Borderlands Policy and National Security in Nigeria: An Exploratory Study of the 2019 Border Closure

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ABSTRACT: Borderlands closure policy ordinarily should be a recipe for national security but this appears not to be the case with the 2019 border closure policy which was rather driven by economic objectives. This paper argued that the 2019 policy on borderlands closure had no significant positive impact on national security in Nigeria. The human needs theory was used in this paper to explain why the issues of insecurity, smuggling, and cross border crimes continued unabated in Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the border areas and fifty (50) participants who were interviewed. Essentially, both primary and secondary data were used in this study and analysis was done using descriptive and content analytical models. The paper found that the policy on land border closure has neither improved national security nor reduced the rate of smuggling and cross border crimes across the Nigerian land borderlines. The study concluded that the policy on land border closure in Nigeria failed to achieve national security but rather exacerbated cross border crimes and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper recommended among others that the Nigerian government through the National Assembly should create an agency to be known as National Border Management and Surveillance Service. Recruited members of this agency should be trained specifically in border surveillance programmes and deployed to the porous Nigerian border areas. The agency alongside other security agencies should be adequately funded and motivated to guarantee proper and effective coordination in Nigeria's border management sector.

KEYWORD: Policy, Land, Border, Closure, Borderland, National Security.

I. Introduction

A policy depicts a conscious choice or action made by a country or an organised body which is aimed at achieving targeted goals and/or solving a particular problem. It is therefore a conscious plan of action and the action itself, initiated to solve a specific social problem (Nwafor-Orizu *et al*., 2018). Similarly, it is a plan or course of action by a government, political party or business designed to influence and determine decisions,

actions and other matters (Lennon, 2009). The conscious choice of any country aimed at preserving, and displaying her national interest could simply be regarded as national policy. The Federal Government of Nigeria had closed her borderlands severally in the past for the purpose of promoting local production and curtailing the smuggling of goods into the country from neighbouring countries. The borderlands of Nigeria were closed to curtail issues of human trafficking, smuggling of drugs, agricultural produce, prostitution, child labour, and insurgency in 1985 by the military regime of Major General Muhammadu Buhari. Again in 2003, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, ordered the partial closure of the borders due to an alarming increase in crime rate along the Nigerian borders. Notably, the policy on borderlands closure was adopted to improve national development and economic growth. Nevertheless, it failed to curtail the rate of smuggling thereby increasing the rate of imported goods into the Nigeria's markets (Afinotan, 2016).

The policy on borderlands closure is a protectionist policy aimed at protecting territorial integrity of a country, the citizens, and the general wellbeing of the country. Barely 14 days after his inauguration for a second term particularly on June 12, 2019, Ahmed (2020) wrote that President Muhammadu Buhari in his speech submitted that, "in order to curb security challenges through the nation's external borders, most especially smuggling of oil products out of the country, flooding of imported rice, small arms, weapons and drugs into the country, and similarly protect the nation's local manufacturers, there was dire need to close down all Nigerian land borders (p. 789)." Consequently, the policy from August 20th, 2019 became effective was manifest when the Nigerian government closed all border lands with her neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad, Benin Republic, and Niger Republic. This conscious action was an attempt to curb smuggling activities, security breaches, trafficking, incidence of illegal cross-border activities, undocumented migration, among others. Notably, the borderlands closure policy is a method of addressing the country's local production gap and curtailing the high rate of smuggling of goods. The preoccupation of this paper is therefore centred on the impact of 2019 borderlands closure policy on national security in Nigeria

Research Questions

i. How has the 2019 policy on borderlands closure contributed to the curbing of smuggling activities across the Nigerian land borders?

ii. How has the 2019 policy of borderlands closure impacted on Nigeria's national security?

Objectives of the Study

The main thrust of this study is to investigate how the 2019 policy on borderlands closure has impacted on national security in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

i. ascertain how the 2019 policy on borderlands closure contributed to the curbing of smuggling activities across the Nigerian land borders.

ii. determine the impact of the 2019 policy of borderlands closure on Nigeria's national security.

II. Conceptual Literature Review

Concept of Borderlands

A border explains the understanding of both local and international legal and political systems (Vaughan-Williams, 2009). The concept of a border has increasingly become complex human responses and social constructions of the global political system (Jean-Guy & Ajumbo, 2012). Contemporarily, borders are explained to mean the international boundaries between nation states. Ramuntsindela (2014) posited that "borders can be natural in form of; sea, mountains, rivers, among others but they are in any case always artificial, or objects of consensus and agreements, conquests and peace treaties (p. 67)." Similarly, Zartman (2010) argued that "borders run across land but not through people (p. 59)." On maps, borders appear as one-

dimensional lines while on the ground they have several dimensions. Borders are international lines of a political boundary. They are naturally or artificially constructed geographic lines that demarcate States or countries. Diener and Hagen (2012) averred that "borders are usually central element in contemporary international disputes relating to security, migration, trade, and natural resources, and they also factor prominently into local debates over land use and property rights (p. 201)." O'Dowd (2003) defined borders to be "places of economic and political opportunities for nations as well as for a host of other interest groups, agencies, either legal or illegal (p. 15)." Ullah and Kumpoh (2018) explained border as "one of the key determinants of geopolitics in Southeast Asia. Border is therefore an integral part of trade relations, security and migration flows. They concluded that the type of border determines the level of relationship between neighbouring countries and security challenge, trade, and population mobility (p. 20)." As such, a country can adopt a border policy for political, economic and security reasons, depending on the prevailing circumstances.

A border is viewed in terms of invisible margins and legitimate jurisdiction of political units such as sovereign states, federal state, it also seen as the main line which demarcates a country to another (Musalli *et al*., 2015). Therefore, border simply define geographical governments and sub national entities. However, they are equally regarded as a solid picture of people's cultural value systems and their identification as statehood. Paradoxically, borders stand as the line that links and separates one country to another at the same time, and it could be a source of benefit as well as of detriment to the contending states depending on the degree of their security (Akinyemi, 2013). As such countries find it mandatory to apply essential measures in order to protect their border entry points. These measures constitute management of border areas. Border management can be viewed as the most important aspect of a nation's security, involving the protection of the population in a given territorial entity against threats such as international terrorism, robbery, proliferation of light arms, and human and drug trafficking (Nwankwo *et al*., 2022).

The term "borderland" was introduced by noted geographer Stephen B. Jones, who examined the US-Canada border in the 1930s. The notion was then developed further, for instance in work on the US-Mexican border. It refers the areas in closest proximity to borders. Boundaries impact on the spatial and cultural development of heir borderlands. Socio-spatial transition between core areas is reflected in the emergence of trans-boundary regions through a process of hybridization. As such, trans-boundary regions are contact zones (Iossifova, 2018). Borderlands are boundaries in depth, space around a line, the place where state meets a society, and where no one ever feels at home (Simon, 2007). Borderlands are therefore the representation of territorial demarcations which appear physically in the form of man-made border fences, and walls or by natural characteristics such as oceans and mountains ranges.

Concept of National Security

Security denotes the condition of being safe. It connotes a guaranteed protection or assurance against danger, harm, or threat of it on lives, property, resources, and other materials of value to human existence. Security brings about peace and development without which there is no security (Tsuwa & Okoh, 2016). The importance of security to a nation according to Nwolise (2006) cannot be underestimated for reasons which include: "without security, all things are meaningless; it ensures the preservation of life, liberties, and existence; it is a prerequisite for any meaningful development, sustainable order, peace, and social harmony; it is critical for attracting external investment and encouraging internal investors; it promotes national productivity, national growth, and development as well as national greatness; and ensures the smooth running of strategic installations such as electricity, military, aviation, and shipping (p. 363)." In this light, Section 14 (2) b, 1999 Constitution, Federal Republic of Nigeria, categorizes the security, and welfare of the people as the primary purpose of government.

National security is therefore the safekeeping of a country, the preservation of its sovereignty, protection and the safety of life and properties of the citizenry. Isa (2007) posited that, "national security is construed in terms of the sum total of a country's effort to promote, preserve and maintain itself, its core values, contain instability, enhance development, thereby boosting the welfare, well-being and quality of life of the citizens by enhancing consumption patterns (p. 20)." Nwankwo *et al.*, (2022) described national security as "the absence of threats to core values, the prevention of public disorder, the preservation, protection, and guarantee of the safety of lives, properties, and wealth of the people, the protection of the nation's integrity, and the protection of the nation's territorial, aerial, and coastal boundaries against external aggression (p. 17)." In sum, national security refers to the conscious efforts and deliberate measures of a sovereign nation to identify and prevent or avert perceived, potential or actual threats to the nation, and ensure the protection of her citizens and the territorial boundaries.

Concept of Policy

A policy is a conscious plan of action and the action itself, initiated to solve a specific social problem (Nwafor-Orizu, *et al.*, 2018). It is a plan or course of action by a government, political party or business designed to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters (Lennon, 2009). Policy may apply to government, public sector organisations and groups, as well as individuals, it may come in the form of presidential executive orders, parliamentary rules of order, and corporate privacy policies. Policies are different from rules or laws. Thus, while the law can compel or prohibit behaviours (example: a law requiring the payment of taxes on income), policy merely guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve the desired outcome (Voican, 2008). Policies are the ways by which annual objectives will be achieved. They include guidelines, rules, and procedures established to support efforts to achieve stated objectives. Policies are guides to decision making and address repetitive or recurring situations. They are most often stated in terms of management, marketing, finance/accounting, production/operations, research and development, and computer information systems' activities (Jili'ow, 2017). Policies can be established at the corporate level and apply to an entire organisation at the divisional level and apply to a single division or at the functional level and apply to a particular operational activities or departments (David, 2011).

Saidi cited in Jili'ow (2017) posited that policy is normally described as a theory or rule to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. The word is not generally used to denote what is actually done; this is normally referred to as either procedure or protocol. Policy or policy study may also refer to the process of making important organisational decisions, including the identification of different alternatives such as programs or spending priorities, and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. Policy is explained to mean the value or perspective that underlies action. For instance, board policies express the board's soul, philosophy, beliefs, commitments, values, visions, and express its wisdom. Policies pass through different processes or stages before they are formulated. This is known as policy process. The concept of policy process brings the idea that public policies are shaped at all stages by different types of actors and institutions, actors can establish relationships (whether formalized networks or not) according to their beliefs/interests in the defense of an idea, their actions being affected by the context in which they operate and influenced by external events. Hence, analyzing the policy process means understanding how several factors interact and influence the trajectory of public policies throughout their phases or stages. This was why Weible and Carter (2017) argued that studying the policy process means analyzing interactions that occur over time between public policies and actors, events, contexts, and outcomes (p. 27)." From the foregoing explanations, it can be deduced that policy is a blueprint or deliberate system of guidelines which guides the decisions of government so as to achieve a goal or a set of goals which are of national interest.

III. Theoretical Framework

The human needs theory as popularised in the works of Abraham Maslow and John Burton was used in this paper to explain why the issues of insecurity, smuggling, and cross border crimes. The major assumption of this theory is that the inability of man to meet his basic needs compels him to varied means both legal and illegal to attain survival. Hence, man's are actions are influenced by his basic needs and then they are unmet, there is bound to be unlawful behavior (Coate & Rosati, 1988). Impliedly, at the point where man has no alternative means to meet his needs (needed for survival), he is bound to result into illegality in various forms. This is manifest in the numerous unregulated border entry points into Nigeria which are used for unlawful movement of persons (human trafficking) and for smuggling purposes, so as to meet man's needs.

Unfortunately, arms and weapons are equally smuggled into Nigeria through the unregulated borderlands. The human needs theory relevantly provided the basis for the understanding of the issues that led to the creation and use of porous/unregulated border routes into Nigeria. Thus, it explained why there are increased smuggling activities and insecurity challenges in across Nigeria borderlands which the theory attributed to the quest for the actualisation of basic human needs.

IV. Methodology

The descriptive design was used in this study because it availed an opportunity to interview the participants on the issues of 2019 policy of borderlands closure and national security in Nigeria. The population of study was drawn from the entire population of people within the border areas of Nigeria and the security agencies. There are about twenty-two million and six hundred forty-two thousand (22, 642, 000) people occupying the border areas of Nigeria. There are equally about thirty-six (36) official (regulated) land borders as point of entry to Nigeria. (Nigeria Population Census Projection, 2020). The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the border areas and fifty (50) participants who were interviewed. Essentially, both primary (key informant interviews) and secondary data (documented materials) were used in this study. The key informant interviews (KIIs) were used to generate data from security agents, traders, and residents within the border areas, while the secondary data were extracted from journal articles, seminar papers, newspapers, official documents and reports, textbooks, among others. The data analysis was done using content analytical model.

V. Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1: Bio Data of Interviewees

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	34 (85)
	Female	16 (15)
Designation	Security Agent	14 (35)
	Border Resident	18 (45)
	Trader	18 (45)
Age Bracket	16-25 Years	10 (20)
	26-35 Years	13 (26)
	36-45 Years	15 (30)
	46 years & above	12 (24)
Marital Status	Single	27 (67.5)
	Married	19 (47.5)
	Divorced/Separated	Nil (0)
	Widowed	4 (10)
Qualification	FSLC	6 (15)

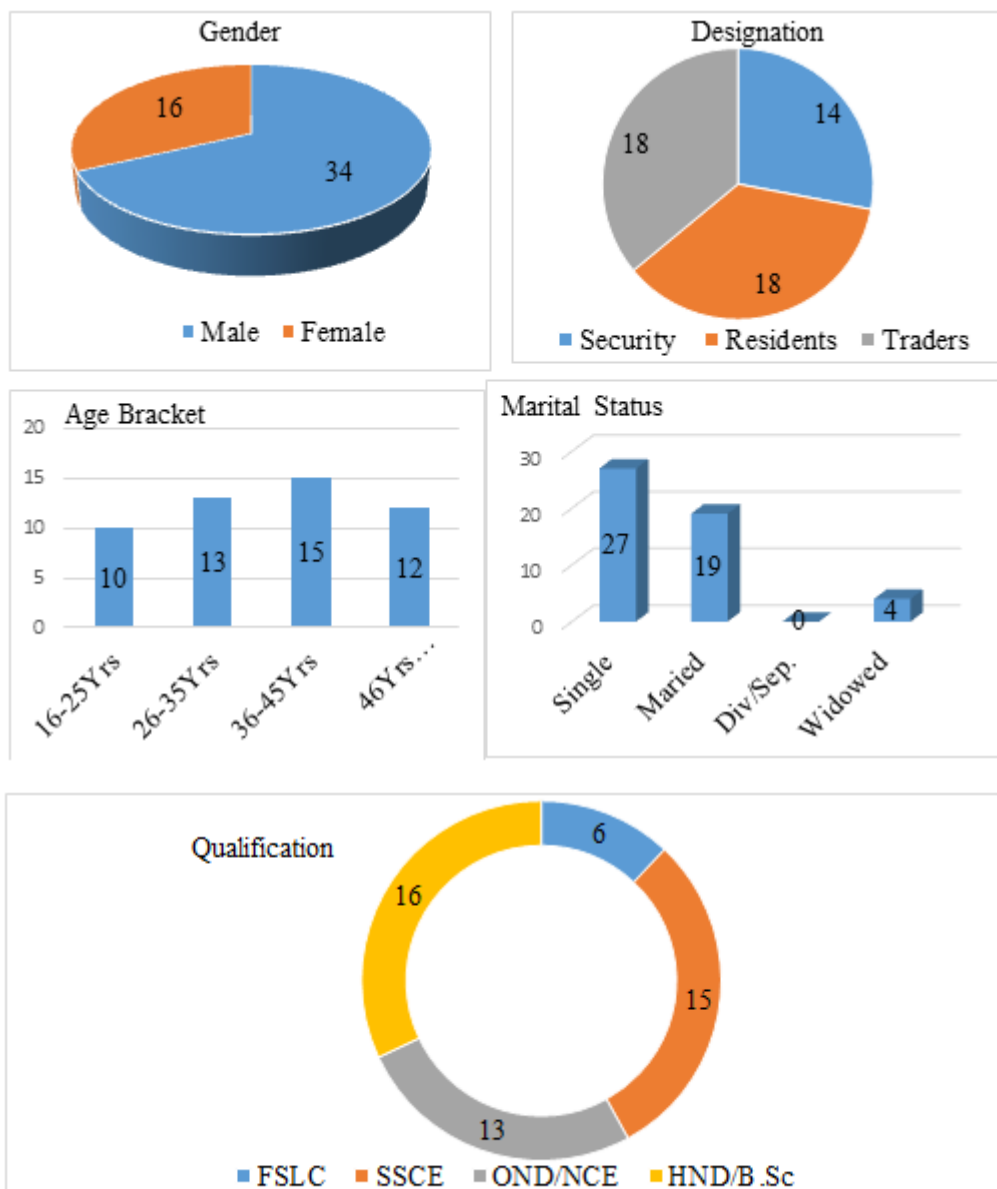|	SSCE	15 (37.5)
	OND/NCE	13 (32.5)
	HND/B.Sc	16 (15)

Authors' Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 and charts above showed the bio data of interviewees. Based on gender, the male were 34(85%) while the females were 16(15%). Based on the interviewees' designation, 14(35%) of them were security agents, 18(45%) of the interviewees were border residents, while 18(45%) were traders. Based on the age brackets, the participants between 16-25 years represented 10(20%); those within the age bracket of 26-35 years were 13(26%); those between 36-45 years represented 15(30%), while those within the age bracket of 46 years and above were 12(24%) of the interviewees. Based on marital status, interviewees who are single were 27(67.5%) of the total interviewees; those who are married were 19 representing 47.5%; there are no interviewees who divorced, while interviewees who are widowed were 4(10%) of the total interviewees.

Based on educational qualification, the interviewees with FSLC were 6(15%) interviewees; the interviewees with SSCE were 15(37.5%) interviewees; those interviewees with OND/NCE were 13(32.5%) interviewees; while those interviewees with HND/B.Sc were 16(15%) interviewees.

Interview Question 1: Are you aware of President Buhari's borderlands closure policy?

All the interviewees acknowledged that they are aware of the Buhari's policy on land border closure which became in August, 2019. One of the interviewees at Ilela border area with the name Alhaji Ibrahim explained that many people got news concerning the policy but that it was impromptu to them. Also, a lot of the traders that deal on auto mobile spare parts within the Mfun border area and across Cameroon expressed their disappointment over the borderlands closure policy. The likes of Mr. Bassey, Mr. Uche, Sir. Ukpabi, Mr. Edidiong, among others lamented that the policy halted their businesses and affected their sales return.

Interview Question 2: Do you agree that smuggling of goods and insecurity issues were some of the reasons given for the borderlands closure?

Majority the interviewees responded in agreement that the issues of smuggling and insecurity situation in Nigeria were the major reasons for the borderlands closure policy. For instance, Sgt. Musa, Officer Jimoh, Abdullahi Umar, Hajia Fatima, Officer Udosoro, Officer Gwer, Officer Igah, were among the interviewees at the Ilela border area and they were of the opinion that the Federal Government of Nigeria had closed the borders then to help the security agents in curtail border security issues and smuggling of contraband goods, firearms and other dangerous weapons into the country. They further stated that drugs/Canabis were some of the prohibited goods smuggled into Nigeria through Ilela and Gamboru-Ngala border areas of Sokoto Nigeria-Niger area and Borno, Nigeria-Niger area respectively. Other interviewees accounted that other commodities such as petroleum products, cement, grains, millets, woods and furniture, groundnut oil, beans, yam, sugar, maize, automobile spare parts, and used clothes popularly known as okirika, are smuggled into Nigeria through the border areas of Idiroko, Ilela, Jibia, Mfum, Seme, Bele Sahoda, Gamboru-Ngala, and Coastal areas. The interviewees lamented that the increased insecurity in Nigeria is promoted by the porous nature of the country's borderlands whereby movements across the borders are largely unchecked. Table 2 below shows the regulated and unregulated borderlands of Nigeria.

Table 2: Regulated and Unregulated Borderlands of Nigeria

S/N	Bordering Countries	Regions	States	Regulated	Unregulated
1	Republic of Benin	South-West/North Central	Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Benue, and Kwara States	12	25
2	Chad and Niger	North-East/ North-West	Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe and Borno States	18	49
3	Cameroon	North-East/ South-South	Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Taraba, Adamawa and Borno States	6	29
	Total			**36**	103

Source: Nigeria Population Census Projection, 2021

From the table and in order of magnitude, North-East/North-West have 18 regulated and 49 unregulated borderlands followed by South-West/North-Central which have 12 regulated and 25 unregulated borderland areas. And North-East/South-South have 6 regulated and 29 unregulated borderland areas of Nigeria. This is

an evidence that Nigeria has more porous/unregulated borderlands than the regulated borderlands. Unfortunately as lamented by most of the interviewees, the closure of the regulated borderland areas in 2019 led to increased smuggling activities through the porous/unregulated borderlands. Impliedly, the policy rather exacerbated smuggling and insecurity issues in terms of infiltration of terrorists/rebels, rise in criminal gangs' activities, smuggling of firearms and weapons. Consequently, the borderlands closure policy posed adverse impacts on national security in Nigeria through increased smuggling activities.

Interview Question 3: Do you think the policy helped to reduce the rate of smuggling, cross border crimes, and insecurity issues?

Border policy usually should contribute immensely in the reduction of border crimes and security challenges, the reverse is the case of the 2019 policy on borderlands closure which had little or no impact on security management in Nigeria. As Mr. Shehu (a 42 year old in Gamboru-Ngala community in Borno, Nigeria sharing border with Niger) puts it:

The policy on land border closure has not reduced border crimes and insecurity rate in the areas let alone the whole of Nigeria. The policy has even caused more harm than good. In fact, the hardship it brought the people even made those who are not bad people to start involving themselves in bad things. Most of them are involving in illegal businesses just to survive. So the policy even helped to increase insecurity in Nigeria.

Similarly, Mr. Kashim (a 58 year old resident in Jibia border area) alleged that:

even the security operatives in the border areas are even the one encouraging border crimes and promoting insecurity in the country. These officers collect bribes from smugglers of banned commodities. They do not check to even know if those commodities were used to hide weapons or even bomb. These are the people who supposed to be protecting the borders. They are now the ones helping the criminals.

In their response, both Mrs. Nkoyo and Mr. Ofombok residents of Mfun border area lamented that porousness of the unregulated borders and illegal routes in Nigeria has contributed to insecurity challenge in the country. The duo argued that the policy on border closure is ineffective in the management of security. Their position agrees with Gros (2011) who averred that the situation of Nigeria's porous borders, which serve as conduits for illicit transnational traffic of small arms and light weapons and drugs, is further exacerbated by the limited presence of security and law enforcement officials. If they are present, they are poorly equipped, poorly paid, poorly trained and sometimes compromised or recruited to do the bid of the insurgents.

Relatedly, Babatola (2015) posited that, "records available to the Nigeria Immigration Service indicated there are over 1,400 illegal routes into Nigeria; 1,316 more than the approved number of border control posts (p. 8)." The 84 approved border controls cover 4,047km, the total length of Nigeria's land border. Ogun and Adamawa states, for example, have 83 and 80 illegal posts respectively (Parradang, 2014). Thus, Osimen, et al (2017) argued that, "in those major borders, there are over hundreds of illegal routes in Nigeria that link or lead to some neighboring African countries. Nigeria's borders are massive with hundreds of footpaths crisscrossing to neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger with links to Mali, Libya and Sudan. From conservative estimate by locals, there are well over 250 footpaths from Damaturu/Maiduguri axis that link or lead direct to Cameroon, Chad or Niger. These paths are mostly unknown by security agencies, are unmanned, unprotected and thus serve as leaky routes for arms and ammunitions trafficking in to Nigeria (p. 21)." By implication, while the officially regulated border routes serve for the importation of goods and services, the unofficial/unregulated routes are mainly used for illicit and criminal activities. Hence, the 2019 policy of borderlands closure had no significant impact on improving national security in Nigeria.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Efforts were made in this paper to explanatorily examine the issues of borderlands policy and national security in Nigeria with focus on the 2019 border closure policy. The paper found that the policy on land border closure has neither improved national security nor reduced the rate of smuggling and cross border crimes across the Nigerian land borderlines. The study concluded that the policy on land border closure in Nigeria failed to achieve national security but rather exacerbated cross border crimes and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper made the following recommendations:

1. The Nigerian government through the National Assembly should create an agency to be known as National Border Management and Surveillance Service. Recruited members of this agency should be trained specifically in border surveillance programmes and deployed to the porous Nigerian border areas.

2. The above proposed agency alongside other security agencies should be adequately funded and motivated. This would guarantee proper and effective coordination in Nigeria's border management sector.

The Nigerian government should rather formulate policies on advance modern technologies for the security of Nigerian borderlands as this would in turn contribute positively to national security.

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