consumption has dropped significantly. To him “significant drop in PMS evaluation from fuel depots since 22 August, 2019 may be connected to border closure and other interventions of the security agencies aimed at curbing smuggling. (Okafor, 2019:6)

- c. **Combating insecurity:** While it is a known reality that no country within the globe is immune to insecurity, the Nigerian security situation has gotten to an apogee and addressing the obvious security challenges has not been easy for the

government. The various regions or geo-political zones in the country have their peculiarities in terms of security challenges, the dreaded Boko Haram insurgency in the North, robbery and kidnapping in the West and East, a development that had put the government in a helpless situation in addressing. While the government is frontally addressing the situation, various security reports point to the obvious fact that the smuggling of small arms and light weapons especially through our land borders is a major factor in fuelling and sustaining the activities of these miscreants that have continued to pose security threat to the country.

It is against the backdrop of these realities and the need to curb arms smuggling and combat insecurity that the government of Nigeria close her land borders. Appraising this popular policy of government, the Director General of the Department of State Services (DSS) Yusuf Bichi stated thus:

The recent closure of our borders attest to what we intend to achieve despite criticisms. The closure of land borders so far have succeeded in checkmating not only smuggling of goods that are illegally brought into the country, even firearms and the checkmating the movement of people that are likely to undermine the security of Nigeria. (www.saharareporters.com of 03 Nov. 2019)

Equally sharing the sentiment over border controls and checkmating illegal proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) a Geneva based Centre for Security Sector Governance states as follows:

Border controls are an important dimension of the international efforts to combat the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. Indeed even if their relevance sometimes seems to be challenged by changes (such as new technologies and globalization), borders remain the most visible sign of the sovereignty of a state on its territory. Border



management are crucial to a state's involvement in the protection of its population. The illicit trafficking of SALW across green borders is characterized by specific dynamics which must be taken into account in the actions to prevent it: a strong link between cross-border trafficking of SALW and other transnational crimes, the role of trans-border communities and the act that border areas can become a shelter for criminal groups, rebels or traffickers and finally the "ant trade". (www.issat.dcaf of 25th January, 2017, retrieved 8th November, 2019)

The Impact of Border Closure on Nigerian Economy

There is no consensus of opinion as to the positives or otherwise over Nigeria's land border closure. Different views have been expressed by both statesmen, government officials and renowned economists. Leading the group that agreed that border closure has brought a lot of positive impact to the Nigerian economy is President Muhammadu Buhari when opined that the activities of smugglers threatened the self-sufficiency already attained due to his administration's agricultural policies. In his words:

Now that our people in the rural areas are going back to their farms, and the country has saved huge sums of money which would otherwise have been expended on importing rice sing our scarce foreign reserves, we cannot allow smuggling of the product at such alarming proportions to continue. (Punch Newspaper of 12th Oct. 2019, p.8)

Also in the same line of thought with President Buhari is the former Secretary-General of the Common Wealth of Nations, Mr. Emeka Anyaoku who called for support for the closure of Nigeria's land borders by the president as it could promote a home-grown policy and boost the economy. According to him:

It is clear that the abundance variety of Nigeria's natural resources and our large population constitute adequate phases for the country's economic prosperity, if the federal and state

governments can show a determination to provide the necessary policy and practical support, and also if our citizens can be persuaded or even coerced through regulation into curbing their appetite for imported rather than locally produced goods, there will be a tremendous turnaround in the economy. (Punch Newspaper of 27th October, 2019, p.3)

To the Nigeria's Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development, Alhaji Mustapha Baba-Shehuri, the border closure is a right decision that will be of great benefits to Nigerians as it is unacceptable for a nation of 200 million people to continue to import everything they eat. In his words:

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 we eat. We need to ask ourselves for how long can our economy sustain it and what is our focus as a people? We have a population of about 80 million youths but we keep creating jobs elsewhere. We have very energetic, patriotic, able, physically and mentally fit youths who are ready to put in their best for the development of the country. The youths were denied the opportunity because as leaders we lost focus and certain decisions are not taken, it cannot continue this way. (<https://www.pulse.ng> of 9th November, 2019, p.16)

Equally, the Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) Col. Hameed Ali said the agency's revenue had risen to over 5bn naira daily since the closure of the border and also more than 200 illegal immigrants have apprehended while thousands of bags of rice and other contraband confiscated and this position was equally corroborated by the Group Managing Director of NNPC, Mele Kyari who stated that the closure of Nigeria's borders as well as other interventions, had helped to check the smuggling of Premium Motor Spirit (petrol) outside Nigeria. (Punch Newspaper of 15th October, 2019, p.20)



Despite the encomium to the Nigerian government especially by government officials, other experts are not too comfortable with the border closure decision as according to them, it is not a good decision and it can bring about economic stagnation.

Onyeiwu (2019: 4) opines that countries do not usually close border for trade related reasons. According to him,

the border closure is an economic aberration as most countries don't usually close their borders for trade related reasons. They do so, as in the cases of Sudan, Rwanda, Eritrea and Kenya, when their security is jeopardized. Hey also sometimes do so during disease epidemics such as Ebola, that have the potential to spread across borders.

Onyeiwu was further to state that the border closure had adversely affected the economy as the country's inflation rate saw an upward trajectory;

the inflation rate, which has been declining since April, 2019 rose to 11.24% in September, driven mainly by sharp increases in food prices, the highest since June. If the closure persists and causes sustained increases in food prices, Nigeria could see more people driven to poverty. This would result in an increase in the country's poverty rate of about 50%. (2019:6)

For Okunrounmu Titus, a former Director of the Central Bank of Nigeria views that closing the nation's borders is not the solution to Nigeria's economic underdevelopment. In his words:

the economy will continue to be stagnant because the smugglers would find alternative means of bringing their goods into the country and that the trend would negatively affect revenue generation. Government should therefore take steps to develop the economy by looking inwards to proffer solutions to the immediate problems affecting the economy. (www.xinhuanet.com of 25th September, 2019, p.2)

Consequently, Senators Ibekunle Amosun and Gabriel Suswan called for a permanent solution to smuggling rather than the country leaning heavily on border

closure to check social malaise. In the position of Amosun and Suswan:

Since the people had been doing genuine business on both sides of Nigeria's border with her neighbours and under the free trade agreement that the contry had signed, and indefinite closure of the border would affect them as the signed agreement with other West African countries require Nigeria to open her borders to all kind of people and services. (Punch Newspaper of 15th October, 2019, p.14)

Notwithstanding the positive and negative consequences of the border closure, the Nigeria situation had always been a development where various policies of government appear to be detrimental to the welfare of the poor as more often than not, it usually swell-up the bank account of the rich in the country while the poor continue to remain the prey in all regards.

However, for Folarin (2019: 12) Nigeria defying the ECOWAS protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods without any recourse or agreement with member states before the border closure amounts to a rogue act as the shutdown was sudden, leaving immigration and custom agencies in Nigeria as well as its neighbours and other ECOWAS states unprepared. Further to that according to him:

the measure is killing the local economy too. Niger, Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso are all landlocked countries and need Nigeria's ports for trade. In addition, Nigerian companies that export products to countries to the north such as Niger will lose foreign earning potentially threatening jobs. Big exporters to other African countries will also be affected, accentuating imminent recession. (2019:13)

Folarin in his write up finally cautioned Nigeria not to forget in a hurry how its foreign policy principles of good neighbourliness has helped it over the years citing



instances of Nigeria's neighbours' assistance to her during the Biafra war, anti-terrorism and counter terrorism initiatives, including the fight against Boko Haram and that Nigeria's decision could set a trade war in motion by triggering rogue counteraction by other countries. (2019: 14)

Border Closure and Nigeria's Trade Relations with her Immediate Neighbours

While the major objectives behind the closure of her borders with her immediate neighbours were protective in nature as Nigeria not only desire self sufficiency in agriculture, it was equally meant to protect local farmers and industries from stiff competition from foreign agricultural products especially rice. However, this action of the government of Nigeria did not go down well with her neighbours.

Firing the first Salvo, Signe and Colette (2019: 13-14) outlined the many breaches Nigeria committed by her unilateral decision to close her land borders:

- ❖ The closure of the Nigerian border goes against the spirit of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) which Nigeria freely and happily signed in May 2019 with the biggest impact being felt by informal traders. Most of them small and medium enterprises that operate along Nigeria-Benin border.
- ❖ The AFCFTA Agenda 2063 aspires to create a continental market with the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services and which the borders closure would definitely affect.
- ❖ Nigeria's recent borders closure is also inconsistent with its 44 year long commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) - West Africa's Regional Economic Community which Nigeria spearheaded in 1975 and is one of the eight binding blocks of the AFCFTA.

It is an indubitable reality that the closure of borders by Nigeria negates the principles that underlie the ECOWAS protocol on Free Movement of Peoples and Goods. This action of Nigeria has consequently affected

Nigeria traders in Ghana who are presently facing several challenges and even possible deportation.

According to Chukwuma (2019: 18) Nigerians doing business in Ghana have been asked to quit their shops by Thursday, November 14, 2019, or be forcibly evicted in apparent retaliation against the Federal Government closure of borders and the ultimatum was issued by the Ghana Union of Traders' Association (GUTA) and the Ghana Electrical Dealers Association (GEDA). He opined that one of the notices placed at a strategic location in Ghana especially Kumasi reads thus:

Attention! Attention! Attention! According to Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) Law Act 865 Section 27A, you are not be in our market. We are by this notice informing you to leave our market by 14th November, 2019. By GUTA

This is obviously a serious action over the border closure against Nigeria traders doing business in Nigeria and it is reasoned that if urgent actions are not taken by government, we may likely experience another xenophobic attacks against foreigners in Ghana in which Nigerians are targets.

The reaction of Ghana against Nigerians doing business in their country over Nigeria's border closure has not yet been replicated in other border countries like Benin Republic, Togo and Chad. While this may be as a consequence of their over dependence on Nigeria for their economic growth and equally with the hope that the border closure may not be for a long duration but it could be said that they may be preparing a survival strategy should they adopt a retaliatory measure against Nigeria. For instance the Benin Republic Agriculture Minister, Gaston Dossouhoui had already promised tomato and vegetable farmers who are worst hit by the border closure that the government is making frantic efforts to look for new market for them. (Hermann, 2019: 20)

Conclusion and Recommendation



The main essence of the ECOWAS protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and Goods and the African Continental Free Trade Area was purely for and unhindered economic activities among African countries as it was envisaged that it will boost the economy of member countries and consequently lead to economic development. Drawing analogy from the above, it becomes crystal clear that the unilateral closure of land borders by Nigeria against her African neighbours negates the principles of the two protocols which Nigeria is not only a signatory but one of the strong voices in the sub-region that is being looked up to ensure the success of these agreements.

To this extent, Nigeria's insinuation that the closure was mainly to curb smuggling activities especially that of rice is not tenable. This weak reason has equally exposed Nigeria to the world as to the fact that the country's security agencies manning her borders are not only ineffective but inefficient. Border closure for the reasons of trade is not the best way to go.

Border closure as earlier pointed out is an economic aberration as most countries don't usually close their borders for reasons of trade but in extreme cases to check insecurity and disease epidemic as was seen in the case of Ebola. To this extent, it is therefore recommended that:

- ❖ Nigeria should strengthen to capacity of the security agencies especially customs and immigration official's policy our borders who are incorruptible as the network of wealthy smuggling cartels are usually facilitated by corrupt borders officials.
- ❖ A state emergency should be declared in the area of employment especially in the formal sector as it can be deduced that the growing activities in our borders are fallouts of the high unemployment rate among the Nigerian citizens.
- ❖ There should be coordinated efforts between Nigeria and her neighbours over curbing smuggling just as it is presently being witnessed in the area of insecurity where Nigeria is waging the

war against Boko Haram with the assistance of her neighbours.

- ❖ The closure of illegal entry points into Nigeria should top most priority of the Nigerian government. It is estimated that there are over 1,497 illegal migration points to enter into Nigeria. The existence of this high number of illegal routes point to the fact that even with the closure of borders, smuggling activities is still taking place through these routes.
- ❖ As a big player in African continent and even globally, Nigeria should at all times respect international agreements which the country had freely entered into rather than taking unilateral decisions to the charging of her neighbours who look up to Nigeria for the success of such agreements.
- ❖ With the closure of border bringing about an increase in the prices of rice, it is recommended that the Anchor Borrow Programme of the Central Bank of Nigeria should as a matter of policy be replicated with the Commercial Banks with the same interest rate to enable more farmers to assess loans that will bring about more production for the people.

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