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Nigerian Expatriates' Integration in Host Countries and its Implication for Nigeria's Foreign Policy Agenda

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyse the challenges faced by Nigerian expatriates in the quest to get integrated in their host countries and the implications it has on Nigeria's foreign policy agenda. The problem arises due to the increasing mobility of Nigerian expatriates abroad, challenges faced by them and potential impacts such as an increasing mobility bears for the international standing and strategic interests of Nigeria. The broad objective is to examine the effects that integration of Nigerian expatriates has on the implementation of foreign policy objectives of Nigeria. The study uses primary data gathered from random sampling through Google form sent to a famous Nigerian in Diaspora (NIDO)'s WhatsApp group. Also, secondary data from the literature, including academic journals, books, newspapers, and historical accounts, were used. The major findings of study are: that the Nigerian expatriates' integration is hampered by a range of issues like xenophobia and legal restrictions on access to critical socio-economic activities needed for effective engagement in diplomacy. The study offers, among other recommendations, increased institutional support for diaspora engagement to break legal and socio-economic barriers, partnership with the host governments and organizations that can aid maximum integration in the host countries. These can be achieved through cultural exchange and educational programs put in place under citizens diplomacy to ensure that there is maximum utilization of Nigerian experts for the development of foreign policy agenda of the country.

Keywords: Nigerian expatriates, integration, foreign policy agenda, diaspora diplomacy, economic cooperation

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Introduction

In an interconnected world, the phenomenon of diaspora communities is fast gaining importance as one of the most vital factors that impacts their respective home country foreign policy agenda (Adeyemi, 2016). Equally, like most diaspora groups, Nigerian expatriates have a great role in influencing Nigeria's external relations through impactful integration in their host country. Integration, in this regard, implies acceptability of Nigerians by their host communities. By this integration, Nigerians abroad can contribute their quotas to the wellbeing of their host countries, as well as be agents of positive impact for Nigerian foreign policy agenda. Being aware of the dynamics with respect to this integration and impacts on the foreign policy of Nigeria is of great essence to the policymakers, scholars, and practitioners at large.

The fundamental objective of this work is to look at how the integration of Nigerian expatriates in host countries plays out and, therefore, affects the country's foreign policy agenda. This can be understood from the standpoint of 'citizen diplomacy' as one of Nigerian foreign policy thrusts. Citizen diplomacy depicts a situation whereby citizens are coordinated to serve as agents of foreign policy actualization. Wherever the citizens are, they promote the interests of their country abroad and bring positive impacts back home (Madueke, 2007). This focuses on different angles of their involvement between diaspora communities, host societies, and the Nigerian government on issues that cut across diplomatic, economic, and socio-cultural factors. Such complexities can give insight into the mechanisms of how diaspora engagement shapes Nigeria's global engagements. The pragmatic issues include those of legal barriers, discrimination, and social and economic disparities, which act as hurdles that otherwise would permit full integration of the diaspora and maximal utilization of potential contributions.

From a global perspective, the phenomenon of diaspora engagement in foreign policy is not restricted to Nigeria. Whether it is America, India, China, or UK, countries engage their diaspora extensively for the promotion of respective national interests. In today's world, when the diaspora becomes a vital source of the country's image promotion in its economic cooperation and strategic partnership, Nigeria began to host waves of outward migration primarily because of economic opportunities, political instability, and educational pursuits. It consists of professionals, entrepreneurs, students, skilled workers, and others scattered all over the globe.

Critical gaps, however, do exist in our understanding of both the subject and impact of diaspora involvement on Nigeria's foreign policy agenda despite

the growing awareness. Some of the studies do focus on one or another aspect of the diaspora contributions like remittances or cultural diplomacy, there is scanty comprehensive analysis of the overall dynamics. In a bid to bridge this gap, the paper synthesizes the idea of integration of Nigerian expatriates and the corresponding implications for Nigeria's external relations.

The significance of addressing these gaps is in the potential gains that may accrue to Nigeria from effective diaspora engagement. In addition, knowledge of the challenges that Nigerian expatriates experience in host countries would be quite useful towards coming up with policy interventions that may assist easier integration of the Nigerian diaspora and harness their fullest potential for the purpose of the country's foreign policy. The study has thus been stimulated to join the argument of theory and practice in diaspora engagement. Better coordination of the diaspora community is, therefore, required so that Nigeria is easily able to tap into the resources, expertise, and networks needed to upscale and broaden the scope of its diplomatic outreach and increase investment and promotion for national development. For example, Gamlen (2008) is of the opinion that the government on its side should be outwardly oriented in order to have proactive policies that not only recognize but harness the potential of diaspora communities. Similarly, "super-diversity" was the idea that Vertovec (1999) located within diaspora communities, hence the necessity for interrogating the heterogeneity of the population that places similar challenges in meeting their requirements or interests.

It is on these grounds, that this study intends to examine the existing gap with regards to the integration of Nigerian expatriates in host countries and implications that this may portend for external relations with Nigeria. Subsequently, this is premised on the choice to equip the policymakers, scholars, and practitioners with actionable insight into how Nigeria can optimize its engagement with the Diaspora for national development and achieving its foreign policy objectives.

Statement of the Problem

Despite contributions made by diaspora, many of which pertain to remittance or cultural diplomatic exchanges, there is still a gap in overall analysis on a comprehensive scale that embodies and reflects their wider implication for diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and national identity. For example, Smith et al. (2021) had evaluated remittances from Nigerian expatriates, paying attention to the economic effect these funds have on Nigeria's national development, without making further analysis in the field of foreign policy. The same was with the report of Migration Policy Institute

(2020), which highlighted the problems a Nigerian expatriate has in a host country but did not give a vivid picture of how these problems interrelate with Nigerian diplomatic priorities.

This was what a work by Sharkdam and Ibonye (2023) had previously advanced, in suggesting the need for some degree of gradation to fully appreciate the level of diaspora engagement in Nigeria's foreign policy, but yet to be empirically proven. All these studies taken together point toward an existing gap in our understanding, regarding the multifarious interplay of Nigerian expatriate integration vis-à-vis Nigeria's external relations, and speak pressingly about the need for further research to attend to this and be duly considered in policy decisions.

Literature Review

The integration of Nigerian expatriates in host countries and its implications for the Nigerian foreign policy agenda have attracted an increasing number of scholarly and policy-related attentions. The following review of the literature, however, provides an insightful analysis of the research materials already available for this, and it puts particular emphasis on conceptual clarification, theoretical perspectives, and empirical studies drawing our attention to the different features connected with diaspora engagement and its impact on foreign policy.

The phrase "Nigerian expatriates' integration in host countries" is integrated in the host countries, social, economic, and cultural life of Nigerian citizens living outside the motherland. This integration can be on issues of employment, education, social networks, and cultural adaptation. In this light, understanding the dynamics of this integration is, therefore, very necessary for the role played by Nigerian expatriates and their contributions toward ensuring that Nigeria attains its foreign policy objective. Vertovec (2001) has raised, with all emphasis, the issue of diversity in diaspora communities to the point that the impacts of integration are different in the home and host countries. Further, Gamlen (2008) studied "diaspora engagement policies" and emphasized that such policies define homeland-diaspora relations in view of their presumed significance.

On "Nigeria's foreign policy agenda," firstly, Agbu (2005) brings in insinuations of a history of commitment by Nigeria to Pan-Africanism, regional integration, and South-South cooperation. What that, therefore, means is that diaspora engagement defines the Nigerian foreign policy, with the most common areas of focus including diplomatic relations, economic partnership,

and cultural diplomacy (Adeyemi, 2016). Secondly, "Nigeria's foreign policy agenda" forms the core of all strategic goals, priorities, and measures applied by the Nigerian government in affirming Nigerian interest and image within the international community. These cut across the diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, cultural diplomacy, and security partnership domains. Analyzing in such a way that one is able to understand the impact of the integration of expatriates from Nigeria into the foreign policy agenda of Nigeria leads to understanding the influence of diaspora engagement in diplomatic, economic, and socio-cultural relations.

A number of authors have contributed to the discourse on some of these main concepts within diaspora engagement and foreign policy. For instance, Vertovec (2001) brings forward an example of the importance, whereas understanding their respective impacts on host and home countries. On the other hand, Gamlen (2008) deals with the concept of "diaspora engagement policies" and what they actually do with the relation between a home country and diaspora. This was explained further in the works of Awumbila and Teye (2008) on the integration of diaspora, how it emerged as a multi-dimensional concept covering social networks, identity development, and political participation. In other words, they work on laying a theoretical foundation that has something to do with understanding the complexities related to diaspora engagement and its effects on foreign policies.

Empirical Studies

The empirical studies give insights into the integration experiences and contributions of the Nigerian expatriates to the foreign policy of Nigeria. For instance, the impact of Nigerian diaspora remittances on national development had been conducted from an economic point of view by Adepoju (2010), wherein he stressed that the said remittance does contribute to poverty reduction and investment. According to Amuwo (2015), these relate to the extent of the diaspora's political activism in Nigerian democratic and governance processes and, most importantly, to their policy outcome-determining capacity.

In addition, Okafor (2018) discusses the cultural diplomacy of Nigerian expatriates in promoting Nigerian arts, literature, and food abroad. This comprises soft power projection of Nigeria in the global image. These empirical studies bring clear examples of how diaspora engagement influences Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in various sectors. Clearly, the review showed the multi-dimensional aspect of diaspora engagement and the implications of it forming part of the Nigerian foreign policy agenda. The paper, then, sets the

stage in further inquiry for the optimal engagement of Nigeria with its diaspora community as a means to advance its foreign policy objectives.

Theoretical Framework

Diaspora engagement and foreign policy are the perspectives that help to look at the ways through which integrating expatriates from Nigeria affects the foreign relations of the country. To this end, this study adopts the Realist and Constructivist theories of international relations as its guide. These theories underline the hierarchical nature of power and the national interest as sovereign determinants or benchmarks, which define the aims of foreign policy. Diaspora-related issues then follow under *realpolitik*. In the case of Nigeria, it includes the pursuit of regional hegemony and leadership of the African continent (Agbu, 2005).

Classical realism, as a theoretical approach to international relations has been attributed to the works of classical realist scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr during the mid-20th century. However, the founding principles and ideas of realism date back to ancient Greek scholars, most importantly, Thucydides and Machiavelli. Realism has great insight into the behavior of states within the international system, thus bringing to light the dynamics of power and centrality of issues in national interest and security. Thus, in this study that talks about the integration of Nigerian expatriates and its influence over the foreign policy agenda of Nigeria, the realistic theory provides a framework to understand these strategic calculations and motivations that explain state behavior. The pursuit of regional hegemony and leadership in Africa goes *pari-passu* with the realist prudence of state-centric power politics in the indefatigable quest for national security and survival.

The weakness that emanates from these two main emphases of realism, including power politics and the state-centric perspectives, is that they could potentially undermine the value of some important non-state forces, and in this case, the diaspora communities in foreign policy objectives. In addition, realism overemphasizes the focus on material factors such as military capabilities and economic resources at the expense of neglecting several ideational facets, including identity, culture, and norms.

However, since theories can complement one another, the lacking parts of Realism can be complemented with another theory, that is, Constructivism. Constructivism affirms the role of ideas, peoples' beliefs and identities in stipulating state behaviour in international relations. By integrating insights from Realism and Constructivism, it has put this study in a better position to

offer an integrated and wider understanding of how diaspora engagement cuts across the material and ideational elements in shaping the foreign policy agenda for Nigeria.

Methodology of the Study

The design of this research is a qualitative method for data collection and analysis with a view to achieving the fundamental objective of the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demography of the Respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	282	71.6
Female	112	28.4
Total	394	100
AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
18 - 30 years	69	17.5
31 – 40 years	111	28.1
41 – 50 years	135	34.3
51 years and above	79	20.1
Total	394	100
EDUCATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
No education	06	1.5
Primary	17	4.3
Secondary	68	17.3
University/Polytechnic	158	40.1
Other Institutions	145	36.8
Total	394	100
OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Employee	186	47.2
Self-employed	113	28.7
Student	71	18.0
Employer	24	6.1
Total	394	100

Source: Researchers' survey, 2024.

The above table shows that 394 respondents responded to the survey instrument, hence the analysis is based on the responses from these respondents in alliance with the major themes and sub-themes in the work.

Discussion of Findings

Table 2: Categorization of themes and sub-themes of the study

	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Economic Contributions of Nigerian Expatriates	Contributions through Remittances Investments Trade relations

2	Diplomatic Engagement and Soft Power Projection	Representation Cultural diplomacy Diaspora diplomacy
3	Political Activism and Governance	Political Advocacy and Lobbying Transnational Solidarity Diaspora Representation
4	Challenges and Limitations	Legal Barrier Discrimination and Xenophobia Socio-Economic Disparities

Source: Researchers' exposition, 2024

The study, which adopts a thematic analysis, presents its findings based on the above categorizations. The categorization was based on the understanding that foreign policy actualization is an extension of domestic policy wellness. That is, there's a strong linkage between foreign policy and domestic policy. Nigerians in diaspora serve as agent of actualizing the country's foreign policy agenda under the thrust of citizens and economic diplomacy. In this case, the citizens welfare is promoted abroad in order to reciprocate promotion of their country's interest as well as bring benefits back home.

Economic Contributions of Nigerian Expatriates

Contributions through Remittances: The most obvious contribution of Nigerian expats to the Nigerian economy is the sum of remittances that the country receives. This remains a very important source for foreign exchange and income to the households. For example, the study by Adepaju (2010) stated that remittances abroad by expatriates from Nigeria are of paramount importance to the country in poverty reduction and in the promotion of investment among citizens.

Investments: With regard to investment, Nigerian expatriates greatly contribute to the economic development through huge investments in various sectors, including real estate, telecommunications, and manufacturing. This corroborates the work of Okafor (2018) that affirmed that most Nigerian entrepreneurs abroad prefer to invest in start-ups and small companies at home, which pushes further growth in jobs and the economy.

Trade Relations: The Diaspora networks of Nigeria facilitate trade relations between the country and host nations through bilateral trade partner links and access to markets. Nigerians in the Diaspora are known to work as intermediaries or business transaction facilitators that deal with the use of their networks and knowledge to help facilitate cross-border trade (Adeyemi, 2016).

This also alludes to the position of some of the respondents who claimed to have facilitated business ideas and joints ventures between citizens in host countries and their compatriots at home.

Diplomatic Engagement and Soft Power Projection

Representation: One of the greatest country representations by its citizens has been considered a significant role in which the Nigerian expatriates engage in the promotion of foreign diplomatic interests of Nigeria as informal ambassadors and number one lobbyists for Nigerian interests, this is also known as citizen diplomacy (Abdulkadir, 2024). For instance, Nigerian Diaspora organizations (NIDO) will often engage the government of the host country and international organizations on policy advocacy that is beneficial to Nigeria (Amuwo, 2015). Eighty-five of the total respondents also affirmed this position.

Cultural diplomacy: Through the sensitization of this cultural diplomacy, Nigerian expatriates are able to undertake exhibitions of arts, music festivals, and culinary events, among many more activities. In so doing, they expose the diverse cultural heritage of Nigeria, meant to contribute to building a positive perception of the country in foreign lands (Okafor 2018).

Diaspora Diplomacy: Diaspora diplomacy will feature Nigerian expatriates who are engaged in efforts that aim at the consolidation of their motherland's bridge to host nations. They do this through the promotion of cultural links, people-to-people relationship building, and cross-cultural understanding. For instance, a respondent who claimed to have worked in Nigerian embassy in Canada and Dubai noted that Nigerians in the diaspora have converged in collaboration with various missions in holding cultural exchange and networking events in recent past. His position was highlighted in a study conducted by Adeyemi (2016), who identified diaspora diplomacy as one of the strongest tools Nigerian governments can use to advance its foreign policy.

Political Activism and Governance

Political Advocacy and Lobbying: Nigerian expatriates engage in political advocacy and lobbying at very high intensities, with an intention to control policy outcomes in their home country. They lobby for electoral reforms, good governance, and human rights protections, utilizing networks and other resources in proportions equal to those (Amuwo, 2015). All the respondents except one canvassed for the activation of voting platform by INEC for Nigerians in Diaspora.

Transnational Solidarity: Together with fellow native Nigerians who were based abroad, the Nigerian expatriates expressed transnational solidarity with

the political movements and civil society organizations back in their country. For example, Nigerian diaspora communities are always able to rally support for grassroots campaigns and advocacy efforts through resourcing and expertise (Adeyemi, 2016). Even though, this has not made much positive impact, its negative impact was felt by the Nigerian government under Muhammadu Buhari during the “Endsars protest” in 2020, when some Nigerians abroad were fingered to be bankrolling protesters at home. This was discovered through forensic audit of cash inflow from some foreign accounts to local ones. However, none of the respondents acceded to the claim of the federal government.

Diaspora Representation: The Nigerian expatriates look for representation in the Nigerian governance structures. A number of respondents (Respondents, 7, 14, 95, 109, 226, 381) categorically stressed this need. This includes setting up the mechanism of diaspora voting and diasporas' representation in the legislative bodies to reflect their aspiration for political inclusion and representation (Agbu, 2005).

Challenges and Limitations

Legal Barrier: Most of the time, the Nigerian expatriates are legally barred from the host country. It therefore implies that some of the administrative hindrances that would always be witnessed may include things to do with immigration, work permits, or the need for residency. These barriers at some point limit a person from getting fully integrated with the host societies, and hence the development agenda of Nigeria goes unmet. From the survey break down, a total of three hundred and twenty-six respondents affirmed that this challenge occurs from time to time.

Discrimination and Xenophobia: All the respondents affirmed that in the host countries, Nigeria expatriates could be victims of discriminations, including but not limited to social exclusion, marginalizations, and identity threats in a foreign land. The worst thing is that these negative stereotypes and prejudices can sabotage the efforts of diaspora integration and hence diplomatic engagement.

Socio-Economic Disparities: Socio-economic disparities among the Nigerian expatriates vis-à-vis host country nationals could affect the diaspora integration outcome and, in effect, the socio-political participation of the two. This sometimes involve varying educational levels, differences in income levels, access to healthcare, and social services affecting contributions and diaspora engagement between the host and home countries (Respondents 4, 7, 13, 18, 29,

33, 84, 177, 200, 234, 289, 312, 345). The work of Mustapha-Jaji and Adesina-Uthman (2023) also conformed with this position.

Deducing from the above themes and sub-themes, there is substantial prove that Nigerian expats are playing pivotal roles towards shaping the foreign policy agenda of Nigeria through multifaceted contributions. The challenges facing this group of Nigerians abroad are gigantic, but they are known to be active in all the facets of economic, diplomatic, political activism, and even cultural diplomacy. Coping with the challenges and potential of the diaspora community is very critical in harnessing their fullest contribution to Nigeria's global engagement and national development objectives.

Conclusion

This study presents the key roles played by Nigerian expatriates toward the shaping of the foreign policy agenda in view of the economic, diplomatic, political, and cultural contributions. However, due to legal hindrances, discrimination, and socio-economic disparities, Nigerian expatriates have continued to face different problems in regard to their loyalty to support Nigeria in the development objectives and rise in global engagements. To overcome these challenges, the study suggests complete institutional support and the general relation to economic engagement, increase in diplomatic outreach, support in relation to political participation, and encouragement for the cultural exchange of the country. With these in place, it is hoped that the country will be assisted in a better way to harness the expertise and resources of the diaspora toward the realization of foreign policy objectives and sustainable development.

Recommendations

The Government of Nigeria should build support institutions by way of creating separate agencies or departments for coordinating Diaspora Affairs. The institutions will implement means of communication, support services, and policies that will be used to take care of the expatriates' needs and complaints. Nigeria should develop conducive policies that give full support to Nigerian expatriates for investment and entrepreneurship that would unleash their full potentials. This could take the form of regulatory harmonization, financial incentives, or support services for diaspora entrepreneurs who may want to invest in the country.

Nigerian embassies and consulates are encouraged to boost diplomatic outreach, and strengthen their relations with diaspora communities. In such a process, the Nigerian embassies and consulates are able to receive advice from the diaspora networks, which in many cases is translated to expertise in

fostering diplomatic interests. Constant dialogues, cultural events, and outreach programs will firm up the connect between the Nigerians living abroad and the respective diplomatic missions.

The Nigerian government should devise mechanisms of easier diaspora voting and political representation so that the Nigerian expatriates get a voice in national forums of making decisions. These may involve the amendment of electoral laws, establishment of diaspora constituencies, and promoting civic education initiatives. Cultural diplomacy should be enhanced in its current drive of being able to help showcase the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria and positive perceptions about the country abroad. Joint projects, cultural festivals, and artistic exchange programs can help develop mutual understanding and appreciation between hosts and Nigerians.

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