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ASSESSMENT OF THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES CONFRONTING RELATIONS BETWEEN REPUBLIC OF NIGER – NIGERIA

Mohammed Bala Adamu	Division of General Studies, University of Maiduguri
Abdulrasheed Adamu PhD	Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science Sa, Adu Zungur University Bauchi, Bauchi State
Yusuf Musa Yahaya PhD	Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science Sa, Adu Zungur University Bauchi, Bauchi State
Umar Faruq Musa PhD	Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science Sa, Adu Zungur University Bauchi, Bauchi State

Abstract

This study examined the bilateral economic relations between Nigeria and Niger Republic 2015- 2020, the level of regional integration between the countries Nigeria and Niger; examines the challenges confronting these engagements. This study employed a qualitative method. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the key informants such as officials from the Ministry of External Affairs, Economic Community of West African States, and office in Abuja, Niger Embassy office in Kano and Abuja and Ministry of Information. The data collected from the field was analysed based on thematic content analysis according to the research questions. The study finding revealed that the economic trade relations between Nigeria and Niger involved energy, agricultural, education, and transportation. The trade contributed toward economic integration between Nigeria and Niger. The study revealed that Nigeria and Niger are intimate because of the historic economic ties existing between the two countries which include the socio-economic interaction between Katsina and Maradi. The study reveals that the challenges confronting Nigeria and Niger's economic relation include trade between Nigeria and Niger that led to the destruction of local industries due to the high rate of smuggling. Several clashes also occurred between the smugglers and their cohorts. The study recommended that Nigeria and Niger should intensify the joint border patrols to tackle smuggling and insurgency affecting the two countries and equally strengthening the activities of international organizations such as ECOWAS and NEPAD should continue involve in creating regional integration between Nigeria, Niger and other neighboring countries.

Keywords: Economic, ECOWAS, Challenges, Niger, Nigeria

Introduction

Different nations have disparate of demographics history and knowledge gained from each other. The cultural diversity between countries has its consequence on trade in a complex way. Furthermore, trade among nations has its special effects on culture (Abiodun 2020). Correspondingly, there is a high possibility that nations with common cultural attributes to the trade more.

Although trade is built on comparative advantage, subsequently with diverse cultures, higher trading may be possible. The benefits from trade could differ from country to country based on its national welfare, and economic, political, regional and strategic state of affairs, (Akindele, 2016).

Promoting trans-border cooperation for the economic and social progress of borderland dwellers has always been at the forefront of the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) primarily aimed at unity and integrating Africa through borders thereby building bridges of peace, development and security. The Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative does not only enhance good neighbourliness, through the provision of infrastructure among other things but also serves as a mechanism for peaceful and negotiated settlement of border conflicts through bilateral relations such as the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation (NNJCC) which was formed in line with the Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative as exemplified in the integration module. It also proffers viable options for the transformation of border areas into zones of exchange and cooperation for peaceful co-existence and transnational development. (Mohammed 2022).

Consequently, the Economic trade between Nigeria and the Republic of Niger goes back centuries and concentrates mainly on agricultural goods, petroleum, textile and manufactured products. The intensive trading between both Countries focuses on livestock from Niger and manufactured products from Nigeria. Cereals remain a stable food product in West Africa, especially in Niger and the Sahel region where it represents between 60 to 90% of the food intake (Ibrahim, 2015).

Nigeria is the largest producer of cereal in the West African region, accounting for about 59% of the total annual output while the Republic of Niger has the highest cereal consumption per number of inhabitants in West Africa. In terms of livestock trade. The reverse is the case with Niger supplying most of Nigeria's livestock imports Republic of Niger (Asiwaju, 2019). The Republic of Niger has a huge advantage because of its huge land mass for feeding, quantity of livestock produced and cheap transportation costs into Nigeria. In addition, Livestock earnings account for 10% of GDP and 20% of export revenue making it an essential part of Niger's economy. However, there are still some challenges for Niger because of fluctuations in Naira/CFA, and strong competition from the

neighbouring countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad (Ibrahim, 2015).

The main obstacle to effective trade within most regional economic commissions is political will, as most countries resist liberalization and are more motivated by protectionist policies to protect trade. However, Nigeria and the Republic of Niger have some differences which further impact trade relations. In the nineteenth century, under Anglophone-Francophone colonial rule, demarcations were made on the Nigerian-Niger Border separating people who historically had a shared language and socio-cultural ties. The border that emerged in 1906 divided the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri ethnic groups between the two countries. This led to the institution of the English and French languages on both sides of the Border creating educational, political, and cultural realignments and further splitting connections between communities. Rival French and English interests meant that during much of the colonial period, trade and other social interactions were discouraged. Nigeria and the Republic of Niger have always had strong historical and social ties. The towns and cities between Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger have shared languages and customs, Hausa being the prevalent language spoken in the area. Furthermore, they share 1,500km of the common border and are often related by family, religious and lineage links (Aker et. al., 2019).

These shared values have inevitably led to the trans-Saharan trade which has lasted right from medieval times. Furthermore, Nigerian States such as Kano and Katsina have acted as a southern terminus of trade networks which sustain much of the Niger Republic's economy. Nigeria benefits from the trade and agricultural sales particularly Nigerien cattle taken to Nigerian markets, while Niger's most direct routes to overseas trade are through Nigeria's land transport systems and Nigeria's southern Sea Ports.

Similarly, to cement bilateral relations, the two countries established the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation (NNJCC) in 1971 to further economic integration and cement trade relations. The NNJCC has through various initiatives sought to establish economic integration. Despite common Hausa language and

cultural ties, the two colonial powers discouraged formal trade which led to informal trade. Trade between Niger and Nigeria is favoured by Niger's geographical situation Niger, a land-locked country dependent on neighbouring countries for food supplies, shares a long border with Nigeria, as well as complementary agro-pastoral activities and socio-cultural factors. The Hausa people on both sides of the border live in interdependent closeness by their shared culture, language, social and religious values. It is against this background that the study intends to assess the bilateral economic relations between Nigeria and Niger Republic 2015-2020.

Fiscal policy, monetary policy and trade policy in Nigeria and Niger are characterized by profligacy, and a poor financial framework, which is strengthened by poor management of huge oil revenue that poses a threat to macroeconomic stability (Popoola, 2016). Relatedly, policymakers in Nigeria have implemented a series of trade policies through various objectives, for example, the export promotion strategy in 1981; exchange rate liberalization and trade liberalization in 1986; the creation of Nigerian Export-Import in 1991; and several trade bilateral and multilateral agreements with different countries among others. The main objectives of these trade policies are: to achieve Nigeria's macroeconomic stability and to improve trade nemxus with the global community via hitch-free inflow and outflow of both liquidity and non-liquidity transactions across the borders, while these activities are expected to increase international competitiveness which in the long run could bring about an improvement in national economic growth.

However, in the time past, Nigerian and Niger economic growth has not significantly tapped from those expected gains from trade policies which could have been traced to the mono-economic nature where the government mostly relied on oil revenue.

Regrettably, among the problems facing Nigeria bilateral economic relations policies with other countries is Policy inconsistency Policy is change best on the National interest, Policy inconsistency is one area that needs very serious intellectual investigation. New government come

in with new policies and the old government fades with her old policies.

However, this study sought to assess bilateral relations between Nigeria and Niger on the road transport infrastructure, security, currency differences and specific tax rate on goods and services between both Countries are very crucial in facilitating bilateral economic relations, this is the literature gap this research intends to fill.

Scope of the study

There are many aspects of relations that exist between Nigeria and Niger i.e. economic, cultural political relations. This study only covered the economic aspects of the relations between Nigeria and Niger. This is perhaps because of the importance and benefits that could be derived from this relation to both Nigeria and Niger because the economic relation is the major relation relationship between Nigeria and Niger.

This study also covered the period of 2015 – 2020 as the limitation of the study. The scope of this research study will focus on an assessment of bilateral economic relations between Niger and Nigeria from 2015 to 2020. This study covers the economic relationship that exists between Niger and Nigeria in terms of trade relations, capacity building, policy reform, and investment in priority sectors such as agriculture, human development, infrastructure, diversification, and increased promotion of manufactured exports between them. The justification of this study is to improve the economic relations that have been in existence for many years, moreover choosing the period of (2015- 2020), is a political transaction from a civilian government to another civilian government from both countries.

Concept of international Economic Relations

International economic relations constitute political relations as international relations become political, once they involve the interaction of different groups in goal-seeking pursuits. The core of international economic relations may be seen as the management of conflict and cooperation in the absence of government. Just like international political interaction, economic interaction

ranges from pure conflict to pure cooperation. Since wealth constitutes a vital objective of groups in international politics, the pursuit of wealth in its scarcity leads to conflict, and such conflicts are often linked to the struggle over power and sovereignty. States have therefore established rules, institutions, and procedures to manage international conflict and cooperation (Keohane and Nye, 2017).

Spero (2015) made a study of three basic systems - the Western interdependence system, the North-South dependence system, and the East-West independence system, to understand the nature of international economic conflict and cooperation and their management. He concluded that as governments seek increased control of their economies, such governments discover that their national economies are increasingly open to external influence.

He posited that the U.S. has been able to control the effect of interdependence more than other states because of its economic power. Whereas, although some 3rd world nations are relatively improving, the absolute differences in income remain, and the gap between the North and South is widening. While interdependence is a relatively symmetrical relationship, dependence is an asymmetrical relationship. Thus, a dependent nation is very sensitive to both political and market factors in the North that shape Northern demands and influence them.

Trade dependence is characterized by the Southern economy's dependence on trade with the North and the high levels of sensitivity to those factors that influence such trade (Cohen, 2013). The impact of this dependence is seen as the perpetuation of dependency and underdevelopment. The agitations of the 3rd world nations have been to share in the management of the system and to benefit from the system. The attempt to change the system of dependence led to the clarion call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974.

In the management of international economic relations since WWII, Spero (2015) highlighted the political bases for the effectiveness of the Bretton Woods system- "the concentration of power in a small number of states, the

existence of a cluster of important interests shared by those states, and the presence of a dominant power willing and able to assume a leadership role.

The concentration of both political and economic power by the members of the Bretton Woods system (North America and Western Europe) enabled them to formulate and enforce decisions for the system, particularly as there was no opposition from the 3rd world nations as a result of their political and economic weakness and the fact that the 3rd world nations had no voice in the management of the system. Though these powerful states disagreed on the specific enforcement of the liberal system, all agreed that an open system would maximize economic welfare, and enhance the possibilities of international peace (Calleo & Rowland, 2013).

Within the post-war era, the public management of the economy became a primary activity of the Government in the Developed States. Therefore, the role of Government in the national economy was associated with the state's assumption of responsibility to care for the welfare of its citizens.

The government thus became the custodian of vital domestic economic sectors. To have political peace and economic stability, states agreed to cooperate to regulate the international economic system. To avoid a situation where the Western economy would be vulnerable to internal communist threats and external pressure from the USSR, economic cooperation was encouraged as a way of rebuilding the Western economies, ensuring their vitality, and providing for their political and military security. After WW II, American policymakers concluded that the US would have to assume the primary responsibility for creating an international political and economic order.

The political implication of the US leadership was viewed as positive as the Europeans and Japanese who had been economically exhausted by the war, needed this assistance to rebuild their domestic economies and to finance their international trade. The concentration of power, the cluster of shared interests, and the leadership

of the US provided the political capability equal to the tasks of managing the international economy.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); otherwise termed the World Bank, were to carry out the functions of the central bank in the international system. The rules of the Bretton Woods system provided for fixed exchange rates with parity of all currencies in terms of gold, and free trade, and any change in exchange rates must seek the approval of IMF. The IBRD or World Bank was expected to make loans and issue securities to raise new funds to facilitate the speedy post-war recovery (Mason and Asher, 2013). By 1947, the US discovered that the Bretton Woods system was not working and that the Western system was on the verge of collapse, as Western Europe was faced with vast import needs, not only for reconstruction but also for survival. Within the same period, the IMF and the IBRD also admitted that they could not manage the system's economic problems (pp. 105-107, 124-135). The Soviet leaders were waiting for the economic collapse of Western Europe, which they felt would be to their political advantage. The Soviet Union also refused to cooperate with the Allies on a post-war settlement for Germany. However, the Europeans and Japanese who had been economically exhausted by the war, needed American assistance to rebuild their domestic production, finance international trade, and provide for political stability. At this point, unilateral American management was made possible by the strength of its economy, the lessons of the interwar period, and its security incentives.

The US therefore abandoned the Bretton Woods objectives of convertibility and encouraged European and Japanese trade protection and discrimination against the dollar. For example, the US absorbed large volumes of Japanese exports while accepting Japanese restrictions against American exports. Thus, the US began to manage the international monetary system by providing liquidity and necessary adjustments. By the end of the 1950s, vast sums were needed beyond the US capability to support the Pound in times of crisis. The dollar crisis was aggravated by the return to the

convertibility of European currencies at the end of 1958, as it made possible huge speculative international capital flows that could be directed against the pound or the dollar. A run on the pound tended to spill over into a run on the dollar.

Consequently, there was a common perception of the need for cooperation to support the system. As the US could not at longer unilaterally manage the system, there was a need to couple it to join in a collective management, to seek the cooperation of others, and to make concessions. This led to the multilateral management of the monetary system performed by the elite from the major states. Also a group of ten industrial nations comprising of Germany, France, UK, Sweden, Belgium Canada, Italy, Japan, Netherlands and the US, met in Paris and established the general arrangements to borrow funds from outside the IMF jurisdiction and under the control of the new group.

The group later assumed the roles of monetary management and became a forum for deliberation and exchange of information and an avenue for negotiation of monetary reforms. This group in its bid to manage the dollar crisis in 1968 established two markets for gold; the private market where the price of gold could fluctuate freely, and the public market where the group were to sell gold at \$35 an ounce to one another. This understanding greatly reduced the crisis and pressure on the American gold supply. Unlike the Bretton Woods system that had no international liquidity control, the dollar system relied on the U.S. to function as the world's central banker. In the late 1960's, the group of ten reached agreement to establish the special drawing rights (SDRS); an International reserve created by a joint decision of the IMF, to be regulated not just by the U.S. alone, but the joint control of the group of ten.

The SDRS were used to settle accounts among the central banks. This was the climax of multilateral cooperation not only in containing crisis and supporting the system, but in the ability to move toward a systemic reform. However, between the late 1950s to the 1970s, there were a lot of structural changes that led to the collapse of the management system. In particular, the development of a high level of monetary

interdependence laid the foundation for the return to convertibility of the western European currencies and the Japanese Yen.

This contributed to the large expansion of international financial transaction, which created monetary interdependence, and good management. Spero (2015) argued that interdependence undermines national monetary tools as the low interest rates that were used to stimulate an economy simply led to out flow of capital to countries with higher interest rates. In an interdependent world, American deficit influenced Japan and Europe economy.

Also, as other countries were willing to hold dollars, the U.S. could carry out unlimited foreign expenditure for political reason - foreign aid and military activities without the threat of balance of payments problems. Dissatisfaction with the political implications of the dollar system was increased by detente between the U.S and the USSR. Consequently, the system experienced the abnegation by the U.S of monetary leadership and cooperation leading to benign neglect in managing the system and in monetary reform. August 15, 1971 marked the collapse of the Bretton Woods system as the U.S. led the attempt to introduce a new international monetary management system. Though the Havana Charter collapsed, the desire to create an international trading system survived.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that was drawn in 1947 to provide a procedural base for tariff negotiation was intended to be a temporary treaty to serve until the Havana Charter was implemented. But as the Charter was never ratified, GAIT became the expression of the International agreement on trade. GATT provided for non-discrimination as a rule for implementing free trade, provided an International Commercial Code with rules on such issues as dumping and subsidies and provided a set of rules and procedures for what was to be the principal method of trade management in the post-war period (Cooper, 2018). As a result of this economic convergence combined with interdependence, small changes in factor costs led to large shift in comparative advantage and thus in trade production, and employment.

The combination of interdependence and changes in the structure of national economies made those economies more sensitive to external events and provoked domestic opposition to free trade. With this, and many others, recession and inflation increased the possibility of disruptive national action and management collapse. One of the final drift that paralyzed the management system was the Japanese Policy of Protective Economic Nationalism.

Despite Japan's economic strength, they continued to view the liberal policy as a means of economic domination by the US. By 1968, some groups of states started calling for restrictions on US trade and in 1970, they shifted their support for liberation to active campaign for protectionism (Krasner, 2016).

Multinational Corporation (MNC) and the issue of management the author posited that international investment is quite a new phenomenon and that the corporate giants tend to be oligopolistic and able to dominate markets because of their size, access to financial resources, control of technology, and their possession of a special differentiated product (Wells, 2012).

The centralized and integrated organizational structure reinforces the MNC tendency to make decisions for the firm and the international environment without concern for the host states. Due to the fact that no one country has complete responsibility for overall jurisdiction, it became difficult for states to exert legal control over resident MNCs. The combination of the unique features of the MNCs and their rapid expansion among the developed economies caused some problems within the international management. The MNCs interest conflict with the global efficiency and growth do not necessarily maximize efficiency and individual national economies (Hymer, 2010).

There have been attempts to regulate foreign corporations to maximize economic benefits and to minimize the loss of control by states. The author concluded that despite the MNCs growth and effectiveness, solutions to the host states remain limited by their inability to control the activities of MNCs

outside national boundaries. There is therefore a call for maximizing the positive effects of the MNCs and minimizing their negative effects by the creation of an appropriate framework of countervailing power at the international level through legislation, guidelines, codes, multilateral agreements and through greater cooperation and exchange between states. Consequently, one will advocate for a complex system of bilateral or multilateral negotiation among states that will lead to many agreements on specific areas of conflict resolutions, such as arbitration, adjudication, or consultation procedures that would replace regulations when rules cannot be agreed, as against a unified and centralized order.

Therefore, this study conceptualise international economic relations as the political struggle that involves the interaction with different states or groups in goal seeking pursuits through bilateral or multilateral agreement to achieve national interest.

An overviews of bilateral economic relations between Nigeria – Niger republic, is improving the stability of the trade relations, consequently the economic community of West African state (ECOWAS), has a vital role to play on stabilising the West African economic thought multilateral Agreement.

Challenges Confronting Economic Relation

In south-western Niger, along the strip connecting the departments of Douthi and Madarounfa, cross-border banditry is a decades-old phenomenon. But in recent years, it has become more organised and much more violent. This development is largely attributable to several factors: the 2011 Libyan crisis; deteriorating security in the border states of north-western Nigeria; and the influence of this neighbouring zone on south-western Niger (Ukwayi and Anam, 2019).

This agro pastoral region has long maintained licit and illicit economic exchanges with Nigeria, some of which are linked to the rustling and black-market sale of livestock. For example, the municipality of Guidan-Roundji (Maradi region) was originally a village that lived off the slaughter of cattle stolen from Nigeria, an enterprise involving organised networks of butchers

selling stolen cattle. Likewise, since the 1980s, cattle rustled in northern Mali are exported to Nigeria via a corridor passing through Tahoua, in Niger, then through Sokoto state, in northern Nigeria. This channel is also used for other contraband. Since the 1983-1984 droughts, the smuggling of Nigerian fuel has notably emerged as a substitute activity for many herders. It has become an essential segment of the economy in the Maradi and Tahoua regions. Vast criminal networks operating between the Sahara Desert and the Niger-Nigeria border have gradually appeared. The nature of this banditry began to change in the early 2010s due to external factors. Most important was the Libyan crisis of 2011.

Trafficking became central to the Libyan war economy, facilitating the illicit flows from Nigeria: people (migrants, including some destined to work as prostitutes) and narcotics (Tramadol and Indianhemp). These flows are moving north, via Niger and Libya, to supply the Middle Eastern and European markets. Basic necessities and fuel smuggled from Nigeria also fill part of the Sahelian market's needs.

At the same time, since 2011, weapons of war from stocks accumulated during the Qaddafi era have been making their way down from Libya to satisfy part of the sub regional demand for arms, notably from Nigerien and Nigerian criminal groups, although the latter also obtain supplies from Nigeria. The regions of Tahoua and Maradi have thus become trafficking corridors for Libyan small arms and ammunition destined for Nigeria. The western part of the Niger-Nigeria border was simultaneously affected by a deteriorating security situation in several northern Nigerian states in the 2010s. Mounting violence in Zamfara state, particularly after 2013, resulted in the formation of better-organised bandit groups equipped with arms sent from Libya, but also from the Lake Chad basin. Since 2016, this insecurity has spilled over the border, primarily affecting the Nigerien region of Maradi, next to Zamfara state. Attacks there multiplied, replicating forms of crime already seen in Nigeria: theft of entire herds of cattle and kidnappings for ransom (Ukwayi, and Anam, 2019).

In 2019, the attacks spread to Nigerian states neighbouring Zamfara, including Katsina and Sokoto. In turn, the west of Niger's Maradi region (bordering Sokoto) was hit by insecurity, in particular the departments of Madaoua, Konni and Doutchi. Nigerian territory remains the rear base for bandit groups operating on both sides of the border. They benefit from being able to retreat easily into extensive wooded areas such as Baban Raffi, straddling Nigeria and the Nigerian departments of Madarounfa and Guidan-Roundji, and the long forest zone of Gandou (Nigeria), bordering the Nigerian departments of Doutchi and Konni (Thomas, 2020).

Bandits come from different ethnic groups in the region (Hausa, Tuareg and Fulani) and have often been involved in cross-border criminal networks. Several bandit leaders are known to have begun their activities in the 1990s, smuggling fuel, selling stolen cattle or trafficking weapons, and some continue to do so. In 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari's government decided to close the Nigerian border, an initiative which reportedly had the impact of driving more people into the criminal economy (Popoola, 2016).

Banditry also thrives off local tensions. Many attacks are the result of scores being settled between people from the same families, villages or communities. These often involve longstanding, unresolved conflicts, jealousies and experiences of injustice. But the herding crisis is undoubtedly the single most important and most worrying factor reshaping cross-border banditry today. Not only is banditry spreading, but the violence is increasing in scale: animal rustling now involves entire herds, kidnappings are becoming common and targeted killings – infrequent until 2019 – are on the rise. The violence is partly fuelled by a crisis of pastoralism. This crisis affects the border strip between Doutchi and Maradi like other Sahelian areas, stirs up tensions between ethnic groups and lays the groundwork for the emergence of insurgencies (Popoola, 2016).

Crisis of Pastoralism's and its Repercussions

The crisis of pastoralism affecting the Sahel is hitting herders hard in the regions of Tahoua, Maradi and

Dosso. Here, more than elsewhere, the expansion of agriculture, combined with increased demographic pressure, is reducing the space dedicated to livestock. The whittling of grazing areas and transhumance corridors complicates the migration routes of nomadic pastoralists.

The growing difficulty in practising mobile livestock raising including transhumance is contributing to the gradual impoverishment of pastoralists. It results in the loss, sale or theft of animals. The reduction of cattle farming areas is leading to conflicts with other land users, especially crop farmers. Changing migration routes forces herders to take itineraries that are less secure or with fewer watering points, at the risk of losing part of their herds (Osagie, 2012).

More broadly, the evolution of agro pastoral relations is making the situation worse. To diversify their activities or to accumulate savings, crop farmers are becoming owners of livestock and are in turn seeking land for pasture. Land pressure is thus accentuated, causing the once reciprocal relations between pastoralists and crop farmers to suffer. Finally, cattle rustling on both sides of the border are a major threat for pastoralists in the area.

The Nigerian state is trying to regulate and protect the pastoral sector. Niger is in fact a pioneer in the Sahel for its rural code and conflict resolution mechanisms. But the regulatory effort varies in effectiveness from one region to another. One relative success story is Maradi, where the state intervened after a 1991 massacre of Fulani pastoralists by Hausa farmers in Toda (Guidan-Roundji department) shook the region.

Following this incident, with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the state set up land commissions intended to regulate conflicts over land use. The region has not experienced another conflict as deadly since then, though the situation remains tense. However, Dosso has continued to see lethal incidents despite regulation. Tahoua has been a more difficult case still. All three regions are drawing up land development plans, but it is too early to predict what effect these will have on conflict mitigation. In the zone under study, pastoralists are predominantly Fulani and sometimes

Tuareg, while crop farmers are predominantly Hausa or Zarma. When limited land resources create a tense climate, the overlap between occupation and ethnic affiliation increases the risk of violence. In Tahoua, communal relations were greatly affected by a conflict that arose in November 2016 in the locality of Bangui (Madaoua department), where Hausa villagers killed 22 Fulani with the probable involvement of traditional Hausa authorities. More recently, in May 2019, crop farmers killed five herders in an Ilelah (Konni department) before the authorities' rapid intervention prevented the conflict from escalating.

Even when violent conflicts are avoided, it is often at the cost of nomadic pastoralists, who suffer various injustices. Village chiefs, of who are mostly sedentary, often set excessive and arbitrary fines, some of which they apply in defiance of official regulations. In addition, water and forest management officials and gendarmes regularly demand bribes from herders seeking to reach cattle markets or pasture in certain protected areas. Other rackets stem from the impounding of stray cattle, a legal provision that state representatives and local elected official's abuse.

These injustices undermine confidence in the authorities and are detrimental to peaceful coexistence between communities. Indeed, rural populations as a whole suffer from a lack of access to justice, whether because they are geographically distant from courts, unaware of their legal recourse, or too poor to pay for legal services. The Para legal networks that serve rural Mali are still insufficiently developed in Niger.

Most Fulani pastoralists are no longer able to live off livestock alone, and some adopt an agro pastoral way of life if they can. Some Fulani are becoming more or less sedentary. Others are abandoning the pastoral world altogether. Yet they are poorly prepared for vocational retraining, and their professional prospects are limited, as they have less schooling than sedentary people. As the alternatives are few, a small number of pastoralists fall into banditry.

For many Fulani herders in this region, joining the bandits is simply a way of dealing with the herding crisis,

protecting them from cattle theft and sometimes attaining a position of power. This trend was already significant in Nigeria and is now spreading into Niger. It leads, in turn, to the stigmatisation of Fulani pastoralists and strains communal relations.

Particularly in north-western Nigeria, bandits are often seen as successful men: in a few months or years, formerly impoverished herders who took up banditry have become owners of several hundred or even thousand head of livestock. With the power granted by weapons and money, they set the rules for using local lands. In north-western Nigeria, it can be necessary for herders to join the bandits simply to ensure their own safety and to protect their herds. "In Nigeria, the bandits laugh at herders who have not joined their ranks and call them weak", notes a cross-border herder.

In Niger, similar behaviours are developing. While most Fulani bandits remain simple criminals, others pose as defenders of the community and have become respected local figures. In the aftermath of the above-mentioned Bangui conflict, a Fulani bandit leader, originally from that locality and operating in Niger, contacted several Fulani notables living nearby to offer them his protection services.

Fulani bandits tend to target Hausa and spare fellow Fulani. In the Maradi areas of Guidan-Roundji and Madarounfa, the bandits attacked the Hausa villages, while leaving the Fulani hamlets and encampment. The Fulani targeted by the bandits who refuse to join their ranks or are suspected of giving information to the authorities. Fulani villages reportedly protect themselves from attack by providing recruits to the local bandits.

The Hausa have come to perceive banditry as particularly widespread among the Fulani, especially in Maradi, the most affected region to date. Communal relations, which were previously healthy, as evidenced by numerous mixed marriages, are deteriorating. Fear is setting in: while some Fulani are leaving their hamlets, others no longer frequent Hausa villages

Formation of Self – Defence Groups

In north-western Nigeria, the recent wave of murderous banditry has led to the formation of numerous self-defence groups and armed militias. The phenomenon is especially noticeable in sedentary communities of Hausa farmers. Some of these groups were formed very recently, either on a voluntary basis or with the encouragement of local authorities who recruited and armed village-based self-defence units. Others are rooted in the hunting and other brotherhoods of traditional society (Osagie, 2012).

Since the 1950s at least, the latter have been tasked with protecting people and property. Confronted with the extreme violence of bandits operating in north-western Nigeria, they have gradually become militarised and now stand accused of various abuses. Following the Nigerian example, communal self-defence groups appear to be forming in south-western Niger. Indeed, the Nigerien side has recently witnessed the birth of self-defence groups tasked with combating banditry. Still at a fledgling stage, most do not have a specific name (Osimen, Anegbode, Akande, and Oyewole, 2017).

They exist in almost every village in Gabi municipality (Madarounfa department), because banditry has hit this area hard and the state has been unable to protect its inhabitants. In some villages in Tibiri and Safo municipalities (Guidan-Roundji department), which have been similarly affected by the attacks, self-defence groups equipped with traditional rifles have also reportedly emerged.

For the time being, local authorities and the armed forces appreciate this group's help. They receive support from local elected officials, who contribute to the purchase of artisan weapons costing 5,000 CFA francs (or €7.6).

Nigerien defence and security forces showed them recognition after they repelled several bandit attacks and managed to recover some stolen livestock. Yet the rate of bandit attacks has not dropped in these municipalities.

The self-defence groups provide real services to local populations, but they threaten social cohesion when their actions target particular ethnic groups. On the Nigerian side of the border, the formation of Hausa self-defence

groups prompted the Fulani to approach bandit groups for protection, initiating a cycle of violence that has lasted several years. In Maradi, these fledgling groups are entirely Hausa; the Fulani are systematically excluded due to the stigma attached to them.

The risk of ethnically charged confrontations is therefore high. Clashes between the self-defence groups and bandits could easily multiply and inflame communal relations. The formation of communal self-defence groups generates tensions that, in central Mali and Burkina Faso, for example, have fostered or fuelled cycles of severe ethnic violence. Traditionally, these groups have enjoyed close ties to the authorities.

They recruit among sedentary populations, which also form the majority of state representatives. In addition, they maintain forms of collaboration with security services in their common fight against bandits. Conversely, because pastoralists (and especially Fulani) are often excluded from the self-defence groups and suspected by them of being at the root of violence, they tend to be driven toward bandit groups in the hope of finding a form of protection.

This trend further alienates the pastoralists from the state and its security forces, with whom relations are already strained. Pastoralists are generally under-represented in state institutions, as well as political parties, largely as a result of their low level of education. As a result, policymakers seldom take their interests into account. The risk of an insurgency the outbreak of open hostilities against the state and its allies is growing, all the more so because the region is increasingly arousing the interest of jihadist groups based in neighbouring zones.

Discussion of Findings

From the result of the study, the results findings were divided into two sections based on the research methodology applied. The findings reveals that the economic trade relations between Nigeria and Niger involve the exports and imports, the exports from Nigeria to Niger Republic include petroleum products and textile materials and the import include Rice / spaghetti and vegetable oil (*Olga*) constitute the major

items imports. On the regional integration, the findings revealed that, Nigeria and Niger are intimate because of the historic economic ties existing between the two countries which include the socio-economic interaction between Katsina and Maradi. Ever since, the two cities have maintained these excellent relations. This is because Maradi was an extension of Katsina kingdom as such they share the same norms and values since time immemorial. Since before colonial period there were interactions between Katsina and Maradi. Katsina tobacco farmers and merchants grew tobacco and travelled to Maradi. They returned with livestock to Katsina and satisfied the livestock, and set off again. Also, there were trade relations between Katsina and Maradi since precolonial period. This type of relation was based on the exchange of goods like iron implements, cloth and leather goods, all of which occupied an important position in the pre-colonial economy of Katsina and Maradi.

The trade contributed toward economic integration between Nigeria and Niger. The development of trade relations between southern Niger and northern Nigeria stems from two major activities: trade in local products and transit. The flow of goods from Niger to Nigeria includes a type of string beans (*niébé*), Zulu nuts (*chufu*), gum arabic, cattle, leather and skins, commodities and manufactured goods from Lomé and Cotonou. Goods flowing in the other direction include cereals, other food products (pasta, corn meal, sugar, salt, yams, fruits, etc.), hydrocarbons, building materials and plastic products, both from Nigerian as well as international sources.

On the bilateral relations between Nigeria and Niger the study reveals that territorial unity and cohesion beyond successive authorities under the authority of the Songhai and the Borno, the Hausa city-states, despite their political instability, were able to retain their territorial integrity and a very strong cultural unity. Fundamental characteristics of Hausa territory and the Maradi micro-region the considerable interdependence between settlement dynamics, urban development, agricultural production and trade. Due to the simultaneous presence of all these factors, the area has greater potential for integration than most other West

African areas witnessing economic and social development.

The findings on the challenges confronting Nigeria and Niger economic relation include trade between Nigeria and Niger revealed that there are challenges that led to the destruction of local industries due to high rate of smuggling. This manifested heavily when the trade sustained and develop other sectors of activity, which would be unable if the traders were to buy goods from the national industry or import them legally at high cost. Several clashes also occurred between the smugglers and their allies. These occur in their efforts to either become lords or sets in the smuggling business.

The findings on the trade relations between Nigeria and Niger Republic is in line with the research findings conducted by Halidu, and Atnadu (2022) on Nigeria's Bilateral Trade Relations with China: An Assessment, 2010 – 2019. This assessment was done using secondary sources of data such as books, journals, newspapers etc. Dependency theory was used to examine the trade relations between Nigeria and China to show how dependent Nigeria is on China. Nigeria need China for finished goods and getting of loans and China need Nigeria for certain raw materials but Nigeria has overtime been dependent on China and this has increased Nigerian debt burden.

The findings on the economic integration between Nigeria and Niger is in line with the findings of Okorie (2022) Assessing the regional economic integration taking as a case study the Economic Community of West African (ECOWAS), we set off to empirically validate its essence in terms of benefits to its member countries in relation to the possible factors that might determine these benefits so as rationalize the decision to belong in an economic integration. Employing the random effect estimation methods on the longitudinal series from inception of the economic integration till 2014, we discovered that the member states benefit from being the economic community and these benefits are unequal as shown by the arrow plot. However, we also found out that these benefits do not depend on the level of openness of each member state. We hereby recommend that the

ECOWAS body should take all necessary actions to ensure that all member states benefit positively.

Similarly, Nzuwi (2018) studied on Assessing the regional economic integration taking as a case study the Economic Community of West African (ECOWAS), we set off to empirically validate its essence in terms of benefits to its member countries in relation to the possible factors that might determine these benefits so as rationalize the decision to belong in an economic integration. Employing the random effect estimation methods on the longitudinal series from inception of the economic integration till 2014, we discovered that the member states benefit from being the economic community and these benefits are unequal as shown by the arrow plot.

The study findings indicated that the trade imbalance in the bilateral relations persisted and, the bilateral trade relations have made Nigeria to be dependent on China. The study also discovered that trade relations benefited the two countries within this period and China benefited more due to the persistent trade imbalance. After seeing all these, the study made the following recommendations: Nigeria need to invest massively in manufacturing sector in order to close the massive gap in the economic strength between the two countries, the two countries should do more to increase foreign direct investment (FDI), Nigeria should do more in exporting finished goods to China and this can be actualized through massive industrialization.

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Conclusion

The study on politics of international economic relations between Niger – Nigeria revealed that the smugglers followed bush trails in order to evade customs and other security agents. It is therefore pertinent to argue that despite the problems associated with unrecorded cross – border trade, the trade has the potential of facilitating economic integration between Nigeria and Niger. This led to the development of trade relations between southern Niger and northern Nigeria stems from two major activities: trade in local products and transit.

Recommendations

To solve the problems of politics of international economic relations in Niger – Nigeria bilateral relation, the following recommendations are made:

- i. International organizations such as ECOWAS and NEPAD should be involve to create regional integration between Nigeria, Niger and other neighboring countries. Though proponents of intense regional integration have advocated for substantial and forceful missions by Africans.
- ii. The Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation (NNJC) established in March, 1971 in order to avoid disputes that may result in the breach of peace and political instability should be reviewed.

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