

Sustainability of Borders in a Post-COVID-19 World

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has, in many ways, redefined the discourse on borders. While some countries advocate for state centrism which views the functionality of borders as barriers to the entrance of ‘others’, some other countries view borders as bridges for closer human connectivity, a functional tool for combating racism. Globalisation has created a balance between the two blocs; borders now act as filters that permit significant connections between people while keeping threats out. The novel COVID-19 disease has, however, in an unprecedented manner, triggered border closures around the world; the globalisation of public health-related issues has redefined borders, as can be seen in Europe, which saw its member states closing their internal borders and by the extension the collective borders of the Union. This research will use secondary data to analyse the development of the Covid-19 disease situation and the resulting impact on refugees and, most importantly, borders; our findings reveal that though the disease demands closed borders on public health grounds, the situation is being used as a tool by policymakers to institutionalise extreme exclusionary measures, which may be sustained post-COVID-19. This paper opposes this move and advocates for the sustainability of the open border system post-COVID-19 due to its benefits.

KEYWORDS Sustainability; open borders; COVID-19; pandemic

Introduction

The health crisis that has now spread worldwide first began as a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan’s Chinese city back in December 2019. What began with a total of 27 people presenting with fever, dry cough, and dyspnoea quickly escalated. Within a month, China had reported 170 deaths and 7,711 active cases (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2020). By the time the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus a global health crisis on January 30th 2020, it had already spread to all 31 provinces of China and resulted in at least 304 deaths and 14,380 infections (Al Jazeera 2020). The virus was declared a pandemic by WHO on March 11th almost two months after identifying the virus in Wuhan, China after a total of 118,000 cases and nearly 4,300 deaths reported in 114 countries across the world.

Shortly after the declaration of the coronavirus as a pandemic, many countries in the world began shutting down both land and air borders such that international travel

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ultimately came to a grinding halt. The closure of borders continues to be practised by countries as a preventive and ameliorative measure to ensure that the virus does not spread further than it has already done. With much of the world dependent on international travel, whether of humans or goods and services, most countries' travel ban has had significant impacts on local economies and, consequently, the global economy. Beyond crippling global economic activity, border restrictions have impacted heavily on migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, preventing them from seeking asylum and safety for fear of refolement (International Organization for Migration 2020a). Notwithstanding the challenges arising from travel restrictions, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports that some borders remained porous, thus posing the risk that increasingly desperate people will either become smugglers in order to cross borders, while others ran the risk of falling into the hands of human traffickers (IOM Research 2020), we find this is an interesting study worth researching. However, this is not the focus of this study. This article takes as its core task the problem of reframing the arguments about open borders and the sustainability of open borders in the face of the global pandemic. This article suggests that an adequate theory of open borders requires a prior and generalising theory, one that takes into account the contradictory nature of the various views related to borders and their uses, and the processes that extend social relations across time and space—from the local to global, and everything in-between. The truth, however, is that the task of debating borders, open or not, is too large a task for one article to do justice to the subject matter, but we need to begin the process somewhere. Thus, this discussion is related more to how globalisation that hitherto had led to open borders has inevitably also triggered closures due to the global health pandemic.

The borders in Africa have long been considered artificial because they were super-imposed on the African populations without their consent in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 (Foucher 2020). The result is that these colonial borders separate ethnic groups into different countries, thereby severing kinship and cultural ties. Across Africa, borders have become sites of intense deprivation and underdevelopment as they suffer from neglect from the government at the centre (Aduloju 2017). Also, borders feature an over-securitisation with the deployment of several agencies' to secure them (Scorgie-Porter 2015). However, African borders remain highly porous with the very limited demarcation of the formal borders and the existence of several informal routes for ease of ingress and egress into countries. Despite African governments' efforts to maintain strict border security measures akin to a closed border regime, the people of the border communities have ensured an open border system for the purpose of maintaining relationships with kith and kin across the border. The shared kinship ties of ethnic groups that exist on either side of the border have continued unabated despite their division into two separate countries with unique administration systems by the colonial borders. Border communities carry out intense informal cross-border trade, festivals, and traditional rites and share an affinity that is not broken irrespective of the border regions' official state policy (Asiwaju 2017). By their very nature, African borders facilitate interactions between the border communities on both sides, providing opportunities for trade, migration, and cultural linkages for kin who can cross over to the other side. Bound by similar language, culture, religion and tradition, border communities drive a bottom-up open border system wherein people move

freely across the borders, often adopting the informal porous routes. However, such a flawless open border system has proven rather tricky for African policymakers to achieve formally. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) that posits to create free movement throughout the continent to boost trade met with intense opposition from heads of state with its implementation stalled partly due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (PWC 2020). Cross-border collaboration is also quite limited with most African states taking anti-integrationist stances towards working together to resolve transnational security challenges. Thus, the open border system is informally entrenched in the African context, which takes little cognisance of the colonial borders that divide the continent into states.

In this context, the present article takes as its core task the problem of reframing the arguments about the formations of borders and their purposes. We are concerned with examining the impacts the coronavirus has had on borders, open borders. We also aim to build a discussion around how countries and international organisations are working to manage the challenges that have arisen due to the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. Ultimately, we aim to identify the challenge coronavirus poses to the move for an open border across the globe, mainly, as scientists asserted that the virus might never be eradicated.

Debates on open borders

Borders are used as a tool for the management of a state's labour market, and at the same time, borders represent foreign affairs issues and security challenges; at the same time, borders equally create identities of belonging and non-belonging (Samers 2003; Anderson, Sharma, and Wright 2009; Bauder 2011). Kukathas (2012, 4) noted that

borders are political constructs which demarcate distinct and separate jurisdictions. Thus, crossing a border does not always take one beyond the reach of the authority of one jurisdiction, it brings a person under the command (even if only temporary) of another authority.

The openness of a border goes beyond whether or not people can freely come into a jurisdiction, what matters is what they may do once they get in. He argues that if entry into a country were sufficient, it could then be said that most countries across the globe have open borders since only a few deny migrants the opportunity of entry as tourists and visitors, transit, or to stay temporarily. Therefore, the openness of a border must be assessed based on the extent to which aliens are granted entry, participate in citizens' lives, and remain in the society that has granted such entry rights (Kukathas 2012). A border can also be more open if migrants are free to enter not just for a short visit but can equally to reside, work, settle, and join the political community that the border defines. Therefore, it could be said that the openness of a border can be determined in part by the rights migrants are allowed to enjoy once he/she gains entrance into a state (Kukathas 2011). The more difficult it is to enter and settle in a state, the less open the borders are. A state could, therefore, make its borders less open by utilising a combination of measures. Such measures could be to restrict entry for a visit, study or work to only visa holders; limit the number, duration and transferability of work visas; increase the qualification requirements for entry and-or reduce the rights of accompanying family members to work; deny the right to acquire property; amongst other measures. Immigration Laws and Policies can

also be used to ensure that borders are 'closed' by erecting walls and fences, recruiting more border guards; and increasing surveillance and internal monitoring processes relating to aliens' employment without proper authorisation.

Over the years, the theme of open borders has gained much scholarly attention. Various scholars have argued against the move for open borders. These scholars have drawn so much from the literature emerging on the political theory of territorial rights (Kukathas 2012). They hold the belief that a country has the fundamental right to exclude migrants from its territory. Notably, not all researchers are focused on immigration essentially howbeit; they all proffer arguments that raise issues against the borders' openness (Miller 2007; Meisels 2009; Nine 2012). Again, some scholars have critiqued the concept of open borders from the perspective of Ryan Pevnick, who believes that immigration restrictions should be reduced and there should be a balance between open borders and absolute sovereignty (Kukathas 2012).

Kukathas (2012) argues that since humans live in territorially defined spaces with recognised geographical boundaries recognised under international law, they do not inhabit a borderless world. Therefore, advocating for open borders does not connote an argument for the elimination of borders, but for changes in how borders are construed and how the existence of borders affects those who intend to cross them. Arguing, therefore, for open borders does not necessarily connote a call for increased immigration. It is a call for expunging restrictions on the movement of persons from one territory into another. Various reasons have been put up in support of immigration, free movement and consequently open borders. Firstly, based on ethical grounds, it is an interference in others' affairs that needs to be justified. According to Benn (1988), good reasons need to be provided for denying anyone his freedom and the use of force to prevent anyone from acting. Some scholars from a materialist-Marxism point of view have criticised border restrictions in the light of promoting and reinforcing social injustices (Sassen 1988; Hess and Kasparek 2010; Brown 2014). The reason for this stance is that restriction on movement and across the borders impedes freedom most especially those of aliens who seek to travel for visitation, work, or for residency in a country where they would have gotten the opportunity to go to, and also because citizens of that particular country are prevented from associating and engaging with those aliens they would have loved to meet, make friends with, employ, and have relationships. Given the gains accrued to citizens and aliens from free movement, very sound reasons are needed to justify the prevention of doing so (Kukathas 2012).

Secondly, looking from a global lens, the benefits are so immense with a world of open borders (Kukathas 2012). According to Carens (1987), from a liberal-utilitarian point of view, the benefits accrued to migrants far outweigh the disadvantages for citizens. Migrants can make ends meet while contributing to the growth and development of whichever country's economy they find themselves, thus making it a win-win situation. This makes open borders a measure that creates greater collective utility. Therefore, this position makes it difficult to justify restrictions on migration as it can go a long way to reduce global poverty. This is because trade would create immense wealth which the poor would benefit from as they will be opportune to move to spaces that require their services more with higher remuneration. The poor societies will benefit through remittances from family members abroad, thus boosting the poorer economies. In this regard, both the rich and the poor would gain from the general prosperity, and

notably, in this system, the poor gains more than the elites. According to Clemens (2011, 84),

Gains from the elimination of migration barriers dwarf – the gains from eliminating other types of barriers. For the elimination of trade policy barriers and capital flow barriers, the estimated gains amount to less than a few per cent of world GDP. For labour mobility barriers, the estimated gains are often in the range of 50–150 per cent of world GDP.

This shows that if gains from labour mobility would yield trillions of dollars that the poor economies across the globe would benefit from, substantial reasons need to be provided as justification for restricting the free movement of people.

Thirdly, while it is apparent that immigration barriers and a threat of sanctions may discourage many from attempting to cross borders, millions will continue to make attempts (Kukathas 2012). The current reality has shown that despite the barrier and public rejection of migrants in North America and Western Europe, many still embark on such adventure (Okunade 2020). This move only puts unnecessary pressure on such states, and the process hits deep into their coffers with a less expected result. As noted by Cole (2000), controlled migration at the border may put a financial burden or political inconvenience on the state, which does not necessarily constitute a threat to its survival. This thought process provides an interesting perspective that needs further research even as it concerns migrants and the migration process.

Regions across different continents have established protocols for free movement of persons, goods, and services; there is the Schengen Agreement in Europe, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement and, the African Union Protocol on Free Movement within Africa. The Schengen Agreement was reached at a meeting attended by states such as Belgium, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg in 1985 and was named after a small community in Luxemburg (European Commission 2016). The Agreement led to abolishing all barriers that inhibit free movement of persons, services, and capital among member states. This move was a bid to create a borderless region with a single external border to benefit member states and their citizens (European Commission 2016). Member states agreed to several rules to guide their conduct concerning the Treaty. Firstly, internal borders were abolished, and no member should restrict nationals' movement from other member countries into their territory. This is because a single external border has been created with adequate policing to prevent external incursion. Secondly, the rules set out border control management within the region (European Commission 2016). The Schengen Border Code, for instance, allows member countries to tighten border controls as a result of the crisis; this comes a few years after the EU tightened its border policies as it dealt with the inflow of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the Middle East and North African (MENA) region (Koerner and Boettcher 2020).

The ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Goods, and Services relates to the West African region and predates the Schengen Agreement (Okunade and Ogunnubi 2018). The concept of ECOWAS was predicated on the success of the European Economic Community. The ECOWAS Protocol was adopted in 1979 in line with the objectives that established ECOWAS in 1975. The Protocol defines the right of Community citizens that is citizens of member states, to enter, live, and be established within the territory covered by the ECOWAS treaty. Okunade and Ogunnubi (2018) clearly explains the Treaty's

provisions, its implementation thus far and its failures. The African Union (AU) Protocol on Free Movement is the most recent Treaty signed by African leaders to facilitate continental integration and the realisation of Agenda 2063. It was a move to create a seamless border that will recognise a single passport for all African states, which will aid Africans' free movement within the continent (Okunade and Ogunnubi 2019). According to Dick and Schraven (2019), the AU Protocol thus guarantees the establishment of an African Economic Community where its members have full right of movement, right of residence, and right of establishment within Africa. The gains of the Protocol, if fully implemented, are thoroughly reviewed by Okunade and Ogunnubi (2019).

These Protocols explored above are prototypes of a move for a borderless region that aims to boost the economy and make opportunities abound for citizens of the community. The implementation process of these treaties has been challenged in a way or the other, howbeit, the outcomes have significantly been impactful and have outweighed projected pitfalls.

The permeability of borders and COVID-19

With the increased use of technology, increased international trade, and tourism, the world has become a global village. However, some have predicted that with the birthing of the global village, otherwise called a borderless world, the delineated borders of nation-states are far from dead (Weber and Pickering 2014). Borders have, in truth, become a renewed institution because of globalisation. This has been made even more manifest with the onset of the pandemic which prompted the closure of borders, stranded people within borders and behind internal boundaries, and essentially changed the former outlook as a global village to isolated hamlets behind guarded sentries.

Following the widespread of the SARS-COV-2 virus, most countries implemented a partial or total border closure, with travel, restrictions imposed prohibiting arrivals from certain areas in the world and even restricting internal movement between regions. For example, India's sudden lockdown in March 2020 led to the displacement of the rural-urban migrants who had come to large cities such as Mumbai and New Delhi to find work; thousands had to return to their villages on foot with several deaths reported along the way (Bhagat et al. 2020). Initially made to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, these restrictions have not been entirely successful in achieving the goal of preventing the outbreak from crossing international borders as is evidenced by the fact that the virus is now in almost every corner of the world, except for Antarctica (Banulescu-Bogdan, Susan, and Fratzke 2020). Regardless of this perceived failure of the impact of border restrictions, it is impossible to know precisely for how long the closures will be because, rather than easing the restrictions, it seems countries are becoming more restrictive requiring people entering or attempting to enter their territories to be quarantined for longer than the initial two weeks on arrival (Yayboke 2020). International Organization for Migration, reports that a total of 221 countries, territories and areas, have issued a total of 63,872 travel restrictions as at May 21st 2020, a three per cent increase from the restrictions recorded only four days prior on May 18th, 2020 (International Organization for Migration 2020b).

The impact of the travel bans and restrictions have been felt across the world by students, migrant workers, pilgrims, travellers, and domestic workers who have become stranded at airports and between land border entry points or at sea without means to return to their home countries (International Organization for Migration 2020). In addition to this, many people, especially asylum seekers, have been forcefully returned to their home countries, pushed back, and ultimately denied entry across different regions of the world. The IOM reports growing instances of refusals to disembark rescued individuals at sea, leaving them stranded in unsafe boats for long periods. In North America, the United States announced that it would turn away potential asylum seekers at the border it shares with Mexico in an attempt to close off its ports of entry to non-essential traffic. Similarly, Canada also stated that there would not be any hearing on asylum claims from those who enter by land from the US; likewise, in Europe, asylum hearings have been suspended (Connor 2020).

COVID-19 has also radically altered the educational sector. The impact is more severe on international students who represent a significant revenue source to educational institutions located in Europe and North America. These students, particularly from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, pay exorbitant educational fees and use it as a form of legal migration to study overseas (McKie 2020). As COVID-19 has brought most forms of mobility to a halt, international students are unable to resume studies at overseas universities abroad in 2020. Most universities have cancelled physical lectures on campuses until the summer of 2021 by which time they expect to have attained some form of certainty in the post-COVID-19 era (Ries and Wagner 2020). International students have also found themselves caught up in a maelstrom of policies which do not provide financial or otherwise aid in force-majeure situations. These students may also have experienced denial of access to health care in situations where visa renewal processes have been stalled due to the lockdown. The long-term impact on students stuck within borders, with no jobs or access to funds being sent regularly by guardians or parents has not been adequately captured in research.

The health crisis has also led to the increased presence of protection-sensitive border management. In the EU for instance, border guards were re-assigned to the regions' external borders after creating the Schengen Area; thus, governments found themselves under pressure to re-apply border infrastructure that neither existed nor been operational in decades (Eržen, Weber, and Sacchetti 2020). Further complicating this issue was that border guards neither had the right information or training in public health issues. While the EU was able to quickly clarify the role of border agencies as auxiliary and support units for public health services, many other areas have been unable to catch up. As a result of both strict border regulations and the absence of protection-sensitive border management in many places, it is projected that many migrants, asylum seekers and refugees will adopt irregular and potentially dangerous movements to access assistance and protection from smugglers. This lacuna is also projected to increase the rate of human trafficking, exploitation and abuse (International Organization for Migration 2020). Another point worth noting is that the newly imposed travel restrictions may inadvertently pose a risk to public health. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who choose to adopt irregular movements may inadvertently pose a public health risk, particularly if they have already been exposed to the virus (International Organization for Migration 2020).

Besides the direct impact on human lives, as seen with migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, the closure of borders has had a devastating impact on economies worldwide. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for example, was supposed to be one of the significant achievements on the continent this year. The agreement was set to establish a continent-wide free movement of goods starting on July 1st, however, due to indefinite closure on borders, the African Union (AU) has shifted the launch to January 1st, 2021. Also, border closures have fuelled the fear of a food crisis across Africa and other parts of the world (Bouët and Laborde 2020).

In Nigeria, the restriction on movement is projected to cause a fall in households' consumption and affect the income-generating capacity of workers engaged in the informal sector and those who work on short-term contract basis (Onyekwena and Ekeruche 2020). The ability to generate income by households will directly affect their ability to source for food and other essential goods and services. Moreover, if households cannot earn an income due to the global lockdown, many will have to endure difficult circumstances resulting from border closures and movement restrictions.

Influence of COVID-19 on the open border system

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the continued existence of the global open border system. It has upended systems with the United Nations designating the pandemic as the most potent threat to global peace since the Second World War ended in 1945 (UN News 2020a). Premised on the idea that countries could reap immense benefits from the loosening up of their restrictions on movement around their territories, the open borders system has been sustained in various forms across the world inspired by thinking in economics, sociology, geography, political science, amongst others.

Globalisation is one of the offshoots of the open border system with advanced communication and transportation technologies, leading to an interconnected global economy and sophisticated international trade. This system thrives on the free flow of goods and services across borders and the unhindered multilateral and bilateral cooperation among states. COVID-19 has, however, put the open border system under immense strain. The reactions of multiple stakeholders, including state governments, national politicians, civil society and local populations, have been very cautious and sceptical of the open border system in the wake of the pandemic. Furthermore, though, closing the border seems to be a possible way of containing the spread of the virus, many anti-migrant governments and politicians have utilised this opportunity to propagate their campaign against migrants. As a result, migrants have been successfully demonised as public health threats, leading to the shutting down of the borders (UN News 2020b). Furthermore, populist leaders have taken advantage of the situation to stoke anti-globalist tensions and xenophobia among their citizens.

A long-term consequence of these restrictions is a more closed-off world where foreigners are not welcome, and xenophobia is on the rise. The world witnessed a rise in xenophobia, particularly in the United States of America and Europe; thus, the prognosis for outsiders' socioeconomic inclusion and social cohesion is particularly bleak (Chugh 2020). Rosa and Goldstein (2020) opened the discourse on Sino-Americans' molestation in the wake of the pandemic. Blacks and other ethnic minorities have been identified as being at higher risk of contracting the virus in various places, including the United

States and the United Kingdom (Booth and Barr 2020). Xenophobia has increased tremendously across the world in the wake of the coronavirus. In particular, the Chinese have been racially profiled and discriminated against as carriers of the virus because it assumedly originated in China. This xenophobic portrayal of migrants has resulted in their harassment and intimidation, even to the extent of physical attacks as witnessed on Chinese and Asians in the United States and Africa. The inflammatory rhetoric from the President of the United States, Donald Trump further worsened this stereotyping with his remarks on the 'Wuhan Virus' and the 'Chinese Virus' leading to attacks and hate crimes against Chinese-Americans (Human Rights Watch 2020; Rosa and Goldstein 2020). Sinophobia or the fear of the Chinese has also been widespread in Europe and Africa.

The rise in xenophobia is not peculiar to the United States or Europe alone. In Africa, the UN reports that as many as 14,000 Mozambicans travelled back home from South Africa at the onset of the pandemic (United Nations, Department of Global Communications 2020). Many of these Mozambicans were labour migrants and worked in South Africa to earn their keep. There were concerns that the mass exodus of Mozambicans from South Africa would further spread the disease; however, with the UN and IOM's help, Mozambique's government has been able to curtail the spread of the virus. Still, these migrants and thousands of others who contribute to the economies of both their receiving and sending countries have been forced out of employment, losing their source of income and livelihood as restrictions tighten across borders (Bhagat et al. 2020; Chugh 2020).

Besides, the open border system has been weakened by the breakdown of trust in multilateralism as an effective way to tackle global challenges. Multilateralism is the fulcrum of the open border system due to the realisation that no state can achieve its national interests in isolation. For this reason, states have cooperated bilaterally and often on multilateral levels along the lines of security, economy, healthcare amongst others. The public health emergency created global panic and caused national governments to retreat inwards and seek individual solutions to their specific national circumstances. This approach contravenes the open border system where countries are inter-dependent and utilise their pooled resources to confront common threats (Patrick 2020). Even though COVID-19 is an existential threat to all countries, a collective response was resisted with countries adopting various and sometimes contradictory responses to the crises that treat other states with suspicion and downplay information sharing and the use of mutually beneficial multilateral platforms. In particular, multilateral organisations have been scapegoated in various forms from being considered inept in the face of these widespread health crises implicated as colluding parties with China in spreading the pandemic. The latter has mostly been the fate of the World Health Organisation that has come under scathing criticism by states led by the United States of America for its inability to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus that emanated from China. The United States has escalated the row to the extent of pulling out of the World Health Organisation after accusing it of being partisan and biased towards China (McNeil and Jacobs 2020). In Africa, Burundi has expelled officials of the WHO from its territory (Voice of America 2020). The European Union (EU) has also called for an independent probe of the WHO to evaluate its response to the crises. This form of public discredit is highly damaging to the multilateral order that upholds the open border system. The more states continue to adopt strict COVID-19 response measures including border closures, lockdowns and restrictions on movement,

the less likely they are to promote the open border system with the resultant free trade and globalisation.

Disruptions in the global supply chain have also affected the pandemic on open borders (Bhagat et al. 2020). Production cycles are much more dispersed worldwide due to multinational corporations' emergence as significant players in the global economy. These corporations, although often based in the developed world of Europe and North America, situate their manufacturing plants in lower-income countries with large pools of potential labour such as China, parts of southeast Asia and Africa or out-source parts of the production cycles to other smaller companies around the world (Sengupta 2020). Consumers can get their products from these multinationals because of the ubiquity of the open borders system that allows for faster travel and communication; closed borders mean that raw materials and processed goods are unable to circulate as freely as before (Babatunde 2020). This is easily reflected in the global shortage of personal protective equipment that began at the pandemic onset and persisted to date (Sengupta 2020). China, which was then touted as the source of the coronavirus, quickly put in place a nationwide lockdown that created major disruptions considering that China is one of the significant producers of consumer goods and a host of manufacturing plants for several multinational corporations (Sengupta 2020; Babatunde 2020). For instance, over 200 Fortune 500 Global companies, which are some of the world's largest companies, have a direct presence in Wuhan, China which was the origin of the COVID-19 virus (Deloitte 2020). This has impeded the production process and the transportation and distribution of these goods across the globe. In a way, international trade is adversely affected.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse effect on the borderlands. People of the borderlands usually depend on the close interactions with their neighbours across the border. Based on proximity as well as cultural ties that may be shared with communities across the border, there is often a synergy between both communities that are not shared with their respective state capitals (Lamarque 2020). Thus, borderlands feature a lot of cross-border workers, traders as well as shared infrastructure. This, in no small measure, contributes to the functioning of the open border system where people and goods are free to move across these borders with little or no hindrance to movements. The pandemic brought such activities to a halt. In developing countries such as Nigeria, the borders were completely closed, effectively shutting down any form of interaction between the borderlanders (Lamarque 2020). This situation also persisted in the European Union, where the closure of internal borders left cross-border workers stranded. The brunt of the border closures is borne disproportionately by the borderlands rather than the other parts of the countries.

This is despite the fact that the decisions to shut down the borders are usually taken in the countries' capital cities, safely away from the borderlands where the impact of such shutdowns is most felt.

Fortunately, the pandemic presents and exposes one of the numerous benefits of an open border system even though, some states and politicians have latched on the current global situation to preach their gospel against open border system and particularly against migrants. All over the world, local and international policymakers have been exposed to their migrant workers' benefits. The global lockdowns led to restrictions on movement, excluding essential workers who were deemed most critical to providing

care for both the infected and the entire populace. These essential workers included medical doctors, nurses, care workers in elderly homes, grocery store workers and pharmacies. In the developed world, mainly Europe and North America, a large number of these care workers are migrants. In the United Kingdom, many care workers in nursing homes, homes for the elderly, and others are migrant workers (Ramsay 2020). Hitherto, undignified labour usually carried out by migrants has also become highly valuable, such as hospital cleaners, janitors and housekeepers with the World Health Organisation and several policymakers including in the United States praising them for working to ensure sanitation in the hospitals which prevented widespread community transmissions. In Europe and the United States, migrant doctors and health care workers have been crucial to leading the fight against the pandemic (OECD 2020). Other migrants have contributed their skills, brought their communities closer and offered help to the ailing in their host communities. The pivotal role that migrants have played at the frontlines of the response to the virus and building resilience in their host communities shows that they are useful human resources and not a burden to the host countries (Reidy 2020). This, in turn, strengthens the case for the sustenance of the open border system, particularly in the post- lockdown era.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the analysis of states' responses to stem the tide of the pandemic has shown that closure of the borders against trade and movement of people became imperative in curbing the continuous transmission of the virus. This explains and validates the action taken by states across the globe on border closure. This did not exempt regions that have an existing agreement for a borderless region such as the Schengen region in Europe, ECOWAS region in West Africa, EAC region in East Africa, amongst others. While this action is imperative for the present situation, the notion of state-centrism has re-emerged and has manifested in the hoarding of medical supplies from producing countries to consuming countries in need of those supplies worldwide. Some states' actions in intercepting medical supplies and offering to pay more for those supplies have been a show of superiority. This has put some states at a disadvantaged position as they have been limited in their response to their citizens' health needs.

Pathetic to note is that various countries have utilised this period as a window of opportunity to propagate and implement their anti-migrant policies. As such, migrants are being demonised and attacked in some countries. However, migrants have proven to be a huge source of support globally through their activities in various capacities ranging from volunteering as supporting staff in adult homes, cooking and distributing food to frontline workers, amongst others. This shows that migrants are willing to give their all, in whatever situation that springs up. In the light of the preceding, this study, therefore, suggests that rather than countries most especially countries of the Global North rejuvenating state-centric notion, this is a time when countries across the globe should unite as one in the fight against this common enemy. This should reflect in the way countries interact and share knowledge and update on the potentials of health-impacting problems and outbreaks in a timely fashion. Perhaps, it is time to overhaul the World Health Organisation and its dependence on funding from nations worldwide and politics.

Again, given the benefits that can be derived from an open border system, states should not manipulate the pandemic to support and implement policies targeted at securitisation and militarisation of borders while implementing anti-migrant policies well beyond the incidence of COVID-19. Against the position of many countries in the Global North, this study has established that open borders present huge gains for migrants and countries alike. Therefore, given the present situation that genuinely war-rants border closure globally, the open border system should not be thwarted to safe-guard easy post-COVID-19 recovery.

Disclosure statement

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