

# Nigerian Foreign Policy Implications on National Development: A Critical Assessment of Buhari's Beggar-thy-Neighbour Policy

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**Abstract:-** This paper focuses on Nigerian foreign policy implications on national development by critically assessing the President Buhari's Beggar-thy-Neighbour policy from 2018-2019. The study seeks to unveil the implication(s) of this policy on the country's national image and economic development. The methodology adopted for the study is qualitative and explorative research design. The population of the study comprises of border security officers, customs, immigrations, formal imports and exports businesses, informal local businesses and illicit businesses. The Epi Info sample calculator was applied to arrive at a sample size of 384; at 50% expected frequency, 95% level of confidence (5% acceptable margin of error) and leaving design effect and clusters equal to 1 respectively. Judgmental, quota and snowball sampling were employed to select and access the samples. Key Informant Interview (KII) method was applied to elicit valid data. The KII data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Findings of the study reveal clearly that the border closure appears to mean different things to different persons and groups. To some persons it is a right step in the right direction in the fight against smuggling and other nefarious cross border and inter-border activities. Some others are of the opinion that the border closure was not embarked upon in good faith but rather disguised to serve the self-interest of a select few in the helm of affairs and their cronies. The study concludes that the border closure, irrespective of the rationale and the potential as well as actual advantages and disadvantages was an intricate, multifaceted and complex decision. The study recommends among others multilateral dialogue at least, at the sub-regional, regional or even multinational level for all affected parties to present and iron out their cases rather than resort to self-help that could breach international protocol or undermine national sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Nigerian Foreign Policy, National Development, Beggar-thy-Neighbour, Protectionism, Diplomacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

The protectionist policy of the Muhammadu Buhari's administration, particularly the policy that pertains to the closure of Nigeria's land borders, has been subjected to ridicule by scholars, political analysts and individuals from the business community. Critics all over the country have argued that the closure of the country's land boundaries is an anti-human policy that has further impoverished the citizens and displaced businessmen and women from their sources of livelihood. Nigeria's neighbouring countries, together with its foreign trade partners, are also not left out among the critics of the protectionist policy of the administration. Although, the

intention of the government is to promote domestic industries and encourage consumption of local agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, poultry birds, etc., yet critics did not find it necessary to support, in its entirety, this policy of government.

A handful of political analysts have also argued that the policy objective of the government is in tandem with international standards which, in the long run, will be appreciated. Indeed, the problem laid in the manner in which the policy was executed with no palliative measures put in place to cushion its effects on the citizens before its official take off. Others have also discredited the good intentions of the government by tagging it the *buharism* policy which, among the locals, signifies total hardship. In short, this latter group of critics conspicuously occupied themselves with discrediting every single step taken by the administration to restructure the country's dwindling economy. A host of other Nigerians accused the administration of pursuing unfriendly policies, as well as engaging itself in constitutional summersaults and abuse of the rule of law.

But a closer look at this policy agenda shows that the policy has significant prospect that could be achieved in the short-run, particularly in its campaign for self investment in the manufacturing sector, and in the production, cultivation and consumption of local grown agricultural produce instead of over reliance or dependence on foreign imports. Unfortunately, critics all over the country alleged that the policy was a replicate of Buhari's policy during his short reign as military Head of State and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation from 1983 to 1985. Chidozie, Ibietan and Ujara(2014), asserted that the Buhari/Idiagbon military regime, in their brief reign, had proposed to restore the country's battered image overseas, and that administration promised to retrieve looted finances by politicians of the President Shehu Shagari led administration in 1983. In spite of their promise to the people of Nigeria, the administration only succeeded in promulgating anti-drug and anti-corruption military decrees. In its attempts to avoid a repeat of the Shagari led civil rule over dependence on the international financial institutions through borrowing, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime violated human rights with lots of impunity and disregards for constituted authorities. The administration put forth the argument that "a good image constitutes a country's

source of goodwill and encourages investors to consider investing their funds in the country” but the reverse was the case of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime which experience several international sanctions from the super powers. It is therefore very essential for every government to promote at all times, a better image nationally and internationally (Chidozie et al., 2014).

Aremu (2015) criticised the Buhari/Idiagbon regime’s pomposity and insensibility to the feelings of the masses while pursuing its policy agenda. Also criticised were the regime’s incessant violations of human rights, with the Umaru Dikko’s case as a pertinent example. This singular incident was a major setback to the country’s foreign policy aspiration in the 1980s. Ismail, Asmau and Muhammad (2017:43) argued that President Buhari’s foreign policy has always reflected a radical posture right from his time as the country’s military head of state. Till date, with Buhari as the country’s civilian president, the story remains the same, they argued. Like his predecessors, Buhari has demonstrated the inability to sustain good neighborliness and maintenance of exiting diplomatic relations with the country’s immediate neighbours, as well as with the United Kingdom, United States, China, among others. Yet, his policies have been subjected to a lot of criticisms as demonstrated with the local slogan *buharism*.

Skeptical of the likelihood of good intention of the administration to actualise stable economy and political commendations both at the international and domestic front, critics have consistently accused the government of involving itself in incessant and unfriendly policies. However, no matter the strategic objective of the government’s protectionist policy, critics always accused the government of pursuing policies that fall short of international standard and required reciprocity, particularly with its immediate neighbours such as Cameroon and Chad Republics to the East of Nigeria and, Benin and Niger Republics to the West of Nigeria (Worldatlas.com, 2019). It is against this background that this study examines the economic benefits of Buhari’s foreign policy posture and proffers strategic solutions that will be of benefit to both government and the citizens of the country.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The protectionist policy of the Muhammadu Buhari’s administration, particularly the policy that relates to the closure of Nigeria’s land borders, has been subjected to strong criticism at home, within and outside the sub-region by scholars, political analysts, the business community and individuals’ alike. Critics all over the country and beyond have argued that the closure of the country’s land borders is an anti-human policy that could further impoverish the citizens and displace businessmen and women from their sources of livelihood if continued or sustained.

Nigeria’s neighbouring countries, together with its foreign trade partners, are also not left out among the critics of the protectionist policy of the administration. Some have threatened policy retaliations against Nigeria that is still

benefiting from exiting liberal diplomatic trade relations with its neighbouring and trade partners despite the bother closure imposed by Nigerian government. Although, the intention of the government is to promote domestic industries and encourage consumption of local agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, poultry, etc., yet critics did not find it necessary to support this policy of government in its entirety.

In short, it is now unknown how this policy will be perceived by Nigerians, within the sub-region and beyond if it is sustained much longer than necessary. It is against this premise; the study is to examine the benefits, as well as the detriments of Buhari administration’s foreign policy posture to the economic development of the country; as well as to determine if there are national image issues around Buhari administration’s foreign policy abroad, and economic implications.

#### *Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of this study is to find out how the President Buhari administration’s protectionist foreign policy is perceived within Nigeria, the sub-region and beyond on the one hand, and in the business community in Nigeria, within and the sub-region on the other hand, from 2018 – 2019. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- (i) Determine if there is a national image issue(s) around Buhari’s protectionist foreign policy abroad;
- (ii) Examine the economic implication(s) of Buhari’s protectionist foreign policy if any and
- (iii) Suggest ways in which the national image issue(s) and economic implication(s) if any around the protectionist foreign policy can be resolved amicably.

#### *Research Questions*

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

- (i) Is there any national image issue(s) around Buhari’s protectionist foreign policy abroad?
- (ii) What are the economic implication(s) to Buhari’s protectionist foreign policy?
- (iii) How can the national image issue(s) and economic implication(s) if any around the protectionist foreign policy be resolved amicably?

#### *Theoretical Framework*

To enable the study analyse the link between the variables, the study adopted Richard Snyder’s *Decision-making theory (1954)* which states that every political action, whether at the domestic or international level, is undertaken by *human beings* and not the abstract entity, *the state*. Therefore, we must assess the decisions of a state from its internal and external political settings so as to ascertain what influences the decision-makers to make certain policy decisions affecting the people. Considering the various departments, bodies and individuals concerned with decision making, Snyder identified two types of decision making: first, is *crisis decision-making*;

and lastly, *normal decision making*. Snyder, thus, argued that when a nation is faced with a major crisis that needs prompt attention, the decision makers must also attend to the crisis situation immediately. In other words, the government, through its relevant agencies, must respond to the situation to provide short or long term solution. On the other hand, when things are normal and there are no crises, then the government decides whether it should have diplomatic relations with another country or not.

From Snyder's analysis, it is obvious that the international system has different actors or players in a competitive game of politics where different opinions are expressed in different manners by the players. On a general note, decisions and decision-making influence the way choices and values are made or determined and how they shape the outcome of the lives of the individuals or institutions concerned. Dougherty and Pfalzgraff (1997:45) define decision-making simply as the act of choosing among available alternatives about which uncertainty exists. They asserted that rationality and irrationality in decision-making is a function of open and close societies. This implies that while rational decision evolves in an open society where information flows, debates and discussions are free as against a society that is closed. In other words, irrational decision is a common trend in societies where information flow is controlled and restricted, while open (democratic) societies are often associated with free flow of information, evident in the case of Nigeria, both in the era of military rule and in civilian democracies respectively. Other major contributors to the decision-making paradigm, apart from Snyder, include Herbert Simon (1976), Amital Etzioni (1964), Charles Lindblom (1965), James Anderson (2003), Graham Allison, among others (Oromareghake & Oluka, 2016:104).

In analysing the Nigerian situation in this study, a critical assessment of some of the relevant and pertinent approaches to decision-making theory becomes necessary. *Rational decision-making* approach, for example, holds that policy makers search for the best policy approach that will answer or solve the question or situation at hand which requires immediate solution. The actor becomes aware of a problem and posits a goal. He carefully weighs the alternative means and chooses among them and with reference to the state of affairs, the solution to the problem. Such is the situation the Buhari administration finds itself.

With over reliance on imported agricultural produce and sundry goods at the detriments of local farmers and manufacturers, plus the worst scenario of the country's dwindling economy, the administration had no option than to take immediate action to forestall the country's domestic economy. Also relevant to this study is the *Incremental decision-making approach* advanced by Charles E. Lindblom and Robert Dahl (1953) which is a reaction to the constraints of the rational decision-making approach (Atkinson, 2011; Berry, 1990). The proposition of this theory is that, policy makers make their decisions or policy options as situations

demand and not merely relying on well-defined rational principles and attitudes which a state built up over the years (Oromareghake & Oluka, 2016:105).

This implies that decision makers in the incremental approach adopt policy strategies they feel are the best alternatives to situations at hand. They do not just consider policy alternatives but critically assess or consider the immediate interest or goal of the policy, as well as involve political bargain or mutual adjustment to enable them reflect public interests and preferences. In other words, foreign policy options in most cases are taken by the policy makers in line with current exigencies and pressures from both the domestic and external circles. This is also applicable to the Buhari-led administration which tends to reduce over reliance on foreign imports on agricultural produce such as foreign rice, frozen chicken and significant other agricultural commodities hitherto allowed into the country unchecked.

A policy decision, thus, are made to favour a nation and covers its national interests. On the contrary, a good number of the critics of the administration alleged that the beggar-thy-neighbour or protectionist foreign policy posture of the government was purposely design by Buhari and his cronies as well as political allies to orchestrate their political and economic dominance and selfish gains against national interest. They argued that the collective action of these small group of individuals within the larger society has not only instituted hardship (*often regarded as Buharism*) in the country, but has also created *mixed feeling* in the neighbouring countries and is likely to cause policy retaliations.

## II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Foreign Policy: Conceptual Explanation

Whatever success an administration intends to achieve depends on her foreign policy agenda or strategic objectives. This study, thus, argues that the foreign policy of a state must be designed in such a way that its strategic objectives and pending national issues could be solved through its framework. Ota and Ecoma (2016:10) argued that it is difficult for scholars or writers to attach any definite description or measure to the concept of foreign policy because the concept can be defined either as an expression of human behaviour or a diplomatic tool which is expressible in secrecy or in the open. This variation in defining foreign policy has made it difficult for scholars or writers to attach any definite description or measure to the concept. They, therefore, identify foreign policy as a strategy that is properly articulated and designed in a well-coordinated manner by institutionally-designated decision-makers in an attempt to manipulate the international environment, in order to achieve the already stated national objectives. With this mindset, they posit that the concept in its entirety has to do with official course of actions and reactions of a nation from its domestic conditions which influence its actions, as well as social events and developments in the external environment (Ota & Ecoma,

2015). In a like manner, Ujara and Ibieta (2017) argued that foreign policy, as with other concepts in the social sciences, does not possess a universally accepted definition. Hence, it has attracted several meanings from different scholars and authors. For this singular reason, Ade-Ibijola (2013) cited in the work of Ujara & Ibieta (2017), sees the concept as the objectives which constitute a comprehensive plan that serve as goals which a state hopes to achieve in its relations with other members of the world. For Heywood (2007), cited in Otu et al (2018:60), the concept of foreign policy is a slippery and elusive concept despite the deep interest it has generated in the academic sphere. Over the years, it is still used to refer to a process, a strategy, or even an ideology, he argued.

In a concise manner, Ade-Ibijola sees the concept as that in which “every state constructs a plan with certain key goals that seek to achieve its relations with other states in the international system so as to avoid steering without direction in the waters of international relation”. Chibundu (2003), cited in Otu et al. (2018: 60), defined the term as a country’s response to the world outside or beyond its own frontiers or boundaries which may be a friendly or aggressive, casual or intense, simple or complex responses, though always there in its relations with other countries.

In attempt to establish a link between domestic and foreign policy, Ukwuije (2015) conceives foreign policy as an offshoot of the public policy of state that cannot actualise certain aspects of its domestic policy posture without interacting with other states in the international system. Therefore, the foreign policy of a state provides the state the means to achieve its domestic policy in the international front. Ismail et al. (2017:64) posits that the foreign policy of a state is an essential tool with which the state relates with other states and non-state actors in the international arena. Also, they saw it as a set of tools used in the pursuit of the state’s national interests. In broad terms, Akpotor and Nwoliye (2011:4) defined foreign policy as a pattern of behaviour which a state adopts while pursuing its interests in relations with other states. They also see foreign policy as that which is concerned with the process of making decisions to follow specific courses of actions which include the setting of goals and priorities; activating government policy-making machinery and the employment of human and material resources to compete successfully with other nations in the international arena.

For the researcher, it is the pursuit of national objectives extended to the international system to seek a balance in relations with the rest of the world. It is a way of going about a country’s dealings with its external environment in particular. This implies that the public policy of a state is the component element of its foreign policy which it intends to achieve in its relations with other countries. With these assertions, the researcher opines that a state’s foreign policy posture must be shaped, designed or formulated to maximise its values and missions or the purposes to which it was formulated, evident in the case of the Buhari administration in

Nigeria which adopted the protectionist policy to enable the government pursue its agenda of diversifying its economy on the one hand, and encouraging domestic consumption and production, as well as processing and exporting local agricultural produce in the country, on the other hand.

## 2.2 *Economic Benefits and the Image of Buhari’s Foreign Policy Posture Abroad*

Zimako (2009) opines that the national image of a country is an ethical issue which may appear intangible but the benefits and advantages which a good conduct offers a country are unquantifiable. Thus, he argued that the perception of a country by the comity of nations, particularly, on how the country conducts her internal and external affairs or the behaviour of its nationals or government both at home and abroad, matters a lot. Such behaviour, he said, needs to be coordinated or regulated within the domains of the country. In the same vein, Alimi (2005:335) opines that image-building is an essential element in any foreign policy. Its formulation and implementation are so inclusive since these help a country to create and reinforce favourable image externally. Adeniyi (2012:356) reiterated this when he opines that image-building constitute a fundamental element of a nation’s foreign policy and the way a nation is perceived especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Otu et al. (2018:59) believe that the goal of every foreign policy is to establish and maintain a cordial relationship with other nations, as well as to build a good image for the nation; to meet its national and domestic interests. This invariably means that a good foreign policy posture is important in maintaining and sustaining a nation’s image in a foreign country. So, the image of the government of a state depends on her foreign policy posture which must conform to the expectations of the other members of the international community.

Suffice it to state, therefore, that President Muhammadu Buhari’s hunger to eliminate all forms of corrupt practices in the country, no matter the status of the perpetrators, has influenced the administration’s foreign policy posture. To achieve this singular objective, the president adopted a radical posture alleged to have run contrary to constitutional provisions and this gave critics the leverage to criticise his policies over the years.

Ismail, Asmau and Muhammad (2017:44) noted that right from Buhari’s time as military Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, his foreign policies have been judged radical in approach, and have attracted all forms of criticism, home and abroad. The critics, as a result, argued that as president of the Federal Republic, Buhari’s cardinal policy objective till date is to eliminate all forms of corrupt practices in the system, especially those committed by former governors, public servants, political appointees, and business men and women who are linked to the government.

Ismail et al. above reiterated this stand point when they argue that under Buhari’s watch, the country’s main foreign policy objective is to improve on the diplomatic relations between

Nigeria and its neighbours, as well as with foreign allies like the United States America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), China, among others, in the bid to fight transnational crimes and local terrorism. Also of utmost importance to Buhari's government is the need to foster the country's economic development through its relations with China and other allies. The administration's other cardinal policy objective, besides the fight against corruption, is to collaborate with the governments of the countries which share international borders with Nigeria and with other world powers, to fight the Boko Haram insurgency (Ismail et al., 2017:44). This argument is in line with the opinions and perceptions of a good number of researchers and select scholars whose opinions were sought through the Key Informant Interview (KII) conducted by the researcher for empiricism.

However, extant literature on the study area revealed that Buhari's foreign policy in recent year is targeted at the diversification of the country's economy from a *mono-economy* depended on the huge oil and gas resources to a *multiple economic* base system. With agriculture as his basic diversification instrument, President Buhari has attracted investors from China into the country purposely to invest in agriculture in particular, and in manufacturing as well as in the transportation sectors. From this stand point the researcher observed that Buhari's radical approach is sustained with much desire especially now that the country is experiencing economic recession due to oil price fluctuation in the international market. Otu et al (2018:59) noted that President Buhari's administration like that of his predecessors did not lack good foreign policies but the critics of the administration have always alleged that the problem with the country's foreign policy under Buhari is not implementation but corruption and disregards for transparency and accountability while implementing the administration's policies.

Nevertheless, since his assumption of office as the democratically elected president of Nigeria, his desire multiplies leading to the recent imposition of protectionist policy (beggar-thy-neighbour) in attempt to achieve these desires or policy goals. In spite of the successes recorded so far by the Buhari administration's diversification programme, critics have maintained their stand against the policy objective. Reiterating their stand they argued that the programme and aspiration of the president is wrongly prioritised particularly now that the country is experiencing economic recession. A good number of these critics also argued that Buhari's government is insensitive to the yearning and aspirations of the poor citizens who are in the majority. Hence, the critics relate the high prices of commodities in local markets to the closure of the country's land borders to business men and women. Rather than tackling the challenges posed by Boko Haram terrorist organisation and Islamic States West African Province (ISWAP) to attract new investors into the country and the return of those that relocated abroad, the government is busy chasing shadows through the closures of the country's land borders to business

men and women who are gainfully involved in transnational trade to sustain their families, they argued.

Ismail et al (2017:43) noted that since independence the country's foreign policy has been *Afrocentric* which means that Africa has been the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. The question now on the lips of critics and that needs immediate answer is what has happen to the *Afrocentric ideology* maintained by successive government over the years? Critics have alleged that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is yet to make any pronouncement on this development despite the organisation's position as the umbrella in which the West African economies and trade relations are regulated. They also alleged that the organisations as well as the affected member neighbouring nations have been caged and prevented from retaliating through protectionist policies, hence the link with *capture theory*.

On the contrary, the supporters of the president's programmes and aspirations to revitalise the economy of the country through agriculture and self-sustenance, applauded the bold step taken by the administration in its entirety. These categories of people or individuals, from the academia, to political analysts, and economists and to the business world, argued that on the long run, critics of the administration will come to terms with the policy programme when its set goals are achieved. If the administration's protectionist policy is encouraged and supported by all, a time will come when the country will be self-reliant and citizens gainfully involved in the diversification programmes of the government. This implies that the country's mass unemployment crisis will be resolved through the diversification policy agenda of the Federal Government.

### III. METHOD OF THE STUDY

The cross-sectional and exploratory designs were applied for the study. The population of the study is infinite and spatial cutting across different sectors of the economy. Epi Info sample calculator was applied to arrive at a sample size of 384; at 50% expected frequency, 95% level of confidence (5% acceptable margin of error) and leaving design effect and clusters equal to 1 respectively. This sample size was further validated with Survey Monkey sample calculator. The actual elements that make up the sample size were selected from the population using purposive and snowball sampling methods, both non-probability sampling techniques. Primary and secondary data were both used to elicit valid and useful data for the study. Key Informant Interview (KII) method was applied using a pretested and validated interview schedule. Data collected from these processes formed basis for qualitative analysis to establish the link between Buhari's foreign policy posture and Nigeria's economic development and image within and outside the sub-region. Data from the Key informants' interviews were analysed using the thematic content analysis. The category and percentage distribution of

the sample/respondents are as presented in the table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1: Distribution of respondents by category and number

No of Interviewees	Proposed Interviews	Percentage (%) proposed
Category		
Border Security	64	16.67
Customs	64	16.67
Immigration	64	16.67
Formal Importers & Exporters Businesses	64	16.67
Informal Local Businesses	64	16.67
Illicit Trade	64	16.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.1: Summary of proposed and actual respondents by category, number and percentage

No of Interviewees	Proposed Interviews	Percentage (%) proposed	Actual Interviews	Percentage (%) Held	Unheld Interviews	Percentage (%) Unheld
Category						
Border Security	64	16.67	48	12.50	16	4.17
Customs Services	64	16.67	52	13.54	12	3.13
Immigration Services	64	16.67	46	11.98	18	4.69
Formal Import & Export Businesses	64	16.67	58	15.10	6	1.56
Informal Local Businesses	64	16.67	54	14.06	10	2.60
Illicit Trade	64	16.67	60	15.63	4	1.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>82.81%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>17.19%</b>

#### 4.1 Presentation of Key Informants' Responses

The study sought to know from the selected key informants the implication of the beggar-thy-neighbour policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria as demonstrated in the land borders closure on two core areas: (a) the image of the nation within and outside the sub region and (b) free movement of goods and services and trade relationships.

##### 4.1.1 Key Informants' Response on National Image

On the image of the nation, some of the key informants are of the opinion that a continuous lockdown of the land borders could be interpreted by member nations of the ECOWAS as a breach or negation of the ECOWAS treaty which Nigeria is a signatory to. This set of informants note that if the prevailing situation in the borders (smuggling/ illicit trade and security) which the government has cited as the reason for the closure of the land borders has deteriorated, dialogue will do a lot of good in resolving the problem. A multilateral dialogue at least at the sub-regional, regional or even multinational level probably would have yielded better result than a unilateral closure of borders against well-established regional and international norms and standards. This they no doubt note could have a very damaging effect on the image of the nation both within and outside the sub region. This group is of the

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The data for analysis in this study is qualitative in nature (those generated from key informant interview) of the 318 key informants representing 82.81 percent of the sample size. This was pulled from the population using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The thematic content analysis was applied. This was done by identifying and labeling or coding data needed to be developed such that it is bespoke for this study. Table 4.1 below summarises the responses to the interview by category, number and percentages.

opinion that this border closure can elicit direct and or indirect revenge (policy retaliation) by affected nations of the sub-region and beyond. The group cited the unilateral closure of businesses of Nigerian interest and origin in Ghana as most probably a direct or indirect reaction and consequence of the border closure.

Aside from foregoing group, there is also another set of respondents who do not see any actual or potential damaging effect or consequence of the border closure on the image of the nation. This group is of the opinion that as a sovereign nation, Nigeria reserves the right to manage her internal affairs without fear or favour. This according to them includes deciding on whether to leave open or close her land borders either partially or completely as they deem necessary. This must not be done in consultation with any other nation within or outside the sub-region or taking cognizance of any bilateral or multilateral treaty or agreement, particularly the face of any potential or real threat. They are of the opinion that affected nations or organisations can reach out to Nigeria for dialogue and not resort to revenge or vengeful action on Nigerian interest as this can only lead to escalation that could further compound the issues surrounding the border closure. The third groups of key informants were merely ambivalent, not able to emphatically state whether or not and how the border closure

could affect or affects the national image. This group however suggests a middle of the road arrangement or some sought of diplomacy in managing the ensuring stalemate.

#### 4.1.2 Key Informants' Response on Free Movement of Goods / Services and Trade Relationships

A cross-section of the key informants interviewed hold that legitimate trans-border and cross-border business transactions have been adversely affected by the border closure. They note that movement of goods and services have been completely halted on both sides of the borders and all businesses; particularly genuine small, medium and large scale enterprises in import and export businesses through the land borders are already feeling the negative impact. These businesses may go out of business completely if the borders remain closed much longer, they assert. Aside from these trans-border businesses, they note that there a plethora businesses within the ECOWAS sub-region that depend on the imports and exports through the Nigerian-ECOWAS corridor for further production that could be adversely affected by the closure if it persists. This they note could trigger, down-sizing, layoff and in the extreme outright business closure.

Aside from the foregoing, there is another group of key informants which hold that the border closure serves the best interest of the country. This group notes that the border closure has left the nation with no other choice than to depend on local agricultural produce thereby contributing to GDP growth. Almost all the informants in this group cited local rice production and consumption to have increased within the period as a result of the border closure. This group also holds that the nation has made significant gains running into millions of Naira accruing from petroleum and other products that hitherto would have been smuggled through these borders in illegal bunkering and other nefarious activities that are no longer possible following the border closure.

There is also a third group of KIs that believes the border closure was not the most appropriate action as the smuggling and security concerns raised by the government are not necessarily perpetrated through these manned borders, but through myriad of illegal routes either existing or deliberately created for purpose. This group holds that smuggling is still going on unabated and is evident in the number of impoundments and arrests the customs and other border patrol and security agents have made within the period of the closure. This group is of the opinion that rather than dissipate energy and resources in blanket closure of the major routes, emphasis should have been on how to manage the porous and spongy border through which smuggling and other illegalities are majorly carried out. They note that if contraband and unauthorised persons are finding their way through the manned borders in different guises this should rather call for more diligence and sophistication in border security and not border closure. This group affirms that markets in Nigeria are still flooded with banned foreign goods ranging from textiles to food items. To them the border closure at best only spiked

prices of both foreign and local goods such as rice and smothered and strangled import and export dependent businesses. Some of response of this group suggests a *conspiracy theory* that the border closure was targeted at a geographic and ethnic section of the country to strangulate their import and export dependent businesses using the smuggling and security issues cited as a subterfuge.

The third group of key informants was also ambivalent, not able to categorically state whether or not and how the border closure could affect or affects the movement of goods and services and by extension the businesses that depends on these goods and services. This group still insists on a middle of the road arrangement or some sought of diplomacy in managing the ensuring stalemate.

## V. FINDINGS

The study reveals clearly that the general understanding of the border closure appears amorphous, meaning different things to different persons and groups. To some persons it is a right step in the right direction in the fight against smuggling and other nefarious cross border and inter-border activities, thus agitated persons and nations can at best resort to dialogue and diplomatic resolution as against casting aspersion. Some are of the opinion that the border closure was not embarked upon in good faith but rather designed to serve the self-interest of a select few in the helm of affairs and their cronies and could damage the image and reputation of the country both within and outside the sub-region. To this group blanket closure of the major land borders is a mere dissipation of energy and resources rather effort should be targeted at more diligence and sophistication in border security, particularly the porous and spongy sections of borders. There is also a group that is ambivalent without any emphatic response probably due to who they are and what they represent. Majority of the key informants assert that smuggling and insecurity which are some of the problems the border closure seek to address are still going on unabated as customs and other security agents still regularly encounter them.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the border closure, irrespective of the rationale and the potential as well as actual advantages and disadvantages was an intricate, multifaceted and complex decision. For instance, a unilateral closure of international border for as long as one year against well-known and documented international protocols such as ECOWAS, GATT (General Agreement for Trade and Tariff) among others, could trigger diplomatic row which if not well managed could further dent or tarnish the image of the nation both within and outside the sub-region. This could also spell doom for import and export dependent business particularly the small and medium enterprises, SMEs in Nigeria and the sub-region as a whole and a big disincentive to both national and regional economies.

However, a nation may be doing herself a great disservice if it watches apparently helplessly while individuals, groups and even nations take undue advantage of international protocols to sabotage her economy and security through smuggling and other nefarious cross border activities. If smuggling and other despicable and reprehensible cross-border activities continues unchecked, this could also spell doom for home-based business particularly the SMEs and a big threat to national security.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends as follows;

- i. A multilateral dialogue at least at the sub-regional, regional or even multinational level for all affected parties to present and iron out their cases rather than resort to self-help that could breach international protocol or undermine national sovereignty.
- ii. Individual nations or organisations can reach out to Nigeria or vice versa for dialogue and not resort to unilateral action in revenge or vengeful action on one another as this can only lead to escalation that could further compound the issues surrounding the border closure.
- iii. Affected nations within and outside the sub-region should consider exploring diplomatic option in managing the ensuring stalemate.
- iv. Nigeria should channel their effort and resources into more diligent and sophisticated border security particularly the porous and spongy sections of her borders.

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