

Original Research Article

## Nigeria-Benin Border Closure: Implications for Economic Development in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria remains the major international market for foreign earnings for many countries in the world. The Republic of Benin in the sub-Saharan Africa is majorly dependent on Nigeria for the survival of her international trade. This study investigates the Nigeria-Benin border closure and its implications on Nigerian economic development. Secondary data were used for the research, and content analysis was the instrument used in analysis of the data generated from the study. Smuggling was confirmed to occur on the Nigeria-Benin border and was perpetrated by residents of both countries. Though legal commercial activities still take place on the same border. Illegal activities on the Nigeria-Benin border include cross-border crimes like banditry and kidnapping as well as trafficking in human beings, contraband goods, illegal arms and ammunition, illicit drugs, and diverted petroleum products. All these transactions constitute serious threat to Nigeria's national security and affects its economy. Therefore, the illegal activities on the border led to its closure by the Nigerian federal government in August 2019. The effects of the border closure on Nigerian socio-economic includes decrease in all smuggling activities and other cross-border crimes. There were increase in domestic production and patronage: 60% increase in rice consumption, 30% decrease in domestic fuel consumption, 56% increase in daily income generation of Nigeria Customs Service, and seizure of contraband goods worth over US\$6.4 billion within 71 days of the border closure. The downside effects of the border closure include restricted movements of residents of border towns in Nigeria, price increase in consumer goods across Nigeria, and increase in national inflation from 11.22% to 11.61%. As a result of the implications of Nigeria-Benin border closure on Nigerian economy, recommendations on improvement of Nigeria-Benin border relations include change in economic policy by Benin, improvement in Nigeria's infrastructure, improvement in the Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts, and modernisation of the Nigeria Custom Service to be effective and proactive.

### Introduction

Nigeria became independent in 1960, and in 1963 it became a republic. In a similar submission Ali, (2013), contend that Nigeria received its national independence from United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 1960. The length of Nigeria's land boundary is 4,047 kilometers and the north of the country is bounded by the Niger Republic and Chad, the west of the country is bounded by Benin Republic, the east of the country is bounded by Cameroon Republic, and its south is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean (Aregheore, 2005). The international border between Nigeria and Benin Republic is roughly 700 kilometers long and it is one of the most vital border regions in West Africa due to both legal and illegal cross-border activities that occur on it (Blum, 2014:3). Smuggling people and contraband goods inside and outside of Nigeria through its border with Benin Republic has been in existence before Benin Republic obtained its independence in 1960 (Golub, et al,

2019:2). Smuggling on the route became more established in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Benin Republic adopted a development policy centered on serving as a trading hub for importing goods and re-exporting them into Nigeria so as to profit from the distortions and inefficiencies in Nigeria's economy caused by a combination of massive oil wealth, interventionist economic policies, and high levels of corruption.

Smuggling on the Nigeria-Benin Republic border poses a major challenge to Nigeria despite efforts by security agencies officially responsible for curbing illegal trade and other activities on the border. On the establishment of Nigeria Customs Service in 1891 till the present day, (then officially known in 1891 as Customs for the Collection of Inland Revenue in Niger Coast Protectorate) has been and is still responsible for the prevention and suppression of smuggling and the collection of import and excise duties (Nigeria Customs Service, 2019). Despite all efforts of the Nigeria Customs Service, smuggling activities have always been much pronounced on the international border between Nigeria and Benin Republic. The World Bank estimating that goods worth more than US\$2.4 billion were smuggled into Nigeria in 2006 alone from Benin Republic (Raballand & Mjekiqi, 2010:212). Also, Adejo (2005:98) stated that the porous nature of the Nigeria-Benin border makes the crime of weapons theft very common because the weapons thieves easily escape across the border into Benin Republic after stealing weapons from Nigerian sources or vice versa. In a related submission, Hoffmann & Melly (2015:43) affirmed that the overwhelming bulk of refined fuel sold in the domestic market of Benin Republic (including more than 80% of gasoline as well as 20% of diesel and other products) are smuggled from Nigeria across the Nigeria-Benin international boundary. Also, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006:56-57) confirmed that Nigerian human traffickers regularly use the Nigeria-Benin international border to transport human trafficking victims from Nigeria to Benin for onward delivery to Gabon, Togo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Spain, France, Russia, Switzerland, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia for commercial sexual exploitation and child labour. In the same vein, the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria insisted that more than 1 billion kilogrammes of rice were smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic alone in the first three months of 2019 (Munshi, 2019). In another view, the United States Department of States declared Benin Republic as the world's second largest destination for India-manufactured variety of the opioid known as Tramadol in 2016 (Kazeem, 2018). Most or all of which would be smuggled into Nigeria through the Nigeria-Benin border. Corroborating this, Odunsi submits that, the large-scale smuggling of Tramadol into Nigeria once indirectly led to the seizure of over 500 million tablets of Tramadol by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in just two days (Odunsi, 2018).

Smuggling activities on Nigeria-Benin border have negatively affected Nigerian society in many ways. Smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALW) into Nigeria has been discovered to lead to the death of an estimated 1,000 Nigerians per year since 1999 through armed robbery (Okeke & Oji, 2014:416). In addition, smuggled weapons increased the insecurity in Nigeria in the form of Boko Haram terrorism in the country's northeast region (Awodola & Ayuba, 2015:247); increased oil bunkering, oil pipeline vandalism, environmental degradation, and kidnapping for ransom in the country's Niger Delta region (Badmus, 2010:323); worsened the violent activities of the country's urban youth gangs (Oruwari & Opuene, 2006:8); increased herdsmen attacks on the country's farmers (Omitola, 2014:2); and emboldened secessionist agitations in the country's southeast region (Adeniyi, 2017:8). Increased cultism and rival cult clashes among the youths in academic institutions and urban centres. Intra and inter party violent conflict. Also, counterfeit, substandard, and adulterated goods and items like counterfeit computer software, adulterated or deliberately abused medical drugs like Tramadol, banned and substandard food items like smuggled rice, and counterfeit clothing materials smuggled into Nigeria have led to revenue loss for the Nigerian government, increase in the general health problems of the country's residents, increase in the country's unemployment rate, and severe as threat to the country's food security (Dogarawa, 2013:124). In the same vein, international human trafficking confirmed to occur on Nigeria-Benin border is known to lead to the victims' societal disruption, personal dislocation, and exposure to personal injury and exploitation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2006:26)

### **History of Nigeria-Benin Republic Relations**

Long before European colonisation of Africa, indigenous people in the present day Nigeria have always had close economic, social, cultural, and even political interactions with the indigenous people of the present day Benin Republic (Isyaku, 2017:209-211). As far back as 1730, a king in Benin Republic (then known as Dahomey) known as Agaja of Dahomey sent his ambassadors with large quantities of corals and one of his most beautiful daughters as gifts to Alafin of Oyo in Nigeria. Alafin of Oyo also sent one of his daughters as a wife to Agaja as a reciprocation of the expression of peacemaking, good neighbourliness, and africanity. Even after European colonisation ended for the two countries in 1960 (Benin Republic became independent in August 1960 while Nigeria became independent in October 1960), cultural interaction freely

continued across the Nigeria-Benin Republic border in such that two traditional rulers in Benin Republic viz the Onisabe of Sabe and the Alaketu of Ketu were in 1982 invited by Ooni of Ife, a traditional ruler in Nigeria to take part in royal council deliberations in a country other than theirs. Similarly, the consent of the Emir of Borgu in Nigeria is always sought before the appointment of a king of Nikki Kingdom in Benin Republic even till the present day while the Babanna tribe in Nigeria and the Gbaso tribe in Benin Republic are so intermixed that a Babanna Nigerian can emerge as the king of the Gbaso Beninoise and vice versa.

Politically at independence, the foreign policy priority of Benin Republic was directed towards France and French-speaking countries of West Africa and Central Africa while the foreign policy of Nigeria was directed at Great Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations. The implication of this is that Nigeria and Benin Republic maintained awkward political distance despite their physical contiguity and cultural intermix. This was one of the reasons why Benin Republic was adversely affected when Nigeria broke diplomatic relations with France in the 1960s and banned France's aircrafts and ships from its territories (Dahiru, 2003: 10-12). At that time, Benin Republic depended on the Nigerian port at Lagos for the reception of equipment needed for the construction of Cotonou harbor. Owing to this, it had to diplomatically solicit with Nigeria to lift the embargo on French aircrafts and ships few weeks later. Benin Republic was the first country with which Nigeria signed its first friendship treaty at the end of the Nigerian Civil War (Oyebode, 1988: 225). The official visit of Nigerian Head of State General Yakubu Gowon to Benin Republic in 1975 led to agreements to further strengthen the links between the two countries in the areas of setting up joint development projects, facilitating free movement of persons, and intensifying cooperation in such fields as transport, power, telecommunication, information, and cultural exchanges (Oyediran, 1978:297). The good relation between Nigeria and Benin Republic later made Nigerian Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo officially visit Benin Republic in 1978 and address his audience in Yoruba language, which is a language indigenous to both Nigeria and Benin Republic (Dahiru, 2003:20). General Ibrahim Babangida formally re-opened the Nigeria-Benin Republic border in 1986 (which had been hitherto closed) six months after becoming Nigeria's Head of State and subsequently officially resolved after a crucial meeting with the visiting Beninoise President Kereku in 1986 to reduce bureaucracy to the minimum among the security officials of the two countries along its mutual border and also to establish direct contacts between the two heads of state of the two countries and their ministers and officials at all levels (Isyaku, 2017:212). In 2011, President Yayi of Benin Republic declared during a visit to Nigeria that Nigeria and Benin Republic are working towards one and same currency, and further announced that agreement has been reached between the two countries for Nigeria to assist in the training of Beninoise army officials as a furtherance of the brotherhood which made the two countries set up a joint border patrol eight years earlier in 2003 in their bid to combat inter-border crimes.

Nigeria-Benin Republic relations have not always being as rosy as the narration seems to suggest. Nigeria-Benin Republic relations was severely strained in the 1960s when it was discovered that Beninoise President Zinsus was collaborating with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) to use Beninoise airport and seaport as transit or staging posts for aircraft relief materials to Biafran secessionists during the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War (Isyaku, 2017:216) The attempt by five men from Benin Republic to kidnap a Beninoise diplomat in Nigeria Mr Abel Zinsou in 1975 caused a serious diplomatic uproar and an even more serious public opinion ire by Nigeria against Benin Republic (Oyediran, 1978:297-298). In the same vein, Timothy-Asobele & Medupin (2003:37) confirmed that deliberate smuggling of contraband goods into Nigeria defines the activities of many Beninoise on Nigeria-Benin Republic border up to the level that smuggling on the selfsame border is the second highest foreign exchange earner for Benin Republic. Relatedly, the criminal activities of the trans-border car snatcher Hamani Tidjani (a citizen of Niger Republic but a resident of Benin Republic) - who specialised in crossing the border from Benin Republic to Nigeria with his armed gang, snatch cars at gunpoint, smuggle them back to Benin Republic, and repackage the stolen cars as imported cars to be smuggled back to Nigeria for sale - was so serious that Nigerian Government in 2003 unilaterally closed the border against Benin Republic and re-opened it only when Hamani Tidjani was arrested in Benin Republic and brought to Nigeria for trial (*The Nation*, 2013). Golub, et al (2019:6) asserts the fact that Nigeria's border with Benin Republic was closed from February 1984 to February 1986 in a futile attempt to curb smuggling of petroleum products out of Nigeria, and the same border was closed by Nigeria in 1996 due to a political dispute between Nigeria's head of state General Sanni Abacha and Benin's President Soglo. The dispute was due to Soglo's military cooperation with USA which Abacha viewed as a threat. Similar to this was the diplomatic tension generated when 40 Nigerian businessmen were illegally detained by Beninoise security agents in 1999 for allegedly entering the country without valid documents despite the provisions of ECOWAS Protocol on Freedom of Movement and Residence, and the furor caused in Nigeria in 1996 when 2,000 Nigerians were deported from Benin Republic due to being declared as illegally residents (Isyaku, 2017:217). The above narration implies that Nigeria-Benin Republic relations have historically been conflict and mutual. The geographical contiguity

and cultural ties between the two countries might be responsible for their interactions in spite of belonging to different blocks at international community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is predicated on the rational choice theory of crime. The rational choice theory of crime is based on the works of Gary Becker published as an article titled “Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach” in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1968 (Becker, 1968:169-217). The theory postulates that crime is committed only after a human being weighs the benefits derivable from committing the crime and the punishments (if any) for committing the crime (Becker 1968:169-217, Scott, 2000:1, Lovett, 2006:237-239, Regis University College of Contemporary Liberal Studies, 2016). The rational choice theory of crime rests on the assumption that crime is a purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender’s commonplace needs for such things as money, status, sex and excitement (Clarke, 1997:21). It further assumes that meeting these needs involves the making of decisions and choices that are usually constrained by limits, ability and the availability of relevant information.

The strength of the rational choice theory lies in the fact that it is very useful in explaining instrumental crimes (O’Grady, 2016:101). Instrumental crimes are crimes involving planning and weighing of the risks associated with the crime with a rational mind (e.g tax evasion, traffic violation, illegal border crossing etc). Other strengths of the theory are that its assumptions pertaining to a certain rational actor are compatible with any set of structural assumptions about other rational actors; it treats variations in choices among many rational actors and by single rational actor over time as entirely a function of their structural positions; it displays a clear predictive advantage; and its independent variables are amenable to reliable measurements (Chai, 2001:9-16).

On the other hand, the weakness of the rational choice theory of crime is that it is not useful in explaining expressive crimes (Clarke, 1997:21). Expressive crimes are crimes involving emotion and lack of rational thinking without being concerned of future consequences (e.g manslaughter, assault, etc). Other weaknesses of rational crime theory are that several factors like altruism, expressive desire, and sense of justice have been confirmed to lead to decision making in the direction of crime as opposed to the theory’s insistence on mono-maximized self-decision; it wrongly insists that rational human beings always make rational decisions; it cannot be used to analyse situations which consists of corporate actors like political parties, firms, and states; its predictive advantage is weak when analysing a wide range of behaviours because it generates multiple equilibrium or no equilibrium at all when used to analyse such wide range of behaviours; and it does not accept that culture and ideology play important role in decision-making (Chai, 2001:9-16).

Despite the identified flaws, the rational choice theory of crime is important to this study because smuggling on Nigeria-Benin Republic border is a crime that involves planning and weighing of the risks associated with the smuggling activities by rational minds, and also because the theory displays a clear predictive advantage when analysing smuggling activities. Also, rational choice theory of crime is relevant to this study because its independent variables are reliably measured when analysing smuggling activities because smuggling activities involves real entities like smuggled goods, not abstract items. The smugglers are mostly ready for the consequences of their actions and inaction because of the derivable and expected benefits. In general, the derivable benefit of smuggling overweight the penalty if caught. Therefore, the benefit smuggling encourages those involved to continue and inspire others to join.

### **The Rationale for Border Closure**

In the early hours of 20th August, 2019, Nigeria’s land borders at the country’s four geopolitical zones of south-south, southwest, north-central and northwest were closed as part of the commencement of a joint border security exercise known as “Exercise Swift Response” which is aimed at better securing Nigerian borders in order to strengthen the country’s economy and addressing other trans-border security concerns (Mohammed, 2019). The main participants in the exercise were men and officers of the Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) and the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) while members of the Armed forces of Nigeria (AFN), the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), as well as other security and intelligence agencies in Nigeria collaborates in actualising the success of the exercise. The joint border security exercise is being coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) and it effectively sealed off the land border between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Not long after, the Nigerian government banned the supply of petroleum products to any filling station within 20 kilometers to all Nigerian borders (Sahara Reporters, 2019), and the exercise will last till 31st January, 2020 (Uwugiaren, 2019). The rationale for the border closure, as explained by Nigerian Minister for Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed, was that the Nigeria-Benin Republic border has been lately used for illegal activities frequently and so inordinately in perpetrating cross-border banditry, kidnapping, smuggling of goods and human beings, illegal migration, proliferation of small and light weapons

(SALW), and circumvention of the ECOWAS Protocol on Transit. Relatedly the Head of Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) Colonel Hameed Ali (rtd.) gave the reasons for the Nigeria-Benin Republic border closure as being to protect Nigeria's interest as a nation by curbing the illegal medical drugs like Tramadol and illegal arms and ammunition smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic (Royal, 2019). According to British Broadcasting Corporation (2019), the main reason Nigeria closed its border with Benin Republic was the extraordinarily high role of rice smuggling into Nigeria despite the ban placed on foreign rice by Nigerian government. Smuggling contraband goods into Nigeria (mostly through the Nigeria-Benin Republic land border) account for over 20% of the gross domestic product of Benin Republic while about 80% of all imports into Benin Republic is destined to be smuggled into Nigeria. BBC (2019) also identified cars as items heavily smuggled into Nigeria (the estimate is that 10,000 cars are imported into Benin Republic each month, most of them intended to be smuggled into Nigeria) while petroleum products particularly gasoline are regularly smuggled from Nigeria to Benin Republic (as at July 2019, the estimate of the quantity of gasoline smuggled out of Nigeria on daily basis was about 10 million litres).

Long before the closure of Nigeria-Benin Republic border, Nigeria socioeconomic setting has been battered by the rampant smuggling on the selfsame border. Timothy-Asobele & Medupin (2003:40) confirmed that Nigerian naira currency is freely spent as a legal tender in markets in Benin Republic, an act which qualifies and protects smuggling on its own and which directly weakens the naira against the French CFA which supposed to be official legal tender in Benin Republic. Blum (2014:5-6) confirmed the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), narcotics, and human beings on the Nigerian-Benin Republic border as well as cross-border armed robbery which has turned some villages like Djoffin in Benin Republic to real exchange markets for stolen goods and contrabands, all these being part of a broader illegal network. Raballand & Mjekiqi (2010:216) submitted that the value of textile products smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic in 2006 equaled US\$402m, partly contributing to the collapse of Kaduna Textile Limited, Arewa Textiles, United Nigerian Textiles Limited, and numerous other textile manufacturing companies in Nigeria (Maiwada & Renne, 2013:173). Non-medical use of the opioid Tramadol (the Tramadol sold outside of medical establishments is often adulterated and substandard) has led to a rise in hospital admissions and mortalities in many West African countries including Nigeria (Klein, 2019:52). Benin Republic imports large quantities of India-manufactured Tramadol to be later smuggled across the border into Nigeria (Kazeem, 2018). Also, Hoffman & Melly (2015:vii) insisted that large companies operating in Nigeria have been found combining formal (legal) and informal (smuggling) channels to get business done in Nigeria because in many respects, the boundary between the formal and informal is blurred. Added to this is the World Bank's affirmation that Nigeria experiences an estimated revenue loss of US\$1.2 billion annually to smuggling since 2006 (von Uexkull & Shui, 2014:15). In essence, all these examples of sabotage of Nigeria's socioeconomic setting via smuggling contributed to the Nigerian government's decision to unilaterally close its border against Benin Republic in August 2019.

The unilateral decision to close the border against Benin Republic did not go down well with some public personalities in and outside Nigeria. Nigerian activist lawyer Femi Falana condemned the border closure in strong terms and insisted that the action was primitive and a contravention of citizens' constitutional rights to free movement (Olowe, 2019) and that the Nigerian government should have instead acquired the necessary technology to fish out the smugglers and their collaborators in public service and persecute them without any delay as opposed to sentencing of all those who travel by road to collective punishment and inconvenience through the border closure. The matter of border closure also fomented a temporary division in the Nigerian House of Senate (Umoru, 2019). While majority of the 109 senators lauded the Nigerian government for unilaterally closing the border with Benin Republic, seven separate senators insisted that the closure was a wrong option and, at most, should be the last option in tackling smuggling due to the fact that the border closure is only effective on the 87 legal land border routes between Nigeria and Benin Republic while being completely useless on the over 1,000 illegal routes connecting to the two countries. Outside Nigeria, former Ghanaian president John Mahama submitted that Nigerian's closure of its border against Benin Republic is a superlative threat to the economy of smaller West African nations and that re-opening the border will be in the overall interest of all West African people (Aderibigbe, 2019). In a related view, a former director of anti-corruption in Kenya Professor Patrick Lumumba declared that the closing of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border due to border porosity is simply unnecessary because a border can still be opened without being porous and insisted that if Nigeria has strong regulations that are obeyed by her citizens, there would have been no need to close the border (Ebhomele, 2019).

The decision of the Nigerian government to close the border with Benin Republic was well received and lauded by many public personalities and organisations in and outside Nigeria. The governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria Godwin Emefiele expressed the border closure is an important step in curbing trans-border crime because many youths who would have taken

to cross-border crime will have no option but to embrace legitimate work, and he subsequently requested the Nigerian government to keep the border closed for two years (Wahab, 2019). A state governor in the northern Nigeria, Kaduna State, Mr Nasir el Rufai expressed support for the border closure because it is the only way to stop other smaller West African countries from sabotaging Nigeria via inordinate smuggling (Olowolagba, 2019). Also, another governor in the southern Nigerian, Ebonyi State, Mr David Umahi similarly confirmed his support for the border closure by insisting that it is the only way to stem the tide of illegal migration and illegal dealings within Nigerian's petroleum sector. Apart from the fact that majority of the senators of the Nigerian Upper House of Assembly openly supported the Nigerian government's decision to close its borders against Benin Republic (Umoru, 2019), the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), the Nigerian Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines And Agriculture (NACCIMA), and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) all lauded the Nigerian government's decision to close the border (*Punch*, 2019). At the international level, the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Feed Africa Advocacy Network (FAAN) all submitted that the border closure against Benin Republic by Nigeria is a welcome development (Nuhu, 2019, *Nigeria Tribune*, 2019, Uwugiaren, et al, 2019).

Olowe, (2019) in response to the insinuation in some quarters that Nigeria violated the free movement of people guaranteed under the ECOWAS Treaty due to its closure of the border against Benin Republic, the Nigeria-based Daily Trust Board of Economists insisted that the opposite is the fact (Iloani, 2019) in that the ECOWAS Treaty does not support a country using itself as a transit point for cross-border transactions resulting in security breaches for another country as practiced by Benin Republic against Nigeria, and added that Article 13 of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) has a provision for an African country to refuse entry of goods with dubious origin from another African country. Similarly, in the *PM News* (2019) the Nigerian government found it imperative to debunk insinuations in some quarters that the border closure is targeted at importers of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria by insisting that the closure of the border against Benin Republic is targeted against all smugglers on the aforementioned border, not against any legitimate importer or exporter from any ethnic group in or outside Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2019).

### **Implications of Border Closure on Nigerian Economy**

According to the Nigerian government, the unilateral closure of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border has benefited the Nigerian economy in more ways many ways. Nigerian Minister for Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed (2019) submitted that the border closure against Benin Republic has led to the reduction in smuggling of foreign rice into Nigeria; increase in production and milling of Nigeria rice; increase in patronage of Nigeria rice; increase in revenue generation for the Nigerian government (which in turn will be used in building more infrastructures and developing critical sectors of Nigeria's economy). He further submits that border closure has decrease smuggling of petroleum products from Nigeria to Benin Republic; decrease illegal immigration and human trafficking; decrease smuggling of illicit drugs and arms and ammunition into Nigeria which in turn led to the reduction of acts of terrorism and kidnapping in Nigeria. Nigerian President, Muhamadu Buhari was more specific about the effect of the border closure on diversion of petroleum products by insisting that Nigeria's domestic fuel consumption has dropped by 30% since the border closure (*Ships & Ports*, 2019). He specially sent a message of gratitude to President Muhammadou Youssoufou of Niger Republic for unilaterally taking action against smuggling of contraband goods into Nigeria from Niger Republic by dismissing corrupt Niger Republic officials and banning the transportation of contraband goods into Nigeria from Niger Republic. Similarly, the Nigerian government announced that the daily revenue generation by the Nigeria Customs Service has climbed to US\$22m after the border closure from the US\$12.4m it was before the border closure (Ajimotokan, 2019). In its view, the Central Bank of Nigeria stated that the border closure is helping to create more jobs for Nigerians. While the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria (RIPAN) affirmed that the unilateral border closure will save Nigerian government US\$400m which would have been lost to rice smuggling into the country from Benin Republic (*The Nation*, 2019). In the effort to stop smuggling, the Nigerian government announced that it has indeed seized contraband goods worth over US\$6.4billion (N2.3 trillion) within the 71-day period from 20th August, 2019 to 30th October 2019 (Akinkuotu, et al, 2019)

In a sharp contrast to all the gains of border closure, a group consisting of residents of a border town on the Nigerian side of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border named Ogun West Consultative Forum claimed through its spokesman Professor Anthony Asiwaju that the border closure and the concomitant stoppage of supply of petroleum products to any filling station within 20 kilometers to the border has led to the death of many law abiding citizens of Ipokia, Imeko-Afon, and Yewa South in Ogun State, Nigeria due to being mislabeled as smugglers and harassed by overzealous armed security operatives enforcing

government directive (Olatunji, 2019). Relatedly, residents of five border towns that includes Lolo, Dele-Kaina, Kamba, Bachaka, and Gwanara in Nigeria's Kebbi State and Kwara State raised alarm that they cannot go to their farms again since the border closure began because any attempt at such will be misinterpreted as a smuggling activity by the armed security operatives enforcing the border closure (Adebayo, et al, 2019). The residents particularly noted that the ban on supply of petroleum products to filling stations within 20km of the border has led to 267% increase in gasoline in the border communities. In connection to this, Golub et al (2019) expressed that not all cross-border trades between Benin Republic and Nigeria are illegal because peasant farmers and herders have always traded in traditional agricultural products and livestock across the Nigeria-Benin Republic borders, so the closing of the border against these two groups of people is detrimental to their economic survival (Golub, et al, 2019:6). Bouillion (2019) established that the border closure has led to price increases for Nigerian consumers with the price of rice doubling to US\$55.25, which is roughly the entire monthly income of a Nigerian living in extreme poverty of which there are estimated 87 million in the country.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) confirmed that the border closure raised inflation from 11.2% to 11.61% in less than three months but the selfsame CBN assured that the inflationary pressure will moderate and reduce in a maximum of four months (Odunsi, 2019). In a similar vein, the Nigeria-based National Union of Chemical Footwear, Rubber, Leather, and Non-Metallic Products Employees asserted that the border closure threatens to lead to chemical companies downsizing their workers because several goods produced by the companies could not be moved to West African countries for sale as is usual practice due to the closure of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border (*Premium Times*, 2019).

The implications of the unilateral closure of the Nigeria-Benin Republic border on the Nigerian economy are: the Nigeria-Benin Republic border is permeable to smuggling of any kind of goods. It has drastically reduced foreign exchange earnings on both import and export goods. Majorly smugglers were the main beneficiary while the government was losing in all fronts before the border closure.

## **Conclusion**

Legal and illegal cross-border activities occur on Nigeria-Benin Republic border regularly because of poor control of the traffic in the border. Smuggling on the border poses a major challenge to Nigeria socioeconomic setting. It encourages and facilitates cross-border crimes like banditry and kidnapping for ransom as well as trafficking in human beings. Smuggling of contraband goods, illegal arms and ammunition, illicit drugs, and petroleum products, all of which in turn poses serious threats to Nigeria's human security, financial security, food security, and health security. Nigeria-Benin Republic relations have had its ups and downs, but the seemingly unending illegal activities on the border between the two countries made Nigerian government unilaterally close the border against Benin Republic. The border closure is advantageous to Nigerian economy in many important ways, such that it will become possible for Nigeria government to take stock and regulate its economy; the process will encourage the growth of manufacturing companies; provides employment opportunities for the able youths and young graduates; and subsequently sustain Nigerian economy.

## **Recommendations**

This study attempts to make some recommendations towards reducing smuggling activities on Nigeria-Benin border and strengthening the economy of the two countries. The following measures are therefore recommended:

1. Change in Economic Policy by Benin Republic: Benin Republic as a country should change its economic policy from an entrepot economic policy (in which goods are primarily imported with the intention of re-exporting it mostly illegally to another country) to a more productive economic policy.
2. Increase Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Efforts: There had been cases of financial corruption among anti-smuggling security agents in Nigeria in which anti-smuggling security agents were apprehended while collaborating with smugglers for financial gains. The Nigeria anti-corruption agencies like Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should be granted wider legal powers to investigate suspected corrupt Nigerians.
3. Reduction in Nigeria's Port Duties: Nigeria operates a protectionist economy which makes it have the highest port duties in West Africa and one of the highest in Africa. This has created a magnet for smugglers because cheap goods successfully smuggled into Nigeria will fetch a comparably higher price when sold. Therefore, reduction in the country's port duties by the Nigerian government will encourage border traders to conduct legitimate transaction which will help to reduce smuggling activities.

4. Regular training and retraining of anti-smuggling security agents: Smugglers are very dynamic and versatile individuals who always create and use new ways to evade anti-smuggling security agents. Hence, regular training and retraining of anti-smuggling security agents in Nigeria in modern and novel ways of intercepting smugglers will drastically reduce smuggling on Nigeria-Benin Republic border.

5. Equipping anti-smuggling security agents with regularly-updated equipment: Smugglers are usually known to change their methods of smuggling in many ways. Only with the most sophisticated equipment like scanners, radars, camera-mounted drones, lie detectors, etc would assist anti-smuggling agency apprehend smugglers and thereby reduce smuggling generally.

6. Increased public enlightenment and orientation: The government of Nigeria and non-governmental organisations should urgently embark on vigorous and ceaseless public enlightenment and orientation activities against smuggling as a practice and smugglers as individual persons both in the traditional and social media. This will help the country's populace to understand the threat that smuggling pose to Nigeria security and economic development. This will in turn lead to the reduction of smuggling on Nigeria-Benin Republic border and encourage those interested in import and export to conduct their business legally.

7. Unbridled information sharing among anti-smuggling agencies: Information about smuggling and smugglers should be freely shared among anti-smuggling security agencies. The unwholesome practice of one security agency hiding and hoarding useful information on smuggling or smugglers on Nigerian borders for other security agencies can only serve to benefit the smugglers at the detriment of Nigeria government.

8. Conscious Foster of International Collaboration against Smuggling in Nigeria: Many smuggling activities are transnational in nature because most smuggling activities involve smuggling items from one country to another. Collaboration with governments of other countries in Africa and beyond to tackle smuggling on Nigerian borders will help the Nigerian government and other collaborating countries to curb the menace of smuggling on their borders.

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