**Theme:** Assessing the effects of changes in policy on the food system

**Title:** Effects of the border closure policy along the rice value chain

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**BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES:**

Nigeria is the Africa’s leading consumer of rice with per capita consumption rice of 35kg (Ojo,2019; KPMG, 2019). In 2018, about 7 million tonnes of rice was estimated to have been consumed while the level of production was at about 3.7 million tonnes hence making rice importation as means of meeting up with the deficit and the ever-increasing demand of rice for consumption in Nigeria. Nigeria accounts for 25% of Africa’s import thereby holding the position as the top importer of rice in Africa (Udemeze,2018). Due to the effect of the costs of importation, there has been implementation of policies regarding the import of rice into the country, these policies oscillate between increase in tariff placed on rice and total ban on import through border closures (Asiru *et al*,2018). The latest closure of all land borders by the Government of Nigeria was in September 2019 and this has affected the importation of rice to Nigeria as well as the entire rice value chain in the country. This study is aimed at understanding how the border closure has affected the rice value chain.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

This study engaged a mixed method research approach to elicit data from 3 categories of stakeholders along the rice value chain in Ibadan. A semi-structured interviewer administered questionnaire was used to obtain information on rice consumption and coping strategies among 227 low-income households, Key Informant Interview was conducted among 8 retailers and wholesalers of rice at Bodija International market to understand rice distribution and competitiveness between locally produced rice and imported rice, a Focused Group Discussion was conducted among 6 rice farmers to understand the production, distribution and sales of locally produced rice and how border closure has affected their farming systems as well.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:**

The average income of the respondents interviewed at the household level was 20,000±200naira and more than half (53.4%) earn between 20,000-40,000 monthly. Four out every 10 go to the market more than once a week, while a quarter visits the market just once a week. Six out of 10 of the respondnets reported to have consciously reduced their frequency of rice consumption after border closure and the main reasons attributed for the reduction were high cost and poor quality of locally produced rice. Upon the assessment of pattern of rice consumption before border closure, it was found out that more than half (51.5%) consumed rice on a daily basis, 27.8% consumed 4-6 times a week, and 20.7% consumed rice 2-3 times a week. After border closure, a drastic decrease from 51.5% to 9.7% was observed in daily rice consumption and an increase in the proportion that consumed rice 2-3 times a week to 58.1%. It was further revealed that a new category who consumed rice rarely and once a week (1.3% and 8.4% respectively) emanated after the border closure. About 62% indicated to have substituted rice with other alternatives such as beans, spaghetti, yam, Yam flour (*amala*) and mashed maize (*egbo*). Apart from the consumption of rice alternatives, other coping strategies engaged sequel to border closure are reliance on less expensive food, consumption of less preferred food, reduction in portion size, purchase of food on credit and reliance on family and friends for food.

The findings from the retailers and wholesalers of rice revealed that since the border closure, there has been increase in the local production of rice but comes in three grades; the low grade which are not destoned, the medium grade with little stones and high grade which are branded and packaged with international standard. The retailers and wholesalers reported increase in demand for locally produced rice in the first three months after border closure and this was attributed to inability of foreign rice to get to the markets via the closed borders but by the fourth month, the foreign rice began to find its way to the local markets hence leading to low demand for local rice despite the surge in production. It was further revealed that there was drastic increase in the prices of substitute foods such as spaghetti, noodles and yam. Although most of the retailers and wholesalers of rice were not against the border closure but they are more concered about the inconsistency in the policy on border closure and compromise by the security officials manning the land borders which often lead to fluctuation in the supply and demand for the foreign rice hence affecting the demand and price for the local rice. Many of the farmers were subsistence rice farmers and lack the capacity to cultivate rice on a large scale, although many attempted to increase their production but were confronted with low demand due to inferior quality when compared to foreign rice. They attributed the low quality to lack of equipment needed for the processing stage. The low demand and excess supply of locally produced rice leads to huge financial loss on the part of the retailers who eventually have to sell local rice at a price lower than the cost price and this in turn leave little or no profit for the farmers.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

This study reveals that the decision of Nigerian government to close its land borders has led to reduction in rice consumption and increase in the consumption and cost of rice substitutes. Although there was increase in the production of local rice at the early phase of the border closure but an eventual decrease was seen due to low demand. While the consumers are against the border closure, both the retailers and wholesalers as well as rice farmers were not against the border closure. It is recommended that government should create enabling farming environment for rice farmers and address the fluctuation in demand and supply by regulating the price of food commodities especially rice being sold at the market level.

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Figure indicating the change in frequency of rice consumption before and after the border closure