

## Political Economy of Nigeria-Benin Republic Bilateral Relations

Michael E. Nwokedi

&

Christopher U. Obasi

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Correspondence: [chobasi7@gmail.com](mailto:chobasi7@gmail.com)

### Abstract

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Nigerian economy is in dire straits. The Country's frantic search for development underscores the need for a constant review of diplomatic, economic and defence/security relations with next door neighbours, with a view to harnessing such relations for development. Given her proximity to Nigeria, the Republic of Benin is considered critical to Nigeria's development especially in terms of Nigeria's anti-smuggling crusade which comes as part of efforts to revive the Nigerian economy; with attendant implications for national security. The Republic of Benin also seeks to maximize the benefits of diplomatic relations with Nigeria, in view of the latter's status as the largest economy in West Africa. However, there are fears that Nigeria has not maximized the benefits of her relations with Benin Republic. Worse still, it appears that the Republic of Benin is leveraging Nigeria's diplomatic gaffes to advance her economic interests. Accordingly, this paper explores the trajectory of diplomatic, economic and defence/security relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Applying the Interdependence Theory, it exposes the lopsidedness of economic benefits in Nigeria-Benin Republic relations and makes recommendations in the interest of Nigeria. Data collation was qualitative while research design is exploratory.

**Keywords:** Politics, Economy, Diplomacy, Interdependence, Bilateralism

### Introduction

Four centuries of slave trade (1440-1880) had decimated Africa's developmental capacities and potentials. In 1884-1885, the so-called Berlin Conference heralded the first scramble for Africa occasioned by the indiscriminate partitioning of the Continent into artificial boundaries for control by the dominant powers of the time. The colonization of Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries further resulted in socio-political subjugation and economic exploitation of the Continent so that today, the Continent has remained economically dependent on the West, with attendant implications for other components of the "superstructure." Worse still, Africa is currently balkanized into more than 50 countries lumped up in artificial socio-cultural and political boundaries. These historical developments appear to have kept the Continent in continually deteriorating conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. Consequently, the search for constructive and beneficial relations has become epiphenomenal to the developmental aspirations of many African countries. In this light, trans-border cooperation sufficing in economic, diplomatic and defence/security relations between African countries is

seen as the surest way to the speedy development of the African continent. Currently, Nigeria shares a unique relationship with Benin Republic. According to Nwokedi (1991), relations between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin dates back to the first decade of Nigeria's independence (1960-1970) and had been fraught with several challenges. The first bout of challenges ensued with the misunderstanding between Nigeria and Benin Republic over the latter's collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross in providing aid for beleaguered and blockaded Biafrans during the Nigerian Civil War. Relations between both countries were later consolidated following the lowering of tensions, but became edgy again when in February 1984, the Federal Government of Nigeria unilaterally closed her borders against Benin Republic citing the smuggling of Nigeria's petroleum products into the country. The border closure lasted for two years. According to Golub et al. (2019), another era of frosty relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic surfaced in 1996 when the Federal Government of Nigeria closed her borders again against Benin Republic. The purpose of this paper is to dissect the trajectory of Nigeria-Benin Republic relations with a view to understanding how both countries could enhance their economic, diplomatic and defence/security fortunes by virtue of association.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Interdependence Theory is the adopted theoretical framework for this research. The Theory was first propounded by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) with later development of the theory by Kelley and Thibaut (1978), and Kelly et al., (2003) into "a comprehensive theory of social interaction" (Van Lange and Balliet, 2014). The theory is premised on the notion of costs and rewards as the basis for evaluating the outcomes of relationships; hence, it assumes that relationships could be considered beneficial only when the rewards of being in such relationships outweigh the costs, and *vice versa*. Balliet and Van Lange (2014) view the Interdependency Theory from an interpersonal lens in which interpersonal relationships are evaluated by an aspect of interpersonal dependence in which peoples' experiences are influenced by their relations with others. Accordingly, they represent theory with the equation:  $I = f(A, B, S)$ , where  $I$  = interpersonal interactions which are a function ( $f$ ) of the sum of given situations ( $S$ ) + the actions ( $A$ ) and characteristics ( $B$ ) of individuals in the relationship. According to Van Lange and Balliet (2014), the Interdependency Theory is hinged on four cardinal assumptions namely: The Principle of Structure, the Principle of Transformation, the Principle of Interaction and the Principle of Adaption.

Viewed from the point of view of cost-benefit analysis, the Interdependency Theory closely resembles the Rational Choice Theory which foundation was laid by Smith (1776) who assumed that rational actors acting in self-interest could improve the lot of the overall economy. Despite the main opposition to the Theory which suggests that individuals may not always have the best information to make rational choices (Herbert Simon), or that it is impossible for all actors to always be rational even if they are given the right information (Richard Thaler), it does not obviate the fact that an element of rationality is often required to gain the upper hand in bilateral relations since no one enters a relationship for the sole benefit of his partner.

Notwithstanding, the Interdependency Theory remains relevant in the analysis of Nigeria-Benin Republic economic, defence/security and diplomatic relations especially with a view to maximizing Nigeria's benefit within the context of such relations. Additionally, the theory's cost-benefit component enhances its aptness in determining how much of valuable opportunities Nigeria appears to have missed in terms of maximizing the benefits of her relations with Benin Republic, and how much Benin Republic is doing to leverage Nigeria's mistakes.

### **Methodology**

The research employs the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis; while the research design is exploratory. The researcher is convinced that an exploratory research design in combination with qualitative methods of data collection and analysis would be most suitable for the work, given its historical-comparative orientation. Content analysis is a basic component of this qualitative method; hence, the researcher tried to make sense of secondary data in the form of extant literature on the subject matter as well as other relevant documents by analyzing existing trends in Nigeria-Benin relations in order to make informed conclusions based on observed patterns.

### **Geography and Demography**

Nigeria has a landmass of 923,768 km and is about 7 times the size of Benin Republic. The shape and size of the country give the impression that Benin Republic is a 'Hand from the Atlantic'. The land is divided into 5 natural geographical zones. First is the Low Sandy Beach land of about 2-5 km wide along the coast, which is adorned with palm forests. Next is the Low Plateau Zone made up of clayey soil cut with marshy dips and a Silica-clayey plateau with wooden savannah. The third zone is the high Atacora Plateau to the northwest, which has elevations ranging from 500-800 km above sea level. The fourth zone is the River Niger Plain to the northeast with vast fertile land. The last zone is the Savannah grassland at the north central part of the country.

On the other hand, Benin Republic is located in West Africa and lies between latitudes 6° 30' and 12° 30' North and longitudes 1° and 3° 40' East. It is bounded by Niger Republic in the north, Burkina Faso in the northwest and by Togo in the west. It is bounded by Nigeria in the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the south and has a coastline of 125 km. The country stretches north to south for some 700 km while its breadth is about 325 km. It covers a landmass of about 119,622 sq km, with a borderline that stretches 800 km across 6 Nigerian states. The climate of Benin Republic is characterized by the influence of transitional tropical conditions. Rainfall is low relative to other areas with the same latitude, thereby giving rise to tropical conditions known as the Benin Variant. Annual average rainfall is between 500 and 1300 mm while the temperature ranges from 25°C to 28°C. By the 1995 census, the population of Benin Republic was about 5.4 million. Using an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent, the population is now estimated at 6.74 million as at December 2003 with a density of 59 persons per sq km. Benin Republic is a small country tucked under the northwestern elbow of Nigeria. It shares similar geographical features with Nigeria. In spite of the Benin Variant, the climate encourages

fishing in the south and farming in the north just like Nigeria. The geographical affinities and similarities between both countries provide a primary motivation for cross border affiliations, which have been exploited for ages. These realities make the geography of Benin Republic a unique factor in the integration of both societies and economies.

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

According to Isyaku (2017) and Akhigbe (1991), informal relations between African peoples had commenced long before the balkanization of the Continent due to colonization. However, the onset of colonialism marked a visible change in relations which had now become trans-border, owing to the artificial boundaries created by the colonial powers. Consequently, colonial demarcation of African societies separated people of similar races and tribes and translocated them to different societies; (Rasaki 1991). This was exactly the case between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Benin Republic is populated by a large number of Nigerians in the Diaspora and although these Nigerians now bear a different national identity, they still maintain cultural ties with their roots in Nigeria. According to Isyaku (2017),

Beninoise people migrated from the Aja State of Southwest Nigeria in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and settled in Abomey and Porto-Novo. These people were originally of Yoruba stock. But on arrival, the settlers began to evolve a peculiar character and language. By 1625, a kingdom was formed out of the much chiefdom and under King Dako was named Dahomey; (Isyaku, 2017).

Dahomey (now Benin-Republic) had a long history and rich cultural heritage. The area was governed from its capital Abomey. During the slave trade, Ouidah was one of the major slave ports along the West African coast and after independence, the country became known as the Republic of Dahomey. In 1975, the people resolved to shake off the historical liabilities associated with the name Dahomey. Consequently, a committee of historians and senior citizens deliberated and picked the name Benin after the ancient Benin Kingdom. The Committee considered Benin a symbol of strength and unity of the people as well as a source of pride to Africa. Accordingly, the name “Republic of Benin” is derived from Nigeria.

This unique derivation underscores the genealogical antecedents of majority of the Beninoise. Interestingly, the Nigeria-Benin republic element of consanguinity was earlier demonstrated in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when the Agaja of Dahomey reportedly sent his ambassadors to present the Alafin of Oyo with one of his beautiful daughters alongside some coral gifts while the Alafin also presented one of his daughters as a wife to the Agaja; (Isyaku, 2017). Benin Republic comprises of over 50 ethnic groups. The major ones are the Fons, Adjias, Yorubas, Sombas, Tados, Mardes and Baribas. Others are the Fulanis and Hausas. Many of these groups migrated from Nigeria. According to Professor Felix Iroko, a professor of history at the Abomey Calavi University in Benin Republic, ‘many Beninoise ethnic groups had their roots in Nigeria.’ These include the Yorubas, Baribas, Mardes and Hausa/Fulanis amongst others. The Yorubas moved from Oyo, Ibadan, Lagos and Ile-Ife while the Baribas migrated from

Bussa in present day Niger State. The Hausa/Fulanis moved from Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto and Zaria while the Mardes migrated from Borno State. Given the very close proximity between the Nigerians and their Beninoise counterparts, an impression exists among the traditional leadership of the Yoruba communities which were split into two on the attainment of independence by both countries in the 60s that the race is still one, irrespective of the artificial colonial borders. This notion was amply demonstrated in 1982 when the Onisabe of Sabe and Alaketu of Ketu chiefdoms in Benin Republic were invited by the Ooni of Ife to participate in council deliberations in Nigeria. It was further exhibited in 1983 when the Ooni visited the Alaketu of Ketu; (Isyaku, 2017).

Consequently, according to Dahiru (2003), the historical linkage between Yoruba traditional authorities in Benin Republic and Nigeria has led to an informal agreement of cooperation and assistance between them. However, the existential reality among the Yoruba communities in both countries is not exclusive to them. According to Isyaku (2017), the Nikki Kingdom in Benin Republic and the Borgu Emirate in Nigeria consider themselves as one, so much so that the appointment of any Nikki King is not without the consent of the Emir of Borgu. Similarly, the Babanna of Nigeria and the Gbaso of Benin Republic cooperate to the extent that it does not matter whether the ruler of one community is resident in, or indigenous to the other. This is based on both communities' belief of oneness, irrespective of colonial boundaries. Additionally, two Nigerian leaders – Generals Gowon and Obasanjo had visited Benin Republic in 1975 and 1978 respectively while Benin Republic's President Yayi visited Nigeria in 2011.

### **The Determinants of Nigeria-Benin Relations**

Existing cordial relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic are inevitable due to the socio-cultural and ethnic ties linking the peoples of both countries. At present, both countries have diplomatic relations at the highest levels and interact at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Both countries belong to ECOWAS, AU and UN. Other areas of bilateral and multilateral cooperation include military, economic, diplomatic and security issues. The foreign policy of Benin Republic is hinged on certain principles. These include respect for other nations' sovereignty, non-alignment and international cooperation amongst others. However, in Benin Republic's attempt to maintain her foreign policy principles, it tends to downplay her level of commitment towards ECOWAS due to the benefits she enjoys from other economic cooperation platforms like the "Fonds Africain de Garantie et de Cooperation Economique" or African Fund for the Guarantee of Economic Cooperation (FAGACE), which is purely a francophone arrangement.

ECOWAS would need to encourage the francophone countries to be more committed to the organization. Benin Republic's increased commitment towards ECOWAS would foster integration among ECOWAS member states for African development. Nigeria has a series of bilateral agreements with Benin Republic. These agreements are in the area of military cooperation, economic matters and defence/security issues. Of these, defence/security issues have raised more tension between the 2 countries in the last 3 decades than any other issue. It is therefore pertinent for both countries to ensure that existing bilateral cooperation between

them is maintained to enhance socio-economic integration. In the area of language, English and French are the lingua franca of Nigeria and Benin respectively. While these vestiges of colonialism tend to separate the people, there are still strong linguistic bonds. For example, some local languages are widely spoken in both countries. The Yoruba language is commonly spoken in the south while Hausa/Fulani is used commonly in the north of Benin Republic. Secondly, many Beninoise speak passable English. Proficiency in English seems to be a status symbol in the country and has taken root due to their conscious efforts to interact with Nigerians. Language thus provides a unique paradox between both countries.

At face value, Nigerians and the Beninoise seem like the same people separated by 2 foreign but official languages. On the other hand, the strength of the common local languages and the efforts to learn the official ones are breaking artificial barriers and opening new possibilities. These trends have the potentials to bring the people even closer together. According to Professor SA Aluko (1992), 'language is a strong weapon of commerce.' The commonalities between Nigerians and the Beninoise pose many challenges while also offering unique opportunities for both countries. Firstly, they emphasize the need to re-establish primordial ties. Secondly, they negate the requirement of the artificial boundaries imposed by colonialists. Lastly and most importantly, they open boundless opportunities for integration between both countries. In practical terms, both countries could establish 'sister cities' to exploit their commonalities and enhance socio-economic integration. Unfortunately, it has been observed that Nigeria appears not to be making as much effort to learn French as the Beninoise are making to learn English. Consequently, the policy of teaching French compulsorily in Nigerian schools appears to be a right step in the right direction and should be encouraged in the interest of Nigeria-Benin Republic relations. Perhaps, a complimentary policy of special compensations and rewards for proficiency in French may motivate Nigerians to take the language more seriously. The benefits of linguistic integration for both countries are enormous.

The socio-economic sector in Benin Republic revolves around health, education, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, transportation, communications, mining and oil exploration. Agriculture accounts for 34% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Industry accounts for 14% while the services sector (like Cotonou Freeport and tourism) accounts for 52%. The main agricultural exports are cotton, coffee, and cashew nuts. Of these, cotton accounts for about 40% of GDP and 80% of the official exports. Oil exploration was initiated by SAGA Oil, a private oil exploration company. By 1982, crude oil exploration in commercial quantity had commenced at the Seme off-shore oilfield with an initial output of 5,000 barrels of oil per day. However, crude oil production ceased between 1985 and 2001 due to some technical problems. Attempts were made for the exploration of new sites and in 2002, Benin Republic exported a total of 61,000 tonnes of crude oil, a maximum of 1,200 barrels of crude oil per day. After 2002, production stopped again. Reports attribute the stoppage of oil production to mismanagement of the oil business, lack of skilled technical manpower and absence of follow-ups in the oil exploration agreement. However, it is observed that the oil business is one area that Nigeria could be of assistance to Benin Republic, based on her rich and long experience in oil exploration, exploitation, production, marketing and distribution.

## Defence/Security Relations

The analysis of defence/security relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic will be divided into two phases: military cooperation and border security. In terms of military cooperation, Nigeria and Benin Republic signed a military cooperation agreement on 29 April 1979. The agreement provides for Nigeria's training of personnel of the Beninoise Armed Forces, and an exchange of military personnel at all levels. From 1980 to date, personnel of the Beninoise Armed Forces have been trained in various military institutions in Nigeria. The Beninoise Armed Forces have been variously trained at the National War College, Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Nigerian Defence Academy and some selected single service institutions in Nigeria. In 1998, 20 personnel of the Nigerian Armed Forces underwent a French language course at the Beninoise Armed Forces Staff College. In addition, 2 Nigerian Army officers attended senior staff course at the same college in 2002. However, the level of exchange of military cooperation is still considered inadequate. There is therefore a need to increase the number of personnel being trained by military institutions of both countries. To enhance military co-operation, both countries could initiate comparative staff courses.

In terms of border security, Blum (2014) reports that the border between Nigeria and Benin Republic is about 700 kilometers long as is one of the most important borders in West Africa. Historically, there have been few closures of Nigeria/Benin Republic border arising mainly from alleged cross-border crimes. Nigeria has often accused Benin Republic of being a safe haven for cross-border criminals. This was to be confirmed by the arrest and detention of a certain Hammani Tidjani who was considered as the most notorious criminal in Benin Republic. At present, there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which was signed on 14 August 2003 by both countries to address border security issues. To this end, a Joint Border Patrol was set up to strengthen security at the borders in October 2018. There were also arrangements for the opening up of operational offices in each country to coordinate the border patrol activities. Consequently, both countries signed the treaty for the joint management and operationalization of the Seme-Krake border security post in 2022. According to Azeez (2022), "the border post was funded by European and multilateral contributions and is equipped with state-of-the-art scanners, a weighbridge and modern offices for customs and immigration officials." Officials of Benin Republic believe that the treaty would provide the best framework for control of cross-border crimes and other illegal activities.

The Security and Defence Forces (SDF) of Benin Republic comprise the Army, the Military Police or Gendarmerie, the Air Force and the Navy. The main objectives of these forces are preservation of territorial integrity, contribution to regional security and participation in socio-economic development. These objectives have often found practical expressions in the action of the SDF. In the area of Internal Security (IS) and Military Aid to Civil Authority (MACA) the Gendarmerie has on several occasions been used to restore and maintain law and order particularly in the political transition years after 1989. In pursuit of regional security, the Beninoise SDF participated actively in Peace Support Operations (PSOs) in both Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. Activities of the SDF also impact directly on the socio-economic development of the nation. Given the importance of sea borne trade to the country, the Beninoise Navy

conducts coastal and port security operations to prevent smuggling and other sea borne crimes. The totality of these activities helps to project the notion of Benin Republic as a secure and stable entity. However, it is the projection of these strengths to the overall goal of bilateral and multilateral cooperation that is of more interest. In this light, Nigeria and Benin Republic have participated in joint security operations but there is the need for more of such cooperation. Joint operations could be conducted to bolster border and maritime security as well as prevent smuggling and other cross-border crimes. In the meantime, both countries could plan and conduct regular joint training among its Armed Forces. Furthermore, agreed training exchange programmes could be consolidated by ensuring that training billets are taken up annually. These measures are expected to build confidence and improve understanding among members of the Armed Forces of both countries and foster security in the sub-region. Furthermore, Nigeria and Benin Republic have been contributing troops towards Peace Support Operations (PSO) within the West African sub-region. As part of the military co-operations between Nigeria and Benin Republic, Nigeria sponsored the first contingent of Beninoise troops to ECOMOG Operations in Liberia. Future cooperation in PSOs and joint training by both countries would guarantee stability and promote peace and stability within the sub-region thereby enhancing the socio-economic integration of Africa.

Unfortunately, despite all the joint efforts at border security between both countries, cross-border smuggling remains a major challenge, particularly on the Nigerian side. For example, the World Bank estimates that in 2006 alone, goods amounting to more than US\$2.4 billion were smuggled into Nigeria from her borders with the Republic of Benin. In the same year, Raballand and Mjekiqi (2010) affirm that total value of textile products smuggled into Nigeria equalled US\$402 million. Additionally, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2006) asserts that human traffickers regularly use the Nigeria-Benin Republic border to traffic persons to as far as Spain, France, Russia, Switzerland etc., through Gabon, Togo, Senegal and Ivory Coast and other neighbouring countries. Another report from the Rice Processors Association of Nigeria shows that more than 1 billion kilogrammes of rice were smuggled into Nigeria through Benin Republic in the first three months of 2019; (Munshi, 2019). Similarly, Hoffman and Melly (2015) cited in Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) maintain that the bulk of refined fuel sold and used in Benin Republic including as much as 80% of the gasoline used in that country were smuggled into Benin Republic from Nigeria. Incidentally, the smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) into Nigeria through the border with Benin Republic is reported to have killed an estimated 1000 Nigerians per year since 1999, when much of these illegal weapons have been used for armed robbery; (Okeke and Oji, 2014), and also resulted in increasing insecurity in Nigeria's northeast courtesy of Boko Haram; (Awodola and Ayuba, 2015). Furthermore, the increase in the influx of SALWs is attributed to rising oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism (with attendant environmental degradation), kidnapping, herdsmen attacks, increasing secessionist agitations, rival cult clashes, inter and intra party conflicts etc.; (Badmus, 2010), (Adeniyi, 2017) and (Omitola, 2014). Incidentally, cross-border crimes along the Nigeria-Benin Republic border are also known to have influenced the counterfeiting of imported food and clothing items, resulting in increased health problems for Nigerian citizens, unemployment and food insecurity; (Dogarawa, 2013), in addition to the exposure to injury,



exploitation and personal dislocation arising from cross-border human trafficking; (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2006).

### **Diplomatic Relations**

Official diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic commenced August 1, 1960 following the attainment of Benin Republic's independence from France on July 31, 1960. As hinted earlier, diplomatic relations between both countries alternates between cordiality and hostility. As Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) report, Nigeria-Benin Republic relations came under severe tension in the 1960s when President Zinsus collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross to provide aid for economically blockaded Biafrans during the Nigerian Civil War. Similarly, the attempt to kidnap a certain Abel Zinsou, a Beninoise diplomat in Nigeria by five of his countrymen in 1975 attracted significant tensions in relations between the two West African countries; (Oyediran, 1978).

Additionally, there was the 1999 issue of 40 Nigerian businessmen who were illegally detained in Benin Republic on the allegation of lacking valid documents required for their entry into the Country, as well as another issue in 1996 where 2000 Nigerians were deported from Benin Republic as illegal immigrants; (Isyaku, 2017). More than the aforementioned, cross-border criminality appears to have been the major source of diplomatic tensions between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Historically, one can safely conclude that Nigeria's most popular medium of showing its discontent against Benin Republic is the closure of her borders. According to Golub et al. (2019), Nigeria's borders with Benin Republic were closed from February 1984 to February 1986 as part of efforts at curbing the smuggling of Nigeria's petroleum products into Benin Republic. Similarly, in 1996, a political dispute between Nigeria's Head of State General Sani Abacha and Benin Republic's President Soglo on account of the former's military cooperation with the US resulted in the closure of Nigeria's borders with Benin Republic.

In 2003, the Nigerian border with Benin Republic was closed again due to the criminal activities of a certain Hamani Tidjani, a Nigerien citizen based in Benin Republic who engaged in trans-border crimes by coming into Nigeria to organize car-snatching operations after which he would take the stolen cars back to Benin Republic to be repackaged for sale. The Nigeria-Benin Republic borders were closed again in August 2019 in what was termed as the "Joint Border Operations Drill" (Operation SWIFT RESPONSE) which was further aimed at fighting cross-border smuggling. Table 1 shows the gains of the Operation in terms of the magnitude of illegal immigrants and items detained and seized during the period;

**Table 1: Magnitude of Illegal Immigrants and Items Detained and Seized by Nigerian law Enforcement during Operation SWIFT RESPONSE (August 2019-Dec 2020)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Illegal Migrants</b>	<b>Parboiled Rice (in 50kg Bags)</b>	<b>NPK Fertilizer (in Bags)</b>	<b>Vehicles</b>	<b>Motorcycles</b>	<b>Vegetable Oil (in Jerricans)</b>
<b>Quantity</b>	1,401	159,506.7	10,447	1,974	895	18,690.3

\* The above-listed items were valued at ₦12.5 billion as at the time of their seizure.

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria; adapted from Ogunlesi (2021).

Conversely, the foreign policy of Benin Republic is hinged on certain principles. These include the respect for the sovereignty of other nations, non-alignment and international cooperation amongst others. Benin Republic's attempt to maintain her foreign policy principles tends to downplay her level of commitment towards ECOWAS due to the benefits she enjoys from other economic cooperation such as FAGACE, which is purely a francophone arrangement. ECOWAS would need to encourage the countries to be more committed to the organization. Benin Republic's increased commitment towards ECOWAS would foster integration among ECOWAS member states for African development. Another feature of Beninese diplomacy is the policy of assimilation of long staying migrants into their society. It is therefore not uncommon to find Beninese of foreign descent holding high and important offices in the Country. This liberal policy on citizenship offers this small country the benefits of good talents from other lands and is a worthy example of real integration of African peoples. It is a model that could be copied by other African nations including Nigeria for socio-economic integration and development. In terms of bilateral migration between both countries, there are over 15,000 Nigerians currently studying in Beninese universities. Similarly, a large number of private universities in Benin Republic are also owned by Nigerians.

### **Economic Relations**

According to Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020), Benin Republic is greatly dependent on Nigeria for her international trade. Both countries have existing bilateral agreements, which have continued to boost economic relations between them. Nigeria was the sole supplier of petroleum products to Benin Republic up to 1991 when the arrangement was discontinued due to high cost of delivery and irregular supply. At present, Nigeria and Benin Republic maintain two joint venture projects. These projects are the Onigbolo Cement Factory and Save Sugar Company both of which are based in Benin Republic. Benin Republic is also a signatory to the current West African Gas Pipeline Project (WAGPP), established for the supply of Nigeria's natural gas to boost their energy sector. Other signatories are Ghana and Togo. In addition, there exists a bilateral air service agreement between both countries.

Nigerian Airlines have been responsible for air lifting more than 60 percent of Beninese Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Accordingly, the formation of these joint ventures highlights the significance of partnership between neighbouring governments with the objective of fostering economic cooperation. This supports the current AU initiative of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Furthermore, such joint ventures have the potency to reduce the domination of Western influence on African economies, generate more foreign exchange and further stimulate the economies of African countries to create jobs for their citizenry. Advisedly, other West African countries could embrace the WAGPP to improve their energy needs for industrial development. In the long term, this could reduce the over reliance on

foreign technologies and promote socio-economic integration for sustainable development in Africa.

Additionally, Nigeria is the principal partner in Cotonou Freeport, which accounts for about 25 percent of the total imports that pass through the Country annually. According to records, Nigeria also accounted for 80 percent of vehicles and used clothes imported through the Port. This has resulted in Nigeria having a high representation in the Port to protect the interests of her importers. Other countries that use the Cotonou Freeport are Niger Republic, Burkina Faso and Mali. In furtherance of the economic policy, the Beninoise government has strongly encouraged direct private investment in her economy. The direct investments are in the areas of canning, paper processing, glass manufacturing, salt processing and agro-allied businesses. Others include pharmaceuticals, palm produce, building materials and chemicals.

The Beninoise Government has a code of investment that is regularly reviewed. The current code of investment is underpinned by incentives for investors. These incentives include a low tariff structure for imported goods for countries within the sub-region, enhanced state security and a conducive banking environment. The Benin Republic Freeport at Cotonou was built in 1960 to simultaneously accommodate 12 large ships with a handling capacity of 2,500 tonnes of cargo per day. The Port has a berthing quay of 1.5 km and the major goods imported through the Port are processed food, refined petroleum products, used cars and used clothes. Benin Republic exports agricultural products such as cotton, cashew and coffee to India, the US and the European Union. As at the year 2002, the Country exported about 462,000 tonnes of a variety of goods. In the same year, 452,000 tonnes of goods were handled as imports.

The Cotonou Freeport is called a free port because the bulk of the cargoes (goods and vehicles) imported through the Port are on transit to other countries. Consequently, such cargoes are duty free except for the payment of handling charges. The countries that benefit from this arrangement are Nigeria, Niger Republic, Burkina Faso and Mali. It is necessary to state that except Nigeria, all the three other countries are landlocked, and are therefore the main beneficiaries of this arrangement. There are three terminals within the port specifically created for these landlocked countries. Although Benin Republic is obliged under the law of the sea to allow the use of its ports by these landlocked countries, this gesture is a way of creating socio-economic integration between the benefiting countries and Benin Republic and could further enhance African development.

Furthermore, in analysing the economic impact of continuity and change in Nigeria-Benin relations, it is essential to recognize the mutual impact of Nigeria's border closure to the economies of both countries. The impact is mutual because while Nigeria's border closure policy was targeted at Benin Republic, it also affected the Nigerian economy especially in terms of inflation. For example, while the border closure of August 2019 caused a 60% increase in local rice consumption, 30 % decrease in domestic fuel consumption and 56% increase in the revenue of the Nigeria Customs Service, it also resulted in the price increase of consumer goods in Nigeria, pushing inflation from 11.22% to 11.61%; (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). Additionally, the smuggling of textile materials into Nigeria through Benin Republic has

contributed greatly to the collapse of indigenous textile industries (Maiwada and Renne, 2013) while the non-medical use of often adulterated Tramadol has led to a rise in mortalities and hospital admissions in Nigeria; (klein, 2019).

Furthermore, an economic overview of Nigeria-Benin Republic relations is not complete without analysing the state of trade and investment between both countries. Currently, the balance of investments for both countries is in favour of Nigeria; as records appear to show that there are probably more Nigerian-owned businesses in Benin Republic than there are Beninoise businesses in Nigeria. A list of the major Nigerian-owned businesses in Benin Republic is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: List of Major Nigerian Businesses in Benin Republic**

Business	Year of Entry	Area of Interest
Dangote Group	2011	Manufacturing
United Bank for Africa	2005	Finance
Access bank	2007	Finance
Guinness Nigeria	2015	Food and Beverage
Zenith Bank	2007	Finance

Source: Author's tabulation based on data garnered from several internet sources.

Suffice it to mention that there is hardly any major business in Nigeria owned by Benin Republic. Rather, a bulk of Benin Republic's contributions to the Nigerian economy has largely been in the area of providing infrastructure for use by Nigerian businesses. Some of these infrastructures are listed below:

- a. The Cotonou Port which is used by many Nigerian businesses for the import of raw materials or the export of manufactured goods.
- b. The Trans-Benin Corridor which is useful for transport and logistics companies in the facilitation of commerce between both countries.
- c. Ecobank Transnational Incorporated which is headquartered in Togo but operates both in Nigeria and Benin Republic for the purpose of facilitating payments and rendering other financial services to businesses in both countries.
- d. Seme City which is an innovation and technology hub that encourages entrepreneurial collaboration between some Beninoise startups and their Nigerian counterparts.
- e. The National Cotton Company of Benin (SONAPRA) which interacts with Nigerian businesses involved in cotton trade and processing.

As we hinted earlier, the dominant impression is that bilateral relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic have been in favour of Nigeria. However, this does not appear to be the case in the area of trade. In terms of trade, Golub et al. (2019) confirm through calculations based on data received from the Government of Benin Republic that Nigerian exports to Benin Republic were quite smaller when compared to Beninoise exports to Nigeria. Three

explanations seem to be responsible for this: The first is that a majority of trade exchanges between both countries is informal and difficult to measure due to intense smuggling. The second is that Petroleum constitutes the majority of Nigerian exports to Benin Republic and about 80% of it is supplied informally (Golub et al. (2019)). The third explanation is that the Beninoise appear to be more diversified when it comes to exports to Nigeria. This diversity could be seen easily in the larger number of items they export to Nigeria which include used cars, used clothing, rice, poultry etc. However, Tables 3 and 4 show the disparity in Nigeria-Benin Republic exports from 2009-2018 using approximated values. The values are in US\$ million.

**Table 3: Benin Republic's Estimated Official Exports to Nigeria (2009-2018) in US\$ million**

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Value	170	226	46	41	70	49	39	27	74	75

Source: Author's tabulations based on World Bank data.

**Table 4: Nigeria's Estimated Official Exports to Benin Republic (2009-2018) in US\$ million**

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Value	30	47	44	52	38	42	55	28	52	60

Source: Adapted from the calculations of Golub et al. (2019), using data procured from the Government of Benin Republic.

## Findings

Tables 3 and 4 summarize the fact that Nigeria has a tremendous job to do in terms of maximising her relations with Benin Republic. As it stands, the general impression is that Nigeria's economic, defence/security and diplomatic relations with Benin Republic is in favour of Nigeria mainly due to her size, the strength of her military in the West African sub-region and her strategic position as the largest market in West Africa. However, while the impression may be true for other sectors, it is clear that the economic benefits of relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic are clearly in favour of Benin Republic. One reason that could be adduced for this is Benin Republic's identification and development of her area of comparative advantage over Nigeria; vis-à-vis the entreport economic policy which is the bane of her economy. Added to this is the observation by Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) that about 80% of all goods imported into Benin Republic from other countries are likely to be smuggled into Nigeria.

Furthermore, as it has been further observed by Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020), smuggling of goods into Nigeria accounts for about 20% of the GDP of Benin Republic. This seems to explain why the country catches cold any time Nigeria tightens security at her borders with Benin Republic; so that even when the officials in Porto Novo appeal for the reopening of Nigerian borders with their country, it should not be seen by the Nigerian authorities as a gesture borne out of the desire for enhanced cooperation, African unity or good neighbourliness

as often touted, but only in terms that are purely economic. Consequently, Nigeria has to reprioritize her economics to counterbalance this trend. In this light, the removal of fuel subsidy is seen to be in the right direction to discourage the idea of petroleum products smuggling but beyond that, Nigeria must develop her many inland ports which lie fallow especially in the southern part of the Country, in order to not only reduce the influx of goods through Benin Republic but also to fully participate in the maritime commerce along that corridor and expand her revenue base.

Finally, local production of cars, food, clothing and other items must be vigorously pursued by the Nigerian authorities to counterbalance the enormous gains which Benin Republic rips off Nigeria through diversification of exports. All these would go a long way to enhance Nigeria's benefits in her relations with Benin Republic.

### **Conclusion**

The paper surveyed the bilateral relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Using the prisms of the economy, defence/security and diplomacy, it was observed that both countries have the potential to maximise the benefit of relations by tapping into the cultural and historical commonalities which they both share. As part of the benefit of relations, Nigeria needed the cooperation of Benin Republic to boost border security and enhance the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that regularly pour into the Country while Benin Republic was best positioned to benefit economically from Nigeria due to her proximity to the latter which is the largest market in West Africa. However, it was further observed that while the defence/security and diplomatic aspects of Nigeria-Benin Republic relations may have been in favour of Nigeria, the country was lagging behind in the economic sector. Consequently, the paper identified areas of possible concentration for Nigeria's maximization of economic relations with Benin Republic, and made necessary recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the foregoing, it is recommended that Nigeria should:

- a. leverage cultural and linguistic commonalities with Benin Republic to enhance border security.
- b. Propose the setting up of a Nigeria – Benin Permanent Joint Commission on border security, customs, trade and commerce.
- c. Identify and develop areas of comparative advantage to enhance the economic aspect of relations with Benin Republic.
- d. Adopt a “Nigeria first” policy regarding bilateral relations with Benin Republic.
- e. Consistently review the price of petrol in Benin Republic to make informed adjustments that would discourage smuggling.

f. Diversify ports infrastructure and develop inland waterways to boost participation in sub-regional maritime commerce.

## Bibliography

- Abegunde, O. and Fabiyi, R. (2020). Nigeria-Benin Border Closure: Implications for Economic Development in Nigeria. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, 2(4). Retrieved from <https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jhsss/article>.
- Abiodun, T. F. (2021). Untold Impacts of Nigeria's Land Borders Closure Policy on Border Communities, Economy, and Security in West African Sub-region. *International Journal of Research in Education and Sustainable Development*, 1(1).
- Adebayo, I. et al. (2013). Nigerian Communities Lament Border Closure. *Daily Trust*. September. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/nigerian-communities-lament-over-border-closure>.
- Adeniyi, A. (2017). *The Human Cost of Uncontrolled Arms in Africa*. London: Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, OXFAM.
- Adeyinka, A. M. (2014). Trans-border Movement and Trading Activities Across Nigeria-Benin Republic Border. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1).
- Aduloju, A. A. & Omolara, V. A. (2017). Informal Trade and Border Relations between Nigeria and Benin. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net>.
- Afolayan, A. A. (2013). Trans-border Movement and Trading: A Case Study of a Borderland in Southwestern Nigeria. In Afolayan A. A. and Labo, A, (Eds.) *Trans-border Studies*. Ibadan: Institut Francais de Recherche en Afrique-Nigeria (French Institute for Research in Africa).
- Ake, C. (1981). *A Political Economy of Africa*. Nigeria: Longman.
- Akhigbe, M. O. (1991). The Challenge of Parallel Administration Along the Borders: The Lagos State Viewpoint. In Asiwaju, A. I. and Igue, O. J. (Eds.). *Nigeria-Benin Trans-border Cooperation*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Akinyemi, V. O. & Aduloju, A. (2017). Informal Trade and Border Relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic. *IFE Journal of International Affairs*, 3(1).
- Akpan, I. E. et al. (2019). *Cross-border Flows and Security between Nigeria and Benin Republic*. Mauritius: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Awodola, B. & Ayuba, C. (2015). *Terrorism in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram*. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*.

- Azeez, W. (2002). Nigeria, Benin Republic Sign Bilateral Agreement on Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. The Cable Business.
- Badmus, I. A. (2010). Oiling the Guns and Gunning the Oils: Violence, Arms Proliferation and the Destruction of Nigeria's Niger Delta. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 2(1).
- Benjamin et al. (2015). Informality, Trade Policies and Smuggling in West Africa. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 30(3).
- Blum, C. (2014). Cross-border Flows between Nigeria and Benin: What are the Challenges for Human Security? Abuja: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Business Day. (2018). Nigeria, Benin Sets Up Joint Committee Against Smuggling. Lagos, July 25.
- Dahiru, A. (2003). Neighbourhood and Nigeria Foreign Policy: A Focus on Nigeria-Benin Security Relations. *M.Sc Dissertation*. Sokoto: Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University.
- Daily Trust. (2018). Nigeria, Benin Republic to Improve Trade Relations. Abuja, May 6.
- Dioka, L. C. (1991). Trade and Culture Across the Nigeria-Benin Border: Focus on Gun, Badagry and Porto Novo. In Asiwaju, A. I. and Igue, O. J. (Eds.). *Nigeria-Benin Trans-border Cooperation*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Dogarawa, L. B. (2013). Overview of the Socioeconomic Implications and Management of Product Faking and Adulteration. *Greener Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 3(3).
- Golub, S. S. et al. (2019). Benin's Informal Trading with Nigeria. Dakar: Laboratoire d'Analyse Regionale et d'Expertise Sociale (LARES).
- Golub, S. S. (2012). Entrepot Trade and Smuggling in West Africa: Benin, Togo and Nigeria. *The World Economy*, 35(9).
- Golub, S. S. (2015). Informal Cross-border Trade and Smuggling in Africa. *Handbook on Trade and Development*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Golub, S. S. et al. (2019). *The Effects of Nigeria's Closed Borders on Informal Trade with Benin*. Retrieved from <https://brookings.edu/blog/Africa-in-focus/2019/10/29>
- Hoffman, L. N. & Melly, P. (2018). Incentives and Constraints of Informal Trade between Nigeria and its Neighbours. *West African Papers*, No 16, Sahel Research Group. Florida: University of Florida and OECD.



- Hoffman, L. N. & Melly, P. (2015). Nigeria's Booming Borders: The Drivers and Consequences of Unrecorded Trade. *Chatham House Report*.
- Isyaku, S. S. (2017). A Legacy of Peaceful Coexistence: Historico-Political and Economic Perspectives of Nigeria-Benin Relations. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*. January.
- Mohammed, L. (2019). Exercise Swift Response. *Being a Speech by the Honourable Minister of Information and Culture at the Border on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> November*.
- Mohammed, U. F. et al. (2019). *Border Security and Changing Pattern of Nigeria-Benin Relations: An Overview*. India: Kamla Raj.
- Munshi, N. (2019). *Smuggled Rice Makes Mockery of Nigeria's Farming*. Retrieved from <https://amp.ft.com/content/c2636fca-86b05-11eg-97ea-05ac2431f453>
- Nwokedi, E. (1991). Nigeria-Benin Relations: The Joy and Anguish of Bilateralism. *Geneve-Afrique: Acta Africana*, 29(1), pp 33-52. Leiden University Catalogue.
- Ogunlesi, T. (2020). *Notes on Nigeria's Land Border Closure*. August 2019-Dec 2020.
- Okeke, V. O. S. & Oji, R. O. (2014). The Nigerian State and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Northern Part of Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Social Research*, 4(1).
- Omeh et al. (2022). Bilateral Trade and Politico-administrative Border Relations in Africa: An Analysis of the Case of Nigeria and Benin Republic. *Review of African Political Economy*, 42(173).
- Omitola, B. (2014). Between Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen: Organized Crime and Insecurity in Nigeria. *Paper Presented at the Fifth Institute of Security Studies Conference on Crime and Crime Reduction*, Sandton, South Africa, 14-15 August.
- Omolara, V. A. (2019). Porous Borders and Increasing Human Trafficking in West Africa: Issues and Challenges. *International Journal of Social Science Research*.
- Oyediran, O. (1978). *Survey of Nigerian Affairs, 1975*. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, NIIA.
- Raballand, G. & Mjekiqi, E. (2010). Nigeria's Trade Policy Facilitates Unofficial Trade and Impacts Negatively on Nigeria's Customs Efficiency and Economy. In *Putting Nigeria to Work*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Rasaki, R. A. (1991). The Challenge of Parallel Administration Along Borders. The Ogun State View-point. In Asiwaju, A. I. and Igue, O. J. (Eds.). *Nigeria-Benin Trans-border Cooperation*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Smith, A. (1776). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. London. W. Strahan and T. Cadell.

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The Social Psychology of Groups*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2006). *Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations*. UNESCO Online Digital Library.

United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime. (2006). *Measures to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in Benin, Nigeria and Togo*. September.

Balliet, D., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2014). *How and When Reward and Punishment Promote Cooperation: An Interdependence Theoretical Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

World Bank. (2024). *Benin Republic Trade Summary Data (2009-2018)*. Retrieved from <https://wits.worldbank.org>.