THE NIGERIAN DIASPORA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CONTRIBUTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

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Abstract
The paper, in general terms, clarifies and discusses the link between the Diaspora and the issue of development in general, and, in specific terms examines the role as well as the huge potential of the Nigerian Diaspora in national development. Drawing lessons from the historical as well as contemporary experiences of some countries such as India, China, Philippines, Italy, and Ghana, the paper argues that the Diaspora can be an agent of national development. In analyzing the different Diasporas and remittances from Diasporas from the different countries, the paper took cognizance of the fact that they are not similar to each other, just like Nigerian Diaspora has different kinds of diasporic conditions and responses as that of other African countries in Diaspora. After many years of military authoritarian rule, Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999. The event opened a new vista in terms of Nigerian government-Diaspora relations. This is evidenced in the increased efforts by past administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Yar Adua and present administration of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to attract the Diaspora, not only to identify with Nigeria, but also to contribute to the country’s development. The philosophy behind Nigeria’s current efforts to engage
the Nigerian Diaspora was borne out of the recognition of the huge capital and resources of the Diaspora and the need to tap into that vast reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experiences for national development. The new initiatives by the civilian government towards engaging the Nigerian Diaspora included interactive meetings, dialogues, conference, and through the creation of organizations such as the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) and Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) as platforms for Diaspora engagement and the adoption of July 25 as Diaspora Day every year. Such appropriative efforts have not yielded enough fruits as the Nigerian state would have wanted. This, in part, is due to the characteristic of Diaspora and diasporic identities in their highly hybridized and ever multidirectional character, rendering the impossibility of entire cooption by the national government and its agencies. When compared with the experiences of some of the countries examined, it becomes evident that the Nigerian government develop more platforms for the engagement of the Nigerian Diaspora and also improve its engagement with the Diaspora by building partnerships and harnessing its resources for national gains. The study therefore concludes by recommending that an institutional framework should be created by the Nigerian government that will effectively engage the Nigerian Diaspora, so that the huge potentials therein can be harnessed for national development.

Keywords
African diaspora, Nigerian diaspora, diaspora policy, national development, international migration, diaspora relations, international remittance

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Introduction

The formation of the Nigerian Diaspora has been intimately linked to the evolution of a globalised and racialised capitalism. Slavery, colonial labor policies, post-colonial conflict, including the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, and economic hardship occasioned by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) and neoliberalism have all propelled Nigerians into the Diaspora that grows ever more diffuse. Hernández-Coss and Chinyere (40) claims that there are about 15 million Nigerians living abroad (41). The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) gives an estimate of about 20 million Nigerian residents in Europe and the United States. In fact, Ifeanyi (184) estimates that about 3.4 million Nigerians are living in the United States. However, while the linkages between capitalism, imperialism, and displacement are dynamic, we should avoid a simplistic determinism that sees the movements of Nigerian people as some inevitable response to the mechanisms of broader structures (Ifeanyi 184). The complexity of displacement is such that human agency plays an essential role and avoids the unhelpful conclusion of seeing Nigerians and other Africans as victims. According to Mohan and Zach-Williams, “it is this interplay of structural forces and human agency that gives Diasporas their shifting, convoluted and overlapping geometry” (1).

This paper is an in-depth examination of the role of the Nigerian Diaspora in national development. While there has been much work on migration and labour markets (Harris and Todaro; Durand, Parado, and Massey), there is very little on the complex linkages between Diaspora and development. Much of the work on the Nigerian Diaspora has been of a cultural nature, examining such things as the survival of African cultural practices in the New World or the representation of home in the processes of diasporic identity formation. Such issues are undoubtedly important. The primary proposition of this of this study is, however, that although the engagement of Diaspora communities with their countries of origin is not new within developmental studies and international politics, recent developments have heightened both academic and policy interest in the nexus between migration and development.

Over the past few years, the link between migration and development has emerged as a distinct policy field and, to some extent, as a new development and cooperation sector. This development was more or less driven by the Diaspora and supported by the home governments that recognized the growing economic and human resources potentials of their Diaspora communities.

The study begins by noting that it is quite difficult to confine the word “Diaspora” to an agreeable definition because of the form and character of the subject. Diaspora may refer broadly to communities of individuals residing and working outside their countries of origins. These individuals often maintain social, financial, and cultural connections to their country of origin, usually mediated through family and friends in their homeland. The ancient Greek derivation of the word (διασπορά-
diaspeirein ‘disperse’, from dia ‘across’ + speirein ‘scatter’) connotes spreading or scattering of seeds. Historic Diaspora was often forcefully expelled, although the modern Diaspora is formed by those who search for better opportunities and livelihood abroad. Diaspora communities are of different origins. In recent times, the subject has emerged as an area of study generating much interest.

As a subject of study, it has been argued that the African Diaspora communities hardly exhibit the same features at any given time. Whether it is the emotional connection to ancestry, a consciousness on identity, or a willingness to return to Africa, the African Diaspora tends to not display every characteristic it is associated with (Palmer). This is evident in the shift in consciousness of identity among blacks in the United States from Black-Americans to African-Americans, and then to Americans. It is instructive that Nigeria strongly protested foreign media reports about the perpetrators of the Woolwich murder supposedly carried out by a Nigerian descent. In addition, an African who migrates to foreign lands may choose to deny all ties to Africa, thereby also raising the question about who can be classified as a Nigerian or African Diaspora. It notes from the onset that the Nigerian government had long recognized its Diaspora as positive agents in its quest for national development. However, the efforts of the Nigerian government to engage its Diaspora hardly went beyond efforts aimed at cultural reconnections (Alli 255). The paper therefore argues that if the right institutional framework is created for engaging the Nigerian Diaspora, it can contribute more significantly to national development.

However, how does one define or, at least, empirically measure the right institutional framework for engaging the Nigerian Diaspora and how does one truly understand the concept of national development within the context of Nigeria’s national interest? The answers to such questions are usually embedded in theoretical discussions that in essence provide a theoretical measuring-stick through which conceptions and definitions of key terms such as “national development” or “right institutional framework” are determined. The danger in utilizing such theoretical discourse as opposed to a policy “measuring-stick” is two-fold: firstly, its applicability presents some challenges; such as predictability and precision and secondly, it easily results in a generalized analysis of a diverse, unique, and at times unstable case study such as Nigeria. To which end, such a unique case study requires an equally flexible framework that captures the best possible policy choices to bring about a lasting change to the living conditions of the people concerned. Rooted in the study are policy measures that stand as parameters for analyzing the government’s relations with the Diaspora and draw on public policy initiatives from countries in need of addressing economic development and nation building needs. This approach hopes to provide valuable input for continued policy discourse at the national level and beyond. Moreover, the objective is to contribute an alternative approach to evaluate and identify future directions and common ground for addressing the inherent development potential of migration in the
global, regional, and national migration and development debates.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Following the introduction, the second section attempts to define Nigerian Diaspora and National Development. A discussion of the theoretical framework for the paper is also undertaken in this section. The third section examines the history of the Nigerian Diaspora. The fourth section highlights the role of the Diaspora in national development, while it dovetails into relations, especially the extent of engagements, between the government and the Diaspora. The fifth section investigates, in detail, international remittance flows and other contributions by the Nigerian Diaspora to national development. The sixth section explores the experiences of other countries in terms of Diaspora engagements and possible lessons for Nigeria, and the seventh section is the conclusion.

**Defining the Nigerian Diaspora and Role in National Development**

In a world in which identity politics and recourse to ethnicity are regularly invoked, Diaspora as a term is seriously contested. Around the world, many different ethnicities, nationalities, races, and religions claim Diaspora identity for themselves, while scholars who study them often use the term without much analytical precision. What this bears witness to is that defining Diaspora and deciding who gets to be regarded as belonging to a diasporic community is not a little problematic. Accordingly, anyone who seeks to write about the Nigerian Diaspora is almost certain to get caught in the exercise of definition. On the face value, the phrase “Nigerian Diaspora” may appear to be a straightforward description. This may not necessarily be so. Methodologically speaking, defining the Nigerian Diaspora should begin with a clear understanding of the Nigeria state’s character, or at least its ethnic composition.

Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, since independence have been identified as the dominant ethnic groups. However, these dominant ethnic groups are often challenged by the minority ethnic groups. The nature of ethnic contestations especially over power and resource sharing has led some Nigerians to question the degree of “Nigerianness” of the country. The Nigerian state, the ancestral homeland, is central to any informed analysis and understanding of the dispersal of its peoples. It must be noted that the people who left Nigeria and their ethnic group, either coerced or otherwise, took their cultures, ideas, and identities with them as well, which could have been altered with time in the new environment. The point is that the Nigerian Diaspora does not present a single homogenous ethnic group, but a number of ethnic groups, whose identities are underpinned by their country of origin. To avoid the unending debate on the issue of Diaspora, the paper aligns itself with the position of the African Union. Already, the African Union (AU) has acknowledged the African Diaspora as the
Sixth Region in the AU (Araia), and, defined the African Diaspora as:

The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union (“Report of Meeting of Experts on the Definition of the African Diaspora” 7).

This study draws from the definition provided by the AU. For the purpose of this paper, the Nigerian Diaspora is defined as those Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, geopolitical regions, living outside the country and who are desirous or already contributing to the development of Nigeria.

It is necessary to also clarify the issue of national development, and the role of Diaspora in development, especially within the context of this paper. Development is a word that is difficult to define because of the multifarious contextual usage of the concept. There are perhaps as many definitions of development and/or national development as there are scholars working on the subject. For the purpose of this paper, the concept of national development (economic, political, and social), especially as it relates to the role of Diaspora, is understood as bringing about valuable and positive changes that improves the living standards of the Nigerian people.

According to Mohan, developmental activities of the Diaspora can be divided into three categories. Firstly, “development in the Diaspora” refers to the use of diasporic connections in the immediate locality to ensure social and economic well-being of the Diaspora members (107). “Development through the Diaspora” expands upon development in the Diaspora engaging global as well as local networks (113). Both types of development also help economic development in the host country through trade and investment. The third category, “development by the Diaspora”, is the most relevant for this study. The third category brings in the role of the Diaspora in the development of their homelands.

Mohan’s typology refers to the economic, political, social, and cultural diasporic flows that facilitate development of homelands (123). This study will expand upon Mohan’s typology to consider how development by the Diaspora can apply to the home country. The Nigerian Diaspora are as diverse as are the destination countries for Nigerian migrants. Researches on development by the Diaspora have focused on hometown associations. According to Mohan and Zach-Williams, hometown associations are celebrated for using personal ties in developing countries, thereby making diasporic development organizations more relevant, more sustainable, and more accountable (227). Mercer, Page, and Evans have argued that the work of hometown associations is distinctive in comparison to more traditional development organizations (141). However, hometown associations are critiqued for reinforcing the position of elites, incorporating
social dynamics into development projects and reinforcing a sense of absolute ethnic identity. These criticisms force a reconsideration of the role of Diaspora in economic development and the assumptions of the migration and development nexus. What is the true relationship between migration and development? To this we now turn our attention.

**Clarifying the Migration and Development Nexus**

The establishment of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) is illustrative of the growing interest in the migration-development nexus amongst international institutions, national governments, and academics. The assumption of migrants as development agents contrasts with the restrictive immigration policies of migrant-receiving countries. Therefore, we must be cautious of this current round of migration and development optimism.

Raghuram argues that just as development is perceived to be an outcome of migration, migration can also be perceived as an outcome of development (105-108). In migrant-receiving countries that view immigration as a problem to be controlled, politicians, officials, and the public still believe that if they can tackle the “root causes of international migration” (Raghuram 106) then it can be reduced drastically. The root causes is understood here as that migration is a consequence of underdevelopment, a rational response to poor economic conditions in home countries that encourage migrants to seek employment and opportunity in more developed economies.

De Haas identified two problems with the current approach of restrictive immigration policies in developed countries and the linking of migration patterns to underdevelopment. Firstly, restrictive immigration policies have largely failed to curb migration (819). The demand for both skilled and unskilled labor in developed countries is relatively constant so continued levels of immigration are highly likely. Moreover, migration patterns, once established, gain momentum and are hard to control. Restrictive policies, instead of limiting migration, encourage dangerous and irregular migration, as illustrated by increasing border death rates and decreasing apprehension rates. Secondly, De Haas argues that development does not and will not stop migration (819). Martin and Taylor’s study of the “migration hump” sheds light on the relationship between development and migration. Martin and Taylor argue that increases in development levels lead to an increase in migration. According to these, Martin and Taylor, peoples’ aspirations are raised and migration levels fall only after a significant development level is reached and countries become net-importers of labor. The finding of this study is well-supported by Skeldon who argued that “development increases mobility”, and that “migration is essentially the response of individuals to changing development conditions” (1). De Haas’ critique undermines the assumptions upon which current optimism in the migration-development nexus is based, and exposes the
contradictions between this apparent development optimism and simultaneous tightening of border control and immigration levels. In particular, this critique raises questions about the meaning and understanding of development in the mainstream framework. With this clarification we now turn our attention to the theoretical framework for this paper.

Theoretical Discourse

The classical debate of the Diaspora group revolves around the concept of ethnicity as the unifying category, which reasserts group solidarity and commonality. However, as is the case with Nigeria, which has more than 250 ethnic groups, it is evident that the concept of ethnicity alone is not enough to explain constructions of identity.

William Safran is one of the first scholars to establish the main criteria of the classical theory of Diaspora. In his essay “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”, he describes a number of Diaspora groups and classifies them according to the following points: dispersal from a center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions; retention of collective memory, vision, or myth; the belief that full acceptance by the host country is not possible, resulting in alienation and insult; regard for the ancestral homeland as the true or ideal home and place of final return; commitment to the maintenance or restoration of safety and prosperity in the homeland; And personal or vicarious relations to the homeland in an ethno-communal consciousness (35).

The classical theory is preoccupied with the reaffirmation of the value of the collective myth, common shared ethnic identity, unitary homeland, integration, and assimilation of the Diaspora into the host societies. Hence, the classical Diaspora framework concentrates on the reasons and conditions of dispersal, connections with the center, a common ethnic umbrella, and integration issues in host societies; but not on where and how these people lived before their dispersal (re-)migration and, most importantly, what cultural baggage, symbolic or otherwise, they continue to bring with them from their countries of (re)migration to a concrete community space in the Diaspora.

Another significant perspective in classical writings on Diaspora has always been the focus on, cases such as Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and several others, Sheffer argues that the Jewish case has become so central to the Diaspora discourse that dictionaries define the word Diaspora by describing the Jewish Diaspora experience. The orientation towards classifying paradigmatic cases as classical has been predominant even in critical discussions of Diaspora theory. According to James Clifford, “we should be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of Diaspora without making that history a definitive model” (306). The so-called classical model of Diaspora theory has become a descriptive typological tool that does not allow one to go beyond accepted characteristics such
as ethnicity, dispersal, homeland, and origin; neither does it provide an analytical framework to fully understand the phenomenon of Diaspora as a social condition and societal process.

Finally, the use of the concept of Diaspora has become dispersed through different semantic, conceptual, and disciplinary spaces. Harutyunyan has questioned the ability of the theory to adequately accommodate the diverse experiences of many Diaspora groups into the available framework (3). The need for reconsideration of the theoretical approaches has become more imperative against the backdrop of dynamics of globalization, capitalism, transnationalism, culture, identity, hybridity, and other critical issues underpinning the Diaspora discourse in contemporary era.

Against this background, the paper draws from the works of Arif Dirlik’s *Global Modernity: Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism* and Arjun Appadurai’s *Disjunction and Differences in Global Cultural Economy*. Their works, we believe, will help us to grapple the complex notion of Nigerian Diaspora and its effects on national development in the age of globalization and transnationalism.

Arif Dirlik presents the concept of “global modernity” as a way to understand the contemporary world. He argues that during the last three decades, capitalism influenced economic, social, political and cultural aspects of modernity, such that the “present represents not the beginning but the end of globalization, which has produced a new era in the unfolding of capitalism-global modernity” (8). The globalization of capitalism following the fall of socialist competitors in the late 1980’s generated culturally-informed counter-claims to modernity. Modernity, globalized, has resulted in the fragmentation of the very idea of modern. Dirlik’s global modernity is intended as a conceptual marker to distinguish the present from its Eurocentric past, while recognizing the crucial importance of that past in shaping the present. The study makes its case by historicizing globalization as concept and phenomenon and analyzing differences between globalization and earlier discourses of development (from modernization to various challenges to it in World-System Analysis, Dependency Theory, etc.).

The framework proposed by Dirlik seeks to demonstrate why globalization as discourse derives plausibility from a new situation in the unfolding of global capitalism. It also suggests a strong relationship between an emergent global modernity and discourses of postmodernity and postcoloniality that acquired currency during the same years. He further argues that the new situation of global modernity does not break with its colonial past but reconfigures it, as capital in its transnationalization creates new class formations that cut across divides of earlier “Three Worlds” (i.e., developed, developing and underdeveloped) ideas or of clear-cut distinctions between colonizers and colonized.

Dirlik suggests that the concept of global modernity helps overcome the teleology implicit in a term such as globalization, while it also recognizes global difference and conflict, which are as much characteristics of the contemporary
world as they are tendencies toward unity and homogenization. According to Dirlik, these differences and the appearance of “alternative” or “multiple” modernities are expressions, and articulations, of the contradictions of modernity that are now universalized across, as well as within, societies. If we are to speak of alternative or multiple modernities, which presently valorize the persistence of traditions and “civilizational” legacies, we need to recognize that the very language of alternatives and multiplicity is enabled historically by the presupposition of a common modernity shaped by a globalizing capitalism.

Arjun Appadurai, on the other hand, argues that the central problem of today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. According to this scholar, the homogenization arguments most often end up either as arguments about “Americanization” or about “commoditization”. In his opinion, these two arguments are very much linked. The point to note here is that these arguments often fail to consider that as new forces from various societies enter into new societies, they tend to become indigenized in one way or the other.

Another point to note is that smaller groups of Diaspora are careful not to be absorbed culturally by larger groups. According to Appadurai, these widespread global manifestations of the Diaspora are also tied to the relationship between nations and states. To this, he adds that “the global economy must be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” (290). In his view, we can no longer understand the global economy in terms of the existing center-periphery model nor can we understand migration from simple models of push and pull theory. In essence, the complexity of the global economy has to do “with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics which we have barely begun to theorize” (296).

Appadurai proposed an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures by looking at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow: ethnoscapes (movement of people), mediascapes (movement of media), technoscapes (movement of technology), ideoscapes, (movement of ideas), and finanscapes (movement of money). The underlying point of discussion in these five “scapes” is that the globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization. Globalization involves the use of instruments of homogenization including advertisements, language, clothing styles, and many others, which are easily absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise, and even fundamentalism in some cases.

Most relevant to this paper is the Appadurai’s discussion of the relationship between the nation-state and the Diaspora in the disjunctured global economy of culture today. He argues that the idea of deterritorialization creates an avenue where Diaspora takes advantage of opportunities in their new territories and to raise money (by selling their labor, expanding their investment, etc.) independent
of national boundaries. In turn, the Diaspora moves the monies back homeland (as in the case of Bombay) to alter their societies, either positively or negatively. On the other hand, nation-states are always seeking to monopolize the resources of external communities for development purposes.

The works of Dirlik and Appadurai, no doubt, are of great significance for our study on the Nigerian Diaspora and National development. Both authors have provided meaningful insights for understanding the character of Diaspora in the era of globalization. Both Dirlik and Appadurai posit that the logic of globalization and capital is its homogenizing tendencies amidst the otherwise conflicting and heterogeneous character of culture, identities, peoples, media, finances, and many others.

On Diaspora identities, Dirlik has argued that Diaspora or diasporic identities, in contemporary cultural criticism, focus on the problematic of national identity or the necessity of accommodating migrant cultures. The concept of Diaspora or diasporic identity serves well when it comes to deconstructing claims of national cultural homogeneity. It is also important in expanding the horizon of cultural differences and challenging cultural hegemony at a time when the accommodation of cultural differences may be more urgent than ever in the face of the globalizing world. Appadurai has also noted that for the Diaspora community, there is often tension between “cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (297). Appadurai states that in order to understand how to conduct the most successful global economy, the understanding of these “diasporas” and movements of cultural products needs to be achieved. The movement of monies back home could either positively or negatively deployed in the home country, even as state governments continue to seek to promote national development. It is against this background that we proceed to examine the history of the Nigerian Diaspora.

Historicizing the Nigerian Diaspora

The study of Nigeria’s Diaspora cannot be completely separated from the study of Africa’s Diaspora. This is particularly so because, during this period, no single diasporic movement or monolithic diasporic community could be studied unless traced back to certain experiences of the majority of pre-independent African states. It was an era before the creation of an African as a trans-ethnic consciousness, let alone a Nigerian consciousness. Gomez articulates several distinct experiences which, he argues, accompany a description of any African diasporic community, thus, characterizing distinct diasporic phases in Africa’s migration history. Simply put, when examining the Diaspora of different African countries, it would be difficult to ignore the following: Africa as the land of origin; the periods of enslavement (trans-Saharan, Red Sea, Indian Ocean or trans-Atlantic slave trades); the struggle against discrimination, specifically one of adapting to a new environment whilst struggling to maintain their culture; the reification of colour and race; and the on-
going significance of Africa to African descendent populations.6

It is strongly believed that the first African Diaspora was a consequence of a great movement which occurred within and outside Africa approximately 100,000 years ago (Palmer 25). The “Out of Africa” theory7 is the most widely accepted model in the study of palaeo-anthropology, describing the geographic origin and early migration of modern humans. The argument (Gill) that modern humans evolved in Africa, possibly from Homo *heidelbergensis*, Homo *rhodesiensis*, or Homo *antecessor*, and migrated out of the continent some 50,000 to 100,000 years ago, replacing local populations of Homo *erectus*, Homo *denisova*, Homo *floresiensis*, and Homo *neanderthalensis* can be used to argue the earliest migration of humans.8

Although the “Out of Africa” theory is a mainstream position, not every scholar supports it. Critics argue that this early African exodus is different in character from later movements and settlements and thus should not constitute a significant phase of the diasporic process. In 2009, a 10-year study by a team of international scientists, published in the scientific journal *Science*, was described by the BBC as the largest African genetic study ever undertaken (Gill). The reason being that amongst other key findings, the team was reported to have located the origin of modern human migration in South-Western Africa, near the coastal border of Namibia and Angola. Moreover, samples from four African-American populations were also taken, tracing their African ancestry. This was, as expected, mostly pinned down to West Africa, giving more weight to the “Out of Africa” theory and its significance in explaining early migrations patterns out of Africa. Although no study has gone as far as to call these modern humans Africans, it does however, make one consider the extent to which those early migrated groups form early African Diaspora communities. This is why as much as we may want to delve into the subject of the contemporary form of Diaspora, it is relevant we talk about the deeper and wider dynamics of their evolution thereby placing our perception in proper context. Put differently, we must consider significant historical factors that shaped their development, and the critical role of global political and socio-economic forces in their formation.

**Pre-Modern Diaspora**

Palmer identifies the movement of the Bantu-speaking peoples as another major period constituting a phase of the diasporic process. These streams began about 3000 B.C.E., when the Bantu were believed to have migrated south and east of Africa, and further out towards the Indian Ocean from the region that now form modern Nigeria and Cameroon. A number of theories have been put forward to explain this migration. One theory asserts that the Bantu came from West Africa, around the Cameroon highlands and Bauchi/Plateau of Nigeria, pointing to the Niger Basin as the possible cradle land of the Bantu. A second theory posits
that the Bantu came from the Katanga region in South-Eastern Congo, gradually spreading near the lower Congo and Kasai (Stringer 692). Nevertheless, research shows that this distinct group can be found in parts of Africa where variants of the Bantu language is still spoken and where pottery technology and iron technology are still being used, linking those areas with Nigeria and Cameroon. For example, there are said to be close to 450 known languages in the Bantu family from Gikuyu (Gekoyo, Gigikuyu, Kikuyu) spoken primarily by the Kikuyu people surrounding mountain ranges in Central Kenya, to Tswana, spoken by people that can be found in Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland, Namibia, and Zimbabwe.

Trading Diaspora

Palmer identifies another major stream of the African Diaspora, beginning around the fifth century B.C.E, which he calls the trading diaspora. This movement of Africans was characterized by the passage of traders, merchants, slaves and soldiers to Europe, the Middle East and Asia, for example (Palmer). This *diasporic* stream was said to have resulted in the creation of communities of peoples of African descent in India, Portugal, Spain, the Italian city-states, and elsewhere in the Middle East, apparently before Christopher Columbus undertook his voyages across the Atlantic (Palmer). The literature, particularly historical and anthropological research, detailing the trading Diaspora of Africans on the continent has expanded the understanding of the internal movement of Africans and the subsequent creation of non-indigenous communities around the continent. The trading Diaspora emanated from mostly voluntary migration of Africans within the continent. Often, the migrant communities maintain social ties with the “homeland”, forming kinship networks which proved to be vital to the organizational structure of the internal and cross-boundary trading of ethnic migrant groups (Palmer). Although involuntary migration through the Trans-Saharan, Trans-Atlantic, Transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade accounts for the presence of most of the African presence outside Africa today, the trading Diaspora did account for some Africans outside the continent. While each of these massive movements shaped and reshaped African life, none was more important than the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, marking a significant milestone in the involuntary movement of Nigerians across the Atlantic.

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Diaspora

Historical accounts of the creation of a Nigerian Diaspora can be divided into two schools of thought. Alusine and Maizlish argue that the earliest documented Nigerian Diaspora was as a result of international migration of Nigerians as far back as the pre-colonial era. Of which, according to the argument, began with the Hausa transnational links that found its best expression in the Trans-Saharan
trade, particularly between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (71). Alusine and Maizlish also argue that documented history of migration in the territory known as Nigeria can be traced as early as other slave trades in Africa between 1400 and 1900. Despite these differences in perspectives, both arguments agree that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which millions of slaves were said to have been exported from West, West-Central, and Eastern Africa, made up a critical phase in the establishment of Nigeria’s Diaspora. Historians still debate exactly how many Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. A comprehensive database compiled in the late 1990s puts the figure at just over 11 million people (Adi 14).

Modern Nigerian experiences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade can be argued to have begun following interactions with Portugal (Adi 15). The Portuguese initially brought slaves to the Southwestern coast of modern Nigeria and neighboring parts of the modern Benin Republic to be traded for gold. Even when the Portuguese slave trade expanded to the Bight of Benin and modern Angola, it continued to maintain a presence on the Nigerian coast, keeping its control of the slave route. It is estimated that by the early sixteenth century, as much as ten percent of Lisbon’s population was of African descent (Adi 16). The Spanish also played a significant part in forming today’s modern Diaspora, shipping the first captives directly from the modern Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon to the Americas, from Europe, as early as 1518.

Throughout the expansion of the Trans-Atlantic trade and up to the middle of the eighteenth century, more slaves came from the Nigerian coast than from any other country in that region. According to documented accounts, approximately thirty percent (30%) of all slaves sent across the Atlantic during the nineteenth century came from Nigeria (Adi 16). Throughout the period of the trade, more than 3.5 million slaves were shipped from Nigeria to the Americas. Most of these slaves were Igbo and Yoruba, with significant concentrations of Hausa, Ibibio, and other ethnic groups.

Colonial Diaspora

The colonial era witnessed another major migration stream, with the invasion of the British as a colonial power in the nineteenth century and large-scale migration of labor from Nigeria to countries such as Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Benin Republic, and Ghana. There was a need for manual labor on plantations, in mines, and in public administration (Adepoju 71-85). This stream was dominated by internal continental migration, making up a critical phase in the establishment of the Nigerian Diaspora in Africa. According to Mberu, an estimated 6,500 Nigerians were said to have moved to modern Ghana and Benin to work on railway construction and in gold mines between 1900 and 1902. He also gives a detailed account of migration flows of Nigerians during this period. He
argues that after the completion of the railway in Ghana, some migrants voluntarily stayed behind and became traders. After WWI, more Nigerians migrated to Côte d’Ivoire in response to the growing need for labor in cash-crop plantation and to reconstruction efforts to aid the agricultural sector (Mberu). Osuntokun also wrote that during the colonial times, a significant number of Nigerians mostly Igbo from South Eastern Nigeria migrated to Equatorial Guinea (then known as Fernando Po) to work in cocoa plantations (151).

This period was significant because with European intervention came the scramble for African land and resources and the demarcation of African territories. This meant that with the creation of Nigeria as a single territorial unit, and of “Nigerians” as people belonging to that unit, also came the creation of the Nigerian Diaspora as a concept, or consequently, as an identity group. As a result, records of Nigerians migrating to neighbouring states were high specifically due to the creation of territorial boundaries by colonizers, cutting across migration streams. In effect, traditional migration streams of nomadic or trading communities and communities themselves were severed with the creation of artificial colonial boundaries. For example, Yoruba culture and people can be located in Southwest Nigeria to Côte d’Ivoire, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Dahomey (Benin), Mali, Togo, Niger, and Ghana (Osuntokun 151). The same applies to the Hausa ‘culture and people’ also found in Chad, Niger, Cameroun, Benin, and Ghana (Kyari 196-207).

**Contemporary Diaspora**

While a significant percentage of migrant Africans, who have fleeing their home countries because of conflict or fear of political persecution since the 1960’s, could aptly be described as “refugees”, many Nigerians could hardly be described as such and would more appropriately be classified as “economic migrants” and “politics-induced migrants”. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chief Ojo Maduekwe has noted that over 15 million Nigerians live in neighboring countries and across Africa, in Britain, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and North America. The population of Nigerians in the USA alone is put at about 1.5 million, while the UK is home to 2 to 3 million Nigerians (Maduekwe 4).

 Several push and pull factors have influenced the movement of Nigerians out of the country after it gained independence in 1960: severe economic crisis accompanied by the collapse of crude oil prices in the 1980’s; the sporadic emergence of autocratic and oppressive regimes and the accompanying political repression between 1966 and 1998; the economic hardships occasioned by the introduction of the inglorious Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980’s; the brain drain syndrome; the search for economic and social mobility by professionals in various spheres; and the search for educational and training opportunities by many young people consequent upon the destruction of educational systems are a few
amongst many push and pull factors compelling Nigerians to migrate.

The Babangida regime, contributed to the massive emigration of Nigerians between 1985 and 1993 in two major ways (Ajibewa and Akinrinade 1-9). The first was the introduction of the IMF/World Bank-inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which annihilated the middle class, triggered massive poverty, and triggered the mass emigration of several qualified Nigerians to Europe and North America in search for better opportunities. The second was the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, plunging the country into political crisis. The succeeding regime of General Sani Abacha witnessed greater political turmoil. Assassinations of political opponents, detentions without trials, destruction of the homes of perceived opponents, and extrajudicial killing during this time led many Nigerians, particularly many leading pro-democracy figures, to flee abroad. According to Ajibewa and Akinrinade, UK records revealed that between 1993 and 1995, between 400 and 500 Nigerians applied for political asylum on a monthly basis. This is in contrast with the figure of 50 between 1990 and 1992 (cited in Ajibewa and Akinrinade 6).

While most of those whose movements were provoked by search for employment, have found themselves within the African continent, particularly in Gabon, Botswana and South Africa; most of those in search of a better life have found one in countries outside the continent, particularly in the US, UK and Saudi Arabia. A survey conducted from 2008 to 2010, on a sample of Nigerians: the purpose of the survey was to determine if Nigerians will be willing to move outside the country permanently, if given the opportunity to do so. The results showed that 44 percent would do so; 14 per cent of which, were planning on doing so in the next 12 months; and 40 percent said they would choose to move to the US, 20 percent to the UK and 8 per cent to Saudi Arabia (OECD). This supports Kómoláfé’s argument that Nigerian migrants predominantly move to the countries where they are more likely to adjust rapidly in terms of being able to understand the host country’s language, to secure gainful employment, and to reunite with members of their family and with friends or to associate with other people from their country of origin. For these reasons, the United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada are some of the most popular destinations for Nigerian migrants (Kómoláfé). Between 2005 and 2006, the US was the most popular destination for Nigerians outside of Africa, with 47.1 percent of the total, followed by the UK (33 percent), Italy (6.1 percent), Canada (3.9 percent), Ireland (3.1 percent), Netherlands (1.1 percent), Austria (1.0 percent), France (1.0 percent) and Australia (0.6 percent) (OECD).

**The Diaspora as a Driving Force for National Development**

At the global level, the importance of the Diaspora as a driving force for economic and social development has not gone unrecognized. It was not until 2006 that the
nexus between migration and development gained formal recognition with the establishment of a United Nations initiated High-level Dialogue on Migration and International Development (UNHLDMD) and the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) (The World Bank). As the UN observes, part of this realization was due to globalization and increased integration. It served to draw attention to the positive contributions migration could make to development in countries of origin and countries of destination, provided it was supported by the right policies.

At the continental level, recognition that the African Diaspora was fast becoming an important source of foreign exchange for Africa was institutionalized to the extent that the African Union (AU) designated the Diaspora as a sixth development “zone” in addition to West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, and North Africa (Edozie 12). The AU’s definition of this zone is very much tied to the contributions made from the Diaspora towards African development. Since the April 2005 declaration of the African Union Executive Council that defined “African Diaspora”, formal recognition of this important region of Africans has been institutionalized. The AU has also gone as far as to extricate their identity as African Diaspora and merged it with their responsibility to the communities their ancestors came from. During the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) legislative week in 2012, the focus had two themes important to African Diaspora, development and identity. Development issues included economics, education, gender, health, youth and how to support Africa. Identity discussions focused on the millions of people throughout the world who now identify as African Diaspora and how they relate to Africa and the African community of their ancestors.

At the national level, it became a pattern of foreign policy to incorporate the Diaspora in matters of economic development. The focus of such policy include attracting greater developmental and investment capital inflows to the home market; capacity building initiatives that effectively engage the opportunities offered by globalization; to strengthening governance (Edozie 13).

Nigerian Government-Diaspora Relations and Policy Initiatives

One of the key features of the Nigerian government’s engagement with its Diaspora is the absence of programmatized terms of engagement in the form of a Diaspora engagement policy. In essence, a Diaspora policy provides a primary channel through which migrant home states interact with their Diaspora. These policies go beyond immigration issues and focus on emigration, which is increasingly becoming an important consideration in a growing number of countries. A study conducted by the International Migration Institute states that such policies are known to take a wide range of formal and informal manifestations: symbolic and rhetorical appeals to the loyalty of emigrants and their descendants; measures
aimed at capturing and channelling a share of the migrant remittances that now dwarf global development aid; new citizenship provisions that extend beyond state borders; and formal governmental institutions that harmonize and oversee the myriad ways in which states impact on, and are impacted by, the Diaspora (International Migration Institute).

Despite the absence of a Diaspora policy, relations have always existed between the Nigerian government and the Diaspora. Beginning in the 1970s, efforts were made by the Nigerian government to connect with and engage both the Nigerian and African Diaspora. For example, under the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979), there was the recognition of the value of the Diaspora by the Nigerian government, especially the African-American community, not only in promoting Nigeria’s bilateral relations with the United States, but also in the promotion of Nigeria foreign policy, particularly in support of Nigeria’s role in the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle in Southern Africa. This was evidenced by Nigeria’s close working relations with the then-US Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young. Nigeria also hosted the successful Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977, which attracted a many members of African Diaspora to Africa, and Nigeria in particular, to appreciate the plight of Africans, especially of those still under the yoke of colonial and racist rule in continent.

The question of Nigeria purposefully engaging its diverse skilled Diaspora towards its development was relatively an appeal that hardly resulted in many gains under the administration of President Shehu Shagari from 1979 to 1983; nor during the military regimes of General Muhammadu Buhari from 1984 to 1985; and the military regime of General Sani Abacha from 1993 to 1998. The Nigerian Diaspora played a significant role in Nigeria’s struggle to return to democratic rule. This was particularly true during the military administration of General Sani Abacha when the Nigerian Diaspora, under the auspices of the Association of Nigerians Abroad (ANA), labored struggled for the country’s return to democratic rule. The struggle by the Nigerian Diaspora contributed to the isolation of Nigeria from the international community. However, leading and developed nations such as Canada were responsible for the motion that led to the country’s suspension from the Commonwealth (Hagher). By 1985, under General Ibrahim Babangida, the question about the instrumentalization of the country’s Diaspora was extended from a matter of interest to a pursuit and, indeed, an objective following the formulation of numerous policy statements and policy initiatives. As observed by General Babangida, the Nigerian Diaspora are regarded as “an extension of our own resources and as one people with us we have remained ever committed to developing stronger fraternal relations with them” (Babangida 18). Of note among the policy measures that commenced during the Babangida administration was the establishment of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) on the premise of seeking to cultivate relationships with the African Diaspora. Furthermore, a body of eminent Africans, both based locally and in the Diaspora, was raised to address the issue of
Reparation of Nigerian Diaspora (Babangida 18).

Following Nigeria’s return to civilian democratic rule in May 1999, up to 2007 under President Olusegun Obasanjo, various changes were witnessed in the method and approach towards engaging Nigerians living abroad by the official recognition of Nigerians abroad as valuable stakeholders and partners in the country’s development. Howard Jeter, former US Ambassador to Nigeria, had pointed out that “for Nigeria and Africa to really benefit from the Nigerian and African Diaspora, there is need to move to a new phase that will emphasize organized and institutional cooperation between Africa and the African Diaspora” (Jeter 7). This informed several foreign trips made by former President Obasanjo during which he held discussions with Nigerians in the Diaspora. Most of the discussions had centered on Nigerian Diaspora maximization in terms of contributing useful human resources towards Nigeria’s development (Akinrinade and Ogen 81). In other words, Obasanjo’s focus extended beyond improving cultural relations to introducing novel initiatives aimed at bringing home professionals and experts among Nigerian living and working abroad.

Following numerous interactions and engagements with the Nigerian Diaspora referenced above, Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) Worldwide was established in 2001. It comprised a local branch at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Abuja (later moved to the Presidency), and international branches situated in Nigerian embassies across Europe, the United States and Canada, and a few Asian and African countries (Akinrinade and Ogen 81). In order to galvanize development, NIDO Worldwide established a two hundred million-dollar investment fund to be drawn upon by both local- and foreign-based Nigerians seeking to invest in the country, scaling up the competition existent among various NIDO configurations worldwide (Ani). The Organisation offers a base for purposeful debate on issues of Nigeria’s national development and encourages the input of the Diaspora in the country’s domestic affairs (Mberu). Within the same year, the Directorate of Technical Cooperation in Africa (DTCA) was formed to attract professionals of Nigerian and African descent to invest their knowledge, skill and expertise in Africa’s economies (OSFU). Tangible outcomes from Government-Diaspora interactions were witnessed shortly after this time, one of the more notable ones being the 2002 decision that allowed Nigerians to acquire foreign citizenship without forfeiting their Nigerian citizenship (Mberu). This offered Nigerians living abroad the opportunity of having dual citizenship.

By 2003, the government of Nigeria established the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) as an additional institution for Diaspora engagement. Situated in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of Federation, and having branches across the thirty-six (36) states of the federation, the organ guides the process of constructive engagement between Nigeria and its Diaspora. It was in 2005, in Abuja, that the NNVS initiated the first annual Science and Technology Conference between Nigerians at home and abroad. It was at this forum that former President
Obasanjo declared July 25th of every year as Nigerian Diaspora Day (Akwani). This was in recognition of the significance of Nigerians in the Diaspora to the Nigerian project, thereby marking the country’s dedication to the Diaspora initiative (Anyim). Notably, in 2006, the first Diaspora Day celebrations, alongside the second Science and Technology Conference of that year, recorded an increased turnout of two hundred (200) members of the Nigerian Diaspora as against the seventy six (76) which attended the conference of 2005 (Akwani). Some tangible outcomes after the conference included: the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on aiding medical missions to Nigeria between the Association of Nigerian Physicians in America (ANPA) and the Medical Association of Nigerian Specialists and General Practitioners in the British Isles (MANSAG) with the Ministry of Health, Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Health also signed an MOU with the NNVS (Akwani). In addition, local research funds are now available to foreign-based scientists via the Science and Technology Trust Fund, while the execution of projects such as arthritis managing medication produced by Dr. Obaija received approval of the National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) to enter the public market (Akwani).

By 2007, following the controversy surrounding the 2007 presidential elections that ushered in Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua as President; the manner of removal of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (a much respected member of the Nigerian Diaspora) as Finance Minister, among other disappointing showings, disenchantment on the part of the Nigerian Diaspora came to fore in the poor attendance of that year’s conference (Akwani). Notwithstanding, the Nigerian-Canadian Professor Isa Odidi, who vied for presidency in the 2007 elections and lost, managed to secure the right of the Diaspora to contest elections in Nigeria at the Supreme Court (Akwani). Thereafter, in 2008, former president Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua declared open the 2nd Diaspora Day celebrations and 3rd Science and Technology Conference with the theme: “Connecting Nigeria with its Diaspora”. That year’s conference witnessed a high turnout of about four hundred (400) Nigerians living abroad registered in attendance (Akinrinade and Ogen 82).

Since 1999, successive Nigerian governments have paid considerable attention to the Nigerian Diaspora as a distinct community within Africa. The maximization of the Nigerian Diaspora on the auspices of agencies such as NIDO has facilitated high level visits by government officials for the purposes of attracting investors, exploring trade opportunities, and acquiring modern technology. Indeed, governments at all levels have employed the skills and expertise of foreign-based professionals and have appointed some to significant positions of authority (Ani). Open and interactive sessions have been held across Nigerian Embassies between the Nigerian President and Nigerian Diaspora during visits to some countries. These have led to the resolution of possible diplomatic rows and other challenges facing Nigerians abroad that could otherwise prove to be national embarrassments (Ani). The Jonathan administration has also argued that Nigerians in the Diaspora
constitute a major asset in Nigeria’s transformation agenda. In his message at the 6th Annual Nigeria Diaspora Day Celebration (2013), themed: “Diaspora Nigerians-Agents of Investment and Development”, President Goodluck Jonathan, represented by Nigeria’s Vice President Namadi Sambo, stated the Federal Government’s move to redevelop its approach on Diaspora policy for increased cooperation and reinforced partnerships towards economic sustainability (Radio Nigeria and News Agency of Nigeria). While he encouraged the Diaspora’s deployment of its expertise and contacts towards attracting foreign investment into the country, he also appreciated an estimated N10 billion Naira annual remittances from Nigerian Diaspora. It is instructive to note that, on December 3, 2011, the first Diaspora National Development Strategy was initiated Nigerian government at a Business Dinner attended by Nigerian Diaspora, the Nigerian Embassy in Germany, and German businessmen; the event was hosted by the German chapter of NIDO Europe in Berlin (Nweke). In announcing the Diaspora’s adoption of a proactive approach to Nigeria’s development, Collins Nweke, Chairman of the reconstituted Board of NIDO Europe stated that:

Trade and investment is a cornerstone of the development strategy, at least for the period 2012-2014. That our main policy focus is trade and investment should not come as surprise to any careful onlooker given the dire need for wealth creation in Nigeria and enhanced economic growth through injection of impetus into the non-oil sector. It is also an imperative of our time to work in consonance with government national economic priorities in a concerted manner, so that sooner than later, the trickledown effect will translate to job creation particularly for our teeming young unemployed or underemployed youths .(Nweke)

Apart from trade and investment, other policy areas were selected such as political reforms, basic education, and security. In underscoring the need to connect these apparently slack areas for consistency in policy, Nweke stated:

...the development challenges facing the country do not start and end with the chosen areas, but that these are the policy areas where the Diaspora has the human and financial capital to enable it make its impact felt. These are the low-hanging fruits that do not require a ladder to enable us pluck. (Nweke)

The Nigerian National Assembly has equally provided encouragement and support to the country’s Diaspora through the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Senate and the Diaspora Committee in the House of Representatives. On February 27, 2013, Chatham House hosted a meeting between the Nigerian National Assembly’s Joint Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution and UK-based Nigerians in order to provide them the opportunity of contributing to the debate
surrounding the process of, and indeed the amendment itself (Chatham House). According to Rt. Hon. Emeka Ihedioha, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on the Review of the Constitution (following the call for memoranda and the announcement of the holding of the People’s Public Sessions), the Committee received memoranda from numerous interest groups such as the Central Association of Nigerians in United Kingdom (CANUK), the All Nigerian Nationals in Diaspora (ANNID), the Nigerian Diaspora Alumni Network (NIDAN), the Students Association of Nigerians in Diaspora (SAND), among other NIDO related and non-NIDO related organizations (Ihedioha 24).

At the event, Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the Chairman of the Diaspora Committee from House of Representatives, gave several instances where the interventions of the Committee on Diaspora were successful in addressing challenges faced by some Nigerians living overseas. She mentioned the cases of a 72-year-old Nigerian woman who was assisted out of a Brazilian jail she landed in on drug charges, and had her sentence reduced to house arrest, upon discovery of an age restriction barring adults above seventy (70) years of age from being jailed; of twenty three (23) Nigerians that were saved from executions in Libya during the Gaddafi era, among other examples.

The National Assembly has also been very vocal about the Nigerian Diaspora as a vast pool for national development. In her speech at the Chatham House meeting Hon. Dabiri-Erewa stated that “the Diaspora policy is actually the migration policy....we are talking to the executive of government to bring that policy and review it to have a migration policy that includes a Diaspora policy for people in the Diaspora” (Dabiri-Erewa 30). In seeking the review of Nigeria’s migratory regulations, the focus is the establishment of mechanisms that guarantee the constructive engagement of future emigrants as potential Diaspora.

Furthermore, the need for a Diaspora commission has been underscored at various fora in terms of relieving relevant personnel from having to manage both diplomatic and consular issues alongside Diaspora issues. The House Committee on Diaspora Affairs has initiated a Bill for an Act to establish the Nigeria Diaspora Commission (NIDCO). The Nigeria Diaspora Commission as conceived seeks to operate as a one-stop establishment in the management of Diaspora matters, and would be responsible for “coordinating and organizing a system of collaborations with Nigerians in Diaspora for their contributions by identifying, preserving, and mobilizing the human/capital/material resources and expertise to the general development of Nigeria” (Olowokere 2). While the efforts of the National Assembly towards Nigerian Diaspora engagement are noteworthy, Nigerian Diaspora have demanded for increased participation in the politics of the country. Specifically, the Nigerian Diaspora has made a case for the recognition of their voting rights. In the warm-up towards the 2015 General Elections, the Diaspora reiterated its call on the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigerian government for their inclusion as voters. The issue of inclusion of the Diaspora as voters has
remained a challenging issue at this time considering the challenges of managing elections and voter count even within Nigeria. Against the background of the country’s drive to generally harness its Diaspora for development, particularly of the economy, it is instructive that the demand for Diaspora voting be addressed more seriously. While seeking to grant a voice to the Diaspora, that voice for now does not include voting rights as explained by Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa:

You want to know whether or not you are going to be able to vote in 2015. Unfortunately I am not able to answer that question; neither is the deputy speaker at this point in time, because like the deputy speaker said, the issue of Diaspora voting was on the list of amendments. I know how my constituency voted: yes. I don’t know how other constituencies voted. But most important is: let your voice be heard all of the time. (Dabiri-Erewa 32)

In his capacity as Foreign Affairs Minister in the regime of General Ibrahim B. Babangida, General Ike Sanda Nwachukwu had stated that there is “much to gain through mutual cooperation between Nigeria and blacks in the Diaspora” (Yohaig 12). Reflecting on this statement many years later one observes that initiatives for Diaspora engagement not only failed to make considerable headway. This in part is as a result of the frequent changes of leadership and government, especially during the era of military rule, policy reversals and lack continuity that characterizes governance and politics in Nigeria. For instance, in 2007, the Yar’ Adua administration terminated several significant policies of the preceding Obasanjo administration when it came into power. Accordingly, Warisu Alli notes that compared to previous administrations before him, “only President Olusegun Obasanjo has invested so much energy and resource in the Africa project with a great deal of attention given to the Diaspora” (255). Notwithstanding, the significant role the Diaspora will play in the achievement of the transformation agenda of the Goodluck Jonathan administration has been strongly emphasized.

At a meeting with the Nigerian community in Nairobi, Kenya, President Jonathan announced the Diaspora Export Programme (DEP). The DEP, according to Goodluck, is geared towards facilitating international trade through the encouragement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) owned by both local and foreign-based Nigerians. According to Olusegun Aganga, Minister of Industry, Trade, and Investment, the DEP seeks to “leverage on the presence of Nigerians living abroad, using their individual and collective advantage in these countries to advance the promotion of Nigeria's non-oil export” (Ventures Africa, Nigeria Trade Hub). Moreover, the government has made it a fundamental responsibility to defend the interests and welfare of the Nigerian Diaspora. According to Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Nigeria will not abandon the responsibility of protecting its Nigerian citizens abroad” (Otufemi 12). Undoubtedly, Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has lately, risen in defence
of the Nigerians in the Diaspora irrespective of their status or predicament. This can be observed in its recent interventions in Asian-Pacific countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, to obtain clemency for a number of imprisoned Nigerians ordered to be put to death, and indeed their transfer back home under the Prisoner Transfer Agreement.

**Nigerian Diaspora, Remittances and Contributions to National Development**

For decades, Diaspora remittances were a largely unnoticed feature of the global economy. It featured more as cultural practice where expatriates sent a little pocket money back to dependents in their home country. Recently, the flow of migrant money into Nigeria has increased to record levels as more Nigerians than ever before cross borders to live and work abroad. In 2012, the World Bank reported that recorded remittance flows to developing countries reached an estimated $401 billion USD. Of the $401 billion USD estimate, Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to have received $31 billion USD in remittances, with more than one third of remittances to the region coming from Western Europe. According to the World Bank’s projections, remittance flows are expected to grow at an average annual rate of 8.8 per cent between 2013 and 2015, to approximately USD 515 billion in 2015 (The World Bank).

Since many transactions go unrecorded or take place through informal channels, the actual amount of money that Diaspora members send to friends and family members overseas in 2012 is argued to be significantly higher. Analysts predict that informal remittances could amount to more than the volume of officially recorded remittances for a number of reasons. First, some remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa are received through people rather than official channels such as banks or money transfer companies. Second, the cost of remittance that is deducted when money leaves the host state and enters the home state reduces and affects the total amount received. Lastly, in countries lacking functioning formal financial systems, such as Somalia, the DRC, and Afghanistan, informal channels such as via hand (carried by friends or family), through NGOs or religious missions, or through informal transfer systems are often the only alternative for transferring money (De Bruyn and Johan). Thus, it is too difficult to confirm the exact remittances to developing countries’ such as Nigeria, based on the projected figures and unreported sums.

**Nigeria’s Remittance Figures**

Nigeria is the largest recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, most likely as a result of its population size and consequently through the size of its Diaspora. The World Bank ranked Nigeria fifth of the top ten recipient countries, with $21 billion (USD) in remittances in 2012 alone. Its 2012 figures accounted for
approximately 67 percent of the inflows to the region. Estimates in 2003 show that the country received approximately 65 percent of total official remittance inflows within Sub-Saharan Africa, and 2 percent of formal global remittance inflows (Orozco 12). In 2004, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) reported approximately $2.273 billion USD in remittance inflows. At the time, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria was at $72,105,349 USD, putting remittance equivalents to 3.15 percent of the GDP (Hernandez-Coss and Chinyere 41). Estimates for 2007, according to the Migration and Remittances Factbook (2008) and referenced by the Human Development Report 2009 and Ponce, set the total remittances inflows to Nigeria at $9.221 billion USD, while remittances outflows were estimated at $103 million USD (Ponce). That same year, Nigeria was said to have received $2.042 million USD as Official Development Aid (Ponce). An unpublished report by the Central Bank of Nigeria, and referenced in the International Organization for Migration’s 2009 Country Profile estimates that the total amount of remittances inflows to Nigeria for 2007 was $18 billion USD, and for 2008, it was $19.2 billion USD (Ponce). The size of remittance flows to developing countries is now more than three times that of official development assistance. Nigeria’s 2012 remittance inflow was said to have amounted to approximately 7.7 percent of 2012’s GDP and nearly 50 percent of CBN’s foreign exchange reserves (Afolabi). About 50 percent of remittance flows to the country in 2011, originated from the US and the UK, with 40 percent from Chad, Italy, Cameroon, Spain, Germany, Ireland, and Benin (The World Bank).

Evidentially, the Diaspora has a large stake in the economic growth of Nigeria. The figures produced by the CBN, IOM, UNDP, IMF, and the World Bank, and as observed in several other publications, highlight the magnitude of remittance flows to Nigeria, which in part, explains why Nigerian government policies are being directed at increasingly engaging the Nigerian Diaspora. However, the questions still remain: what has the Nigerian government done to make the Diaspora feel more connected to the homeland, in terms of political, cultural, scientific and technological development, and how have Nigerian emigrants been given a greater role in the development of their country of origin? We shall attempt to answer this question by focusing on the impact of remittance on development.

**Impact of Remittance on Development**

Migration has enormous implications for growth and poverty alleviation in both origin and destination areas (Central Bank of Nigeria). This is primarily because migration allows workers to move to where they will be more productive, resulting in an increase in output and income. One of the most substantial contributions the Diaspora makes is the money they send to their countries of heritage. Income essentially becomes the source of remittances sent home by migrants. Most, if not a large majority of reports have pointed to an encouraging increase in remittance
to developing countries, rated three times larger than total global aid budgets, and sparking two serious debates: whether migration and the money it generates is a realistic alternative to aid; and to what extent can remittance alleviate poverty and drive development in home countries.

Nigeria receives the highest amount of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2007, remittances outperformed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and other inflows into the country, with an estimated $18 billion USD in formal flows reported by the Central Bank of Nigeria. Currently, remittance inflows rank second to oil receipts as a foreign exchange earner (Agu 185-220). Comparable data, released by the Canadian International Development Platform for 2010 and 2011, shows that aid from Canada to Nigeria was over $67,537,403 USD and remittances were at $454,639,801 USD (The Canadian International Development Platform).

However, statistics can be misleading. Hong Kong-based Ghanaian academic Adams Bodomo states that the definition of ODA, which is primarily set by Western parameters, does not always include all external aid. For instance, Saudi-financed mosques built for social and religious reasons are not included, nor are semi-commercial deals like Chinese road-building projects in exchange for minerals concessions (Doyle 1). However, he adds that ODA does represent a majority of what most people usually understand foreign aid to be. Moreover, remittance data is generally based on assumptions, leaving room for discrepancies in the literature of data available. For instance, the World Bank’s remittance matrix data is based on assumptions using migrant stock, host country incomes and origin country incomes. Analysts have found large discrepancies between this and other data from the same source. For instance while the bilateral matrix for 2001 estimates global remittances at around $500 billion USD, the Bank’s own remittance outflow database (which relies on data from the IMF, national statistical agencies and Bank country offices) reports the figure at around $337 billion USD for the same year (The Canadian International Development Platform).

Remittances surely have their benefits and have had implications for development. The nature of the impact that remittances have had on development in Nigeria has been either at the individual or household level. Moreover, reports have pointed to the significance of remittances based on the comparable impact such remittances have had with the often skewed development initiatives taken on by the government. Apathy for government’s ability to deliver basic services has warranted the support of such funds that have more visible impact the grass root. However, analysts are also concerned that this can cause discordant development, since not everyone has a relative or patron in the Diaspora.

Supporting Economic Development

Unlike private capital flows, remittances tend to rise when the recipient economy
suffers an economic downturn following a financial crisis, natural disaster, or political conflict (Ratha 2). It is common for migrants to send more funds during hard times to help their families and friends. In Somalia, remittances provided a lifeline for the poor. In 2012, the region was estimated to have received $31 billion USD in remittances, 1 percent greater than in 2011. With more than half of remittances to Nigeria coming from Western Europe and the US, it is bound to feel some decline in remittances throughout the financial crisis. Zero growth in flows to Nigeria recorded by the World Bank in 2012 was partly attributable to the labour market recovery in the UK and other major remittance source countries in Europe. Remittances are more likely to be countercyclical in poor countries (Mohapatra and Dilip 2).

A stable financial system is understood to be a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth and the continued inflow of finances into the country (especially in countries whose GDP is less than remittances) can have positive economic effects, such as making it more resilient to adverse shocks and less susceptible to runs. Remittances are known to fuel innovation and increase household investment, for example, which fuel economic development. However, a stable financial system is hard to qualify in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa because official aid flows have, in the past, fluctuated considerably from year to year, and remittances have been more stable than both FDI and official aid (Gupta, Pattillo, and Wagh 4). It will also be interesting to examine the implication of remittances on poverty reduction in Nigeria and to this we turn our attention.

### Implications on Poverty Reduction

Very limited empirical literature exists on the macroeconomic impact of remittances on poverty in Nigeria. The reasons for few literatures on the impact of remittances are not farfetched as studies in this area conducted by Nigerian scholars are equally scarce. However, cross-country studies are increasingly finding evidence of positive impact of remittances on household income levels. A World Bank-funded study conducted by Adams and Page in 2005, showed that an increase in per capita official international remittances can lead to a decline in the share of people living in poverty (1645-69). According to the World Bank, remittances have the potential to reduce the level and severity of poverty. This is because remittances typically lead to: higher human capital accumulation; greater health and education expenditures; better access to information and communication technologies; improved access to formal financial sector services; enhanced small business investment; more entrepreneurship; better preparedness for adverse shocks such as droughts, earthquakes, and cyclones; and reduced child labour. In this light, the Diaspora is seen as an important part of this process (The World Bank).

Although it can be difficult to separate the effects of remittances from the overall effect of migration, empirical studies shows that the primary benefits of
both remittances and migration to recipient households is the improvement in their general welfare. Household surveys in Africa show that remittance-receiving households have greater access to secondary and tertiary education, health services, information and communication technology, and banking than households that do not receive remittances. This is because a significant part of all remittances is spent on human and physical capital investments, such as education, health, land, housing, starting a business, improving farms, and purchasing agricultural equipment. Analysis of recipient households in Uganda and Ghana shows a high possibility that remittances reduced the share of poor people in the population by 11 percent and 6 percent, respectively. This supports the argument that remittances have the potential to reduce poverty and resulted in better development outcomes in many low-income countries. In essence, remittances directly augments the income of the recipient households by providing financial resources either directly or indirect through multiplier effects and macroeconomic effects (Mohapatra and Dilip 5). This increases aggregate demand thereby increasing employment and wages of the poor.

Studies on Nigeria conducted by Odozia, Awoyemia, and Omonona in 2010 concluded that remittances are associated with a reduction in the share of people living in poverty. For example, food security in rural areas of Nigeria improved considerably with an increase in remittances. One of the reasons being, income, assets, and important food security have close links to nutritional indicators. Since income and assets are important factors in household nutrition and the income of remittance-receiving households is significantly larger compared to those of non-receiving households, calorie supply in remittance receiving households is as a result, significantly larger. Babatunde and Martinetti’s study to examine the impact of remittance income on food security and nutrition among farm households in Kwara State of Nigeria also shows that farm size is also larger in remittance-receiving households. Moreover, remittance receiving households were found to consume significantly more calories than non-receiving households. However, it is important to note that other studies have shown the positive impact of remittances on poverty especially in Africa. This can also be attributed to the possibility that poverty itself causes increased migration, hence larger remittances (Gupta, Pattillo and Wagh 6).

A large percentage of remittances to Southeast Nigeria are predominately for the purpose of housing development. Migrants who wish to return home in the future invest in real estate projects. As a result, demand for additional housing units to provide shelter for Nigerians, especially in rural areas has increased to an estimated 16 million units (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 42). Although community-based Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) are one of the main mechanisms in rural areas, the problematic nature of housing and land market in Nigeria, people also rely on family ties. Migrants in the United States, for instance, have initiated substantial housing investments in their communities of origin. The
home family occupies approximately half of the houses that make up migrants’ residential housing investments in home villages. Current housing finance relationships are based on trust and integrity between the remittance sender and the person that manages the process. Typically, the sender sends money to a friend or a relative, who hires a local contractor for the purpose of building the house. The recipient uses the money to finance the construction and sends visual updates on the progress of the construction. Interviews conducted by the World Bank with commercial banks in Nigeria reveals that Benin City has the largest concentration of property development approximately 15-20 percent in Nigeria through remittances that originate mainly in Italy (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 43).

According to Ratha (185), remittances are associated with increased household investments in education, health, or entrepreneurship. Hernández-Coss and Bun’s study of remittance patterns from Nigerian migrants in the UK to Nigeria describes the typical Nigerian remitter as altruistic. Remittances are usually seen as a means of providing economic support to individual recipients at home or ways migrants can stay in touch with their families and improve their economic situation by sending remittances. Cultural roles and responsibilities generally require the more fortunate family member to provide for the less fortunate ones. Limited or almost non-existent formal welfare systems in Nigeria puts such responsibility on those living abroad to provide for immediate family members, as well as for extended family, friends and orphans (Hernandez-Coss and Bun).

Yang, Woodruff, and Zenteno (14) suggest that, at the household level, remittances have the potential to encourage entrepreneurial activity. Remittances provide capital to small entrepreneurs, reduce credit constraints, and increase entrepreneurship. The Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, commended the contributions of Nigerians in Diaspora to national development. He made particular mention of the donation of educational materials such as books and computers, and medical equipment, and drugs:

They have also organised many free medical missions to many communities in Nigeria through such groups as Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas; Anambra State Association (ASA); Women and Calvary Torch International..... During the 2012 Medical Mission by ASA Women to six communities in Anambra State, about 6,000 patients were treated of various ailments including cervical cancer.... (Anyim)

The significance of looking at the remittance patterns underscores the social returns identified by Ratha. Moreover, studies based on household surveys of recipient countries find that children of remittance-receiving households have a lower school dropout ratio and have higher birth weight, reflecting that remittances enable households to afford better health care. Some have argued that
dependence on remittances creates a serious dilemma for development. This is further explicated below.

**A Dilemma for Development**

Chimhowu, Piesse, and Pinder suggest that remittances have negative impacts by contributing to dependent relations between the sending and receiving countries. The argument posits that remittances increase inequality between households, causing macro-economic stability problems for countries with low GDP. Over the past years, there has been a remarkable increase in remittances from the UK to Nigeria. As part of its wish to develop a remittance partnership with Nigeria, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) conducted a study on the UK-Nigeria “remittance corridor.” The report showed that most UK remittances went to particular cities, considered to be Nigerians migrants’ state of origin. The effect was an intensification of income differentials between Nigerian states, favouring Southwest and Southeast regions. Moreover, for countries that have a large Diaspora and low GDP, such as Nigeria, remittances do have the potential to decrease macroeconomic stability and cause poverty especially for households who do not receive remittances (Chimhowu, Piesse, and Pinder 17).

The argument therefore is that remittance inflows can slow economic growth and productivity by helping to reinforce an already corrupt government dependent on such inflows. A factor that can reduce remittances, and thereby reduce economic growth and social development, is the cost of remitting. Cost can play a direct role in reducing the net amount received and indirectly by discouraging remittances (Goldberg and Levi 13). The global average total cost for sending remittances decreased steadily between 2008 and 2010, reaching a low of 8.7 percent in the first quarter of 2010. In 2013, The World Bank’s Remittance Prices Worldwide database recorded as low as 9.1 percent (The World Bank). Although global remittance costs have fallen in recent years, they remain relatively high, especially in Africa and in small countries where remittances accounts for a significant welfare for many poor households. Globally, migrants pay an average cost of 9 percent to send money home (The World Bank). The criticism associated with remittance often work against development initiatives. This has led the search for alternative ways the Nigerian Diaspora can contribute to development without the negative implications associated with remittances. The alternatives to remittances are discussed below.

**Seeking Alternatives to Remittances**

The Nigerian Diaspora includes highly qualified doctors, engineers, solicitors and advocates, and other professionals who are making tremendous contributions to the economic and social development of the countries they reside in. As far as Nigerian policymakers are concerned, the most significant contribution
international migration can make to development is return migration. As a result, in most policy circles, migration is primarily seen as a development failure rather than a constituent part of broader social and economic transformation process (De Haas). This is primarily due to socio-economic phenomenon also known as “brain drain.” A Presidential Committee on Brain drain set up by the Babangida Administration in 1988, estimates that Nigeria lost about 10,694 professionals from tertiary institutions between 1986-1990. Total estimates, which includes those who left public, industrial, and private organizations, were over 30,000 (Anekwe). The Committee’s past Chairman Professor Oye Ibidapo-Obe equated the movement to the economic problems the country was facing at the time, particularly the devaluation of the naira and inflation. Consequently, the country lost the ability to pay its top specialists competitively. Also, according to Dr. Ihechukwu Madubuike, the Health Minister during the Abacha regime, in 1995, 21,000 Nigerian doctors were practising in the US alone. The figure, according to the Minister, was almost at par with the number of doctors working in public service at the time. By the time Nigerian doctors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, Europe, Australia, and those in other African countries were included, the figure was estimated to be well above 30,000 (Anekwe). In this context, migration is seen as a drain on the country’s resources, harming the ability of the country to get out of poverty.

According to a recent Nigerian investment promotion commission report, each year roughly 2,000 Nigerians trained outside the country, specifically in the US, UK, Germany, France, Russia, Canada, Japan and China, return home to use their expertise and professionalism to help develop the country. Such “Diaspora tapping” or brain gain provides the rationale for the TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Networks) program, spearheaded by the United Nations Development programme (UNDP), and other recognized organizations such as Nigerians in Diaspora-UK/Europe (NIDOE), Central Association of Nigerians-United Kingdom (CAN-UK), and non-political organizations whose activities are to partner with the Nigeria government to develop the country.

The Nigerian government has been quite optimistic that it will achieve much through its efforts to attract members of the Nigerian Diaspora to actively become key in and contribute meaningfully to national development. Unfortunately, such initiatives aimed at engaging the Diaspora may not be based on a proper understanding of the conflicting and heterogeneous character of identities of the Nigerian Diaspora. The issue of ethnicity, which the Nigerian Diaspora often carry as an extra baggage to their host country, may be further complicated, with time, by dynamics of globalization and capital, whose logic, as noted by Appadurai and Dirlik, is the tendency to homogenize. Some informed suggestions have been made by stakeholders on how to engage the Diaspora for national development. For instance while Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the current Chairperson of the House of Representatives’ Committee on Diaspora Affairs, has proposed the establishment of a Diaspora commission to serve as a clearing house for all Diaspora issues in the
country (Dabiri-Erewa 7). A strong case has also been made for the establishment of a Ministry for Diaspora Affairs (MDA), to provide the bureaucratic and policy framework for the management of Diaspora affairs and Nigeria’s Diaspora engagement. Others have argued that the NNVS should be strengthened to enable it drive the government policy on Nigeria’s Diaspora. Ambassador Joe Keshi has argued that the NNVS should be headed by a National Coordinator, who should also be a Foreign Service Officer (171). He further argued that “had the National Assembly promulgated the NNVS Bill which had received the support of the Federal Executive Council and the National Economic Council, there would have been no need for the confusion created by the House of Representatives efforts to establish a Diaspora commission with the same objective as the NNVS” (Keshi 171-190).

The point is that the Nigerian Diaspora must be seen as a strategic asset and thus be meaningfully engaged by the Nigerian government towards achieving Nigeria’s developmental objectives. In this regard, other concerns being raised by foreign-based Nigerians such as their inclusion as voters should be addressed with all sense of seriousness. At the same time, some of the members of Nigerian Diaspora communities at various times complained of official neglect by the Nigerian government and the government’s lack of attention towards the various Nigerian embassies abroad (Keshi 178). The situation often arises from the negative treatment that some have received in their countries of residence. These include xenophobia against Nigerians and other Africans in South Africa; discrimination in trade laws in Ghana; frequent harassment; arrests and even imprisonment due to negative perceptions of all Nigerians as criminals due to poor records of some Nigerians in foreign lands.

Globalization, Transnationalism, Diasporic Tendencies and Challenges of Engagement

We believe that we can no longer afford to treat Diaspora as a primarily cultural phenomenon. The realities of the world today and forces of globalization have posed serious challenges to the state-centered views of the world and make us rethink boundaries, communities, and flows. Globalization encourages a broader understanding of the “world view” which looks to interconnections with “others”, although these tend to be limited to those others who present either a threat to capitalist hegemony or constitute new sources for accumulation (Appadurai 297).

Postcolonialism is not without its problems. In general, there has been a tendency to underplay the role of capitalism in shaping global power relations (Dirlik 9). Reflecting on these developments, Dirlik has drawn our attention to need to comprehend the “human agency” and the relations between political economy and activities such as transnational business networks. No doubt, events of the postcolonial period are making these theoretical interventions more relevant.

Looking at the Nigerian case, large-scale migration in the postcolonial era,
whether done legally or illegally, means that the “New Nigerian-Diaspora”, as opposed to the slave and colonial Diasporas, have increased dramatically. Firstly, such movement from the Nigerian state is largely a rational response to economic hardship, political turmoil, or simply the urge to search for greener pastures abroad. Secondly, information and transport technologies have made interactions much easier and cheaper, enhancing a Diaspora’s sense of community. With persistent and growing racial polarization in USA and Western Europe, the symbolic significance of the “Nigerian” or broadly speaking the ‘African’ for the Diaspora has increased as witnessed by the popularity of Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam and Afrocentric discourses. Indeed, this point raises an interesting concern over recent Nigerian immigrants having a different relationship to the Diaspora and Nigeria state than other Diasporas who left the country many years earlier.

Looking at the big picture, especially from the prism of theoretical postulations by Appadurai and Dirlik, it becomes clearer why the efforts by the national government to harness Diaspora resources for development have not yielded enough fruits that the Nigerian government expects. Both Dirlik and Appadurai posit that the logic of globalization and capital is its homogenizing tendencies, amidst the otherwise conflicting and heterogeneous character of culture, identities, peoples, media, finances, and other related issues. The Nigerian government, especially following the country’s return to democratic rule, has initiated programs, agendas, and projects of harnessing and appropriating the inexorable possibilities of the Nigerian Diaspora. When viewed from a theoretical lens, the initiatives of the Nigerian government to impose such policies and programs aim to re-channel and redirect remittances and other sources of Nigerian Diaspora for broader national gains. This can also be interpreted as homogenizing and appropriating tendencies and acts that harness the immense potentials of the Nigerian Diaspora for the objective of “national development”. Unfortunately, such appropriative efforts have not yielded much due to the characteristic of Diaspora and diasporic identities in their hybridized and ever multidirectional character, rendering the impossibility of entire cooption by the national government and its agencies. There is also the fact that the widely dispersed Nigerian Diaspora has gained some connections, goals, and allegiances to the new host countries that may inhibit the complete appropriation and cooption of the immense potentials of Nigerian Diaspora that could bring about a unidirectional national development to Nigeria, the country of origin. With more than 250 ethnic groups scattered in different parts of the world, and engaged in different progressions, Nigerians in the Diaspora have established different networks, connections, and interactions within their host country, some of which may affect their relations with and their contributions to the Nigerian state.

No doubt, the situation is not peculiar to the Nigerian Diaspora. For want of space and time, we cannot delve into all the experiences and challenges of countries in engaging their Diaspora. However, some countries, based on the understanding
of the character of their Diaspora and the huge potential of the Diaspora in the global era, have engaged them meaningfully for national projects. Accordingly, there are valuable lessons that Nigeria can learn from some countries that have effectively mobilized, engaged, and harnessed the resources of their Diaspora for national benefits.

Engaging the Diaspora for National Development: Lessons from Other Countries

It is worth noting that for most countries of the world desirous to engage the Diaspora, small or large, about 1 percent of their total budget, or about 12 cents a day, is spent on each of its citizens abroad. This commendable investment is critical to maintaining Nigerian government-Diaspora relationship. This is in view of promoting a better partnership for the overall development of the country. In this regard, lessons can be drawn from the experiences of some other countries that have implemented Diaspora policies in the advancement of economic development and nation-building. Though there are many countries that have established such connections and are harnessing the benefits for the overall development of their countries, this section examines the experiences of five countries which Nigeria can draw lessons from, namely China, India, Italy, the Philippines and, Ghana. It is pertinent to clarify that these are different countries, with different histories of migration as well as diasporic experiences. As noted in the works of Dirlik and Appadurai, there are serious contestations surrounding the claims of national cultural homogeneity by any Diaspora, especially in the age of globalization and transnationalism. Given the historical forces that have shaped each of the Diaspora of these countries, it is evident that they are not similar to each other, just as the Nigerian Diaspora is embedded in specifically different conditions and responses as that of other African countries in Diaspora. The choice of these countries, which were randomly selected, was informed by the increased recognition and positive engagement of the Diaspora for national development by governments of these countries.

India

Nigeria can draw some lessons from India’s engagement of the Diaspora and the huge contributions the Indian Diaspora is, in turn, making to the development of India. The Indian Diaspora consists of the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Indian citizens who live abroad; and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), individuals with no Indian passport but of Indian descent (Dubey 189-265). India’s first strategy in engaging its Diaspora was the introduction of legal and tax incentives to attract financial resources of NRIs and to create a PIO card. The PIO card is a long-term 20-year visa that allowed PIOs to own property or have access to the educational
system in India. In addition, the government created a High-level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, charged by the Ministry of External Affairs, to issue a report on the roles NRIs and PIOs can play in India's development. The Committee made far-reaching recommendations, including the granting of a dual-citizenship to some PIOs (Dubey 255).

Within the last decade, the Indian government has shown significant interest in the Diaspora and established a number of Diaspora policies. India’s increasing interest in its Diaspora can be attributed to three major factors (Dubey 255). First, India once had a closed economy that did not encourage foreign contributions, businesses, or investment. When the government liberalized the economy in the early 1990s, Diaspora Indians became more useful as agents of trade, investment, and technology. Second, India’s foreign policy began to recognize the value of the Diaspora in the industrialized countries, especially in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries for public diplomacy. In this regard the Indian Diaspora has also been a useful instrument in furthering India’s engagement with other countries including African states. And third, only from the mid-1990s, ethnic Indians started surfacing as high-level executives of multinational corporations. The general success of the community, especially in the US and Canada, and the community’s positive influence on the overall idea of Indian qualities led successive Indian governments to take a more proactive approach.

Since 2003, the Indian government has been hosting an annual Diaspora conference that is designed to serve as a platform for interaction between overseas Indians, the Indian government, and interested segments of the Indian society, such as businessmen, cultural and charity organizations. High-level political leaders, including the Prime Minister, the President, and Union Ministers, address 1,000 to 1,500 overseas Indians on topics such as investment and philanthropic activities in India, as well as concerns of the communities the world over. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, established in 2004, coordinates activities aimed at reaching out to the Diaspora. These include the “Know India Program” for Diaspora youth and annual awards for eminent Diaspora personalities. The government also set up a Global Advisory Council to the Prime Minister in 2009, consisting of Diaspora scholars, scientists, politicians, and businessmen. With the financial resources of the Diaspora in mind, the government amended investment laws and established the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre in 2007 to make it easier for Indians abroad to invest. Additionally, the Reserve Bank of India has procedures in place so that NRIs and PIOs can invest in Indian companies.

Although there are no reliable statistics, anecdotally, there has been an increase in the number of Indians that have returned in recent years. Returnee Indians can benefit their home countries by contributing enhanced skills, which can be used in the country of origin (human capital); access to business networks abroad (social capital); and financial capital and investment.

The Indian information technology (IT) industry is widely regarded as a showcase
for this triple-benefit formula. Figures from India’s national software association National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), show that North America, particularly the United States, accounted for two-thirds of India’s IT exports from 2004 to 2007. While the industry’s success is attributable to other factors, the impact of the Diaspora and returnees from the United States particularly is believed to be important for three reasons. First, several studies have shown that Indians who returned from the United States have founded and managed successful IT companies in India. Second, some Indians who founded companies in Silicon Valley have subcontracted work to companies in India. These entrepreneurs often serve as intermediaries between the markets. Third, the success of Indian IT professionals in the United States has created trust in the country’s intellectual abilities abroad. It has been a major factor in branding India as a source of well-educated and hard-working professionals (Dubey 265).

The Indian government’s increasing recognition of its Diaspora, in part, explains several countries’ increased interest in recruiting Indian graduates and professionals. It also explains the willingness of companies in other countries to collaborate with and outsource to Indian companies and experts. In addition, India recognizes the importance of the U.S Congressional Caucus on India and the Indian-Americans. This body consists of more than a third of all U.S. lawmakers, as well as the US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC). Indian-American advocacy efforts reportedly played a significant role in the signing of the U.S.-India Agreement for Civil Nuclear Cooperation in 2008, in lobbying for the removal of U.S. sanctions in the aftermath of India’s nuclear tests in 1998, as well as other occasions.

**China**

There are also, lessons to draw from the Chinese experience. The state, legislature, and party have high-level offices dealing with the overseas Chinese. At the Central Government level, China created an institutional apparatus targeting Chinese Diaspora citizens and created the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), which demonstrated that overseas Chinese issues were now a national matter. The office is under the State Council of the PRC (the Chinese Cabinet), which is also the highest executive body. The OCAO is headed by a Cabinet Minister and four Vice Ministers, and has a staff of 120. Governments at every provincial, city, township, and county have similar offices.

The Overseas Chinese Exchange Association and All China’s Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC) are the two major NGOs dealing with Chinese Diaspora affairs. Primarily, their mission includes tapping the financial and human resources of the Chinese Diaspora. There is an Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Chinese Parliament. It functions under the Standing Committee of the Parliament when the latter is not in session. The Chinese People’s Congress has an Overseas Chinese Commission, whose mission is to conduct research and
provide recommendations for guiding policies concerning its Diaspora citizens.

To date, with all these institutions, there are more than 11,000 laws and regulations concerning overseas Chinese (Oparaoji 3). The Chinese constitution recognized Chinese overseas returnees as a special group. In 1990, the Protection Law guaranteed the protection of overseas Chinese family and economic interests, and encouraged them to come back home by granting them special legal and economic privileges. There is no question that China’s investment in the Chinese Diaspora spanned off an unprecedented economic growth of our time.

**Italy**

The Italian experience with its Diaspora could serve as a model guiding similar initiatives in Nigeria. Italy keeps track of its over 4 million Italian emigrants through a national database known as the Database of Italians Abroad (Ionescu 20). Records therein are compiled via a system which requires the details of every Italian resident that has been living abroad for more than a year be registered at an Italian consulate. Voting rights in Italy are extended to Italians resident abroad, thereby allowing their political participation and, on occasion, the voicing and protection of their interests within Italy. For instance, the Italian Diaspora may vote for twelve (12) representatives in the parliament as well as six (6) senators to represent their interests by post (Ionescu 16).

Against the growing contest for knowledge and innovation in an era of globalization, Italy has shown considerable interest in the scientific and technological capacity of diasporic communities. The discourse in Italy extends beyond the problem of the loss of scientific minds to encompass the impact of foreign intellect in Italy. Explained further, the debate particularly covers the consequences of highly-skilled Italians relocating abroad, in association with the country’s poor show in adequately attracting foreign human capital to Italy.

Simply put, Italy’s increasing interest in its Diaspora is driven by a need to address its challenge with retaining Italian citizens well– that are versed in research and development, working professionals, and other skilled citizens, whilst simultaneously managing the outflow of skilled Italians, and drawing foreign expertise into the country.

To this end, Italy’s engagement of Italian Diaspora has manifested in three varieties of returning, retaining, and networking initiatives. The initiatives for facilitating the return of highly-skilled Italian emigrants were introduced in Article 1 of Ministerial Decree No. 13 of January 26, 2001, highlighting incentives such as increased financing for research study and raised income for research staff (Aspen Institute Italia 32). In 2005, the Master’s and Back program was established in the Sardinian region to reduce the emigration of skilled youth abroad by reinforcing higher education, financing postgraduate study towards employability, and empowering bodies and enterprises with funding for the recruitment of highly-
skilled young individuals in Sardinia’s labor market (Aspen Institute Italia 34). Figures from the program as of March 2012 reveal that 3,500 scholarships were awarded and almost 1,500 grants were made to finance trainee-placements as well as jobs for returnees, including those who undertook a higher education without the scheme. The country’s strategy to retain highly-skilled Italians within the country was predicated on the creation of an educational base of international repute and standard, largely devoted to applied research towards purposeful engagement of the technological sector, otherwise known as a centre of excellence (Aspen Institute Italia 1).

The year 2003 marked the setting up of rules meant to direct the formation of the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT), as fashioned after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (Aspen Institute Italia 34). The initiative is an extension of the return policy, including the formation of a world-leading center for higher education possessing the capacity to attract economic activity of an externalist nature that is critical to innovative study (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, and Trow 13). And in terms of Italy’s stratagem for networking, March 2003 witnessed the showcasing of the DAVINCI network (Database Accessible Via the Internet of Italian researchers Not residing in Italy and working abroad at university Centers, industrial laboratories or International organizations) at the conference dealing with Italy’s engagement of its overseas-based researchers, organized by the former Minister for Italians Abroad Mirko Tremaglia. The framework is aimed at boosting linkages among members consisting of researchers and scientists across developed nations, including Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Italian engagement of the Diaspora has also been influenced by the co-development approach, typified in the number of measures for diasporic mobilization, which recognize the community as a defining factor, at best support developmental efforts and, at the very least, concede autonomy in their driving of development (Nyberg-Sørensen, Van-Hear, and Engberg-Pedersen 49-71). An example is the Integrated Migration Information System (IMIS) (2001-2003), a venture on capacity development financed by the Italian authorities in collaboration with Egypt’s Ministry of Manpower and Emigration. In addition, the Italy-Senegal bilateral program known as the Commodity Aid Programme provides credit facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) whilst mobilizing the development of the local private sector (International Organisation for Migration).

### The Philippines

Lessons can be drawn from the Philippine experience from two areas — how the government ensures the safety of its citizens abroad in times of crisis, and how is engages its Diaspora for economic development. The Philippines has a long history of migration to other countries, which have been mainly for economic and family reunification reasons. According to the Philippine Department of
Foreign Affairs (DFA), approximately 10 percent of the Philippine population are migrants abroad. In 2011, Philippine authorities reported that 1.6 million Filipinos left the country for temporary work abroad and 2,500 joined their families abroad, becoming permanent migrants (Yabes 8). The Presidential Middle East Preparedness Committee (PMEPC) was established, in response to the recent events in the Middle East region. Crisis situation has warranted governmental response such as the Overseas Preparedness and Response Team (OPRT), set up in 2011 to coordinate actions to ensure the safety of Filipinos who are caught in crisis situations abroad.

Part of the government’s 3 Ps policy (Preparedness, Partnership, and Political Will) and its diplomatic posts’ contingency plans involve the assistance of Filipino communities abroad in times of crisis. The added logic behind these measures ensures that by ensuring their safety, the Philippine government can continue to engage, enable, and empower the networks of Filipinos abroad. Ensuring that Diaspora continues to be part of Philippine society, thus staying connected and making that connection stronger for sustained national development (Yabes 9). A “wardenship” system was created, wherein each community is designated a community leader who is encouraged to take part in the command and control procedures and structures of the contingency plans. These leaders are considered to be effective conduits of information that needs to be disseminated to the Filipino community in times of crises (Yabes 9). The community leaders connect Filipino migrants in the same location to each other and with the Philippine diplomatic and consular personnel.

Due to the crucial contribution to the Philippine economy, the Filipino Diaspora has been celebrated by the government and people. December was officially proclaimed Overseas Filipinos month by the Philippine Commission on Filipinos Overseas (PCFO) due to the great number of Filipinos who return to the country during the Christmas season. The Philippine Senate further institutionalized the recognition to national development in 1994 by introducing a bill that provides for absentee voting of overseas Filipinos such as contract workers, government employees, and persons living abroad temporarily, during Philippine general elections (Okamura 11). The government also set up programs to facilitate social, political, and economic investments. For example, the Land Bank of the Philippines set up a 2 billion PHP loan facility for Filipino workers working overseas who wish to invest in the Philippines. Moreover, the government also formulated policies to address the brain drain phenomenon wiping across most struggling economies. Programs such as Balik Scientist allows highly skilled Filipino specialists in the Diaspora to teach in their home country universities; to mentor young scientists and specialists; or embark on community projects with local counterparts within the Philippines (Yabes 10).

The government also prides itself in its three specialized agencies that aim to cater for specific functions and types of Philippine Diaspora. To illustrate, the Philippine
Overseas Employment Administration and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration are in charge of economic migrants. The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) takes care of Filipino emigrants and permanent residents abroad, including spouses of foreign nationals. Looking at the Commission in detail shows that it not only focuses on strengthening ties with Filipino communities overseas, but on the wellbeing of Filipinos overseas. The CFO registers and provides pre-departure orientation seminars to emigrants; promotes the transfer of technology as well as material and financial contributions from overseas for development projects in underserved communities all over the Philippines; and provides younger generations of Filipinos overseas with opportunities to learn Philippine history and culture (The Commission on Filipinos Overseas). Lastly is the Department of Foreign Affairs’ Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs, with its usual focus on protecting Diaspora interests abroad. More specifically, the Inter Agency Committee Against Trafficking (IACAT) is largely in charge of curbing the scourge of trafficking in persons.

Ghana

Within the African continent, the Ghanaian example of engagement of its Diaspora offers some lessons for Nigeria as well. The Ghanaian government realized the economic importance of its Diaspora, and has sought to keep the groups engaged. To achieve its objective of connecting the Diaspora with their country of origin in order to promote their efforts in national development, the government organized a Homecoming Summit in 2001, and invited all members of the Diaspora to the capital city of Accra. Following the huge success of this initiative and the warmness the Diaspora received from the home country, a case was made for the establishment of an institution to serve as a one-stop “shop” in the management of Diaspora matters.

A Non-Resident Ghanaians Secretariat (NRGS) was instituted in May 2003, to promote further links with Ghanaians abroad and to encourage return. Data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) indicate that between 1998 and 1999, there were approximately 50,000 return migrants living in Ghana. This particular data set includes mostly returnees from Africa, Europe, and North America. It has been also pointed out that returnee Diaspora is contributing meaningfully to the development of Ghana (Oparaoji 4).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, we examined the role of the Nigerian Diaspora in national development. Our analysis of the dynamics of diasporic globalization and capital builds on the theoretical ideas of Appadurai and Dirlik. Our analysis of the Nigerian Diaspora brings to the fore very critical issues and exposes the complex
nature of the general notion of the Diaspora and Nigerian Diaspora in particular. It also challenges commonly accepted notions of homogeneity, cultural belonging, sense of commitment of the Diaspora, and devotion to the homeland. From our discussion in the paper, it is clear that the Nigerian Diaspora is historically rooted in earlier as well as recent migratory movements in Africa. When compared with the forced movement of slaves and colonially induced migrations, postcolonialism, in the context of the Nigerian state as well as complex forces globalization and capitalism, in their different ramifications and manifestations, have propelled even more migration of Nigerians abroad. No doubt, information, communications, and transport technologies have made interactions much easier and cheaper, thus enhancing a Diaspora’s sense of community.

What has also come to the fore in the analysis of the Nigerian Diaspora and national development is the conflicting character between heterogeneity and homogeneity of the Diaspora. The Nigerian Diaspora, flowing from the hues of multiethnic and pluralistic character of the Nigerian state, with its historical as well as contemporary contestations over resources, power, etc., carries along with it an extra identity baggage to new lands. At the same time, Nigerians finding themselves in new lands, while struggling to retain their identity, have established different networks, connections, and interactions within their host country. These complex issues have, in no little way, hampered efforts by the Nigerian government to engage and tap its Diaspora resources for broader national benefits. These are realities that the Nigerian government ought to factor into its policy initiatives towards engaging and harnessing Diaspora resources for national development.

In concluding this discussion, there are broader implications of the above, which must be underscored. It is imperative that the Nigerian government rethinks its current approach towards engaging the Diaspora for development. Even though initiatives on the part of the government have included interactive meetings, dialogues, conferences, the creation of organizations such as the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) and Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) as platforms for Diaspora engagement, and the adoption of July 25 as Diaspora Day every year, the government seems to be more focused on attracting remittances for national development. The initiatives towards Nigerian government-Nigerian Diaspora engagement should be critically evaluated and repackaged, taking into account the dynamics of globalization and transnationalism, and should be anchored on a proper understanding of diasporic tendencies.

Another implication is that it is highly likely that with deepening globalization there will be a series of contradictory forces at work. On one hand, as the mobility of the Nigerian people and their ability to communicate and transact have increased, so is the possibility of developmental potential of Nigerian Diaspora likely to expand. On the other hand, social polarization and economic and political exclusion means that there will be increased pressure on some Nigerians to seek their well-being elsewhere. However, the movement of people is likely to
be curtailed through restrictive immigration and citizenship procedures. While acknowledging the fact that the Diaspora of some countries examined (China, India, Italy, the Philippines and Ghana) have different characteristics individually and from the Nigerian Diaspora, there are valuable lessons which Nigeria can draw from the study. Obviously, there is the need for more platforms for the engagement of the Nigerian Diaspora to enable the nation benefit from the huge capabilities, which go beyond just recorded and unrecorded remittances of the Diaspora.

The study of the Nigerian Diaspora and development could also benefit from further research and deeper analysis, which in turn would feed the policy process. Although countless studies have been commissioned; publications and reports have been produced; and numerous workshops, expert meetings, and conferences organized on migration and development (between Africa and host countries), our findings validate the need to further study and investigate diasporic tendencies in the era globalization and transnationalism and examine enduring avenues in which Diaspora transfer could make a difference to the situation in Nigeria.
Notes

1. Developments such as globalization and interdependence have important cross-cutting implications for international migration.

2. In his article titled ‘Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora’ published in 1998, Collin Palmer argues that the African Diasporic communities, like other Diasporic communities, possess a number of characteristics. These include a shared emotional attachment to their ancestral land, possession of a sense of racial, ethnic, or religious identity that transcends geographic boundaries, to share broad cultural similarities, and sometimes to articulate a desire to return to their original homeland.

3. In his book *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (1947), Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a foremost federalist, argued that Nigeria is not a nation — it is a mere geographical expression. According to Awolowo, there are no “Nigerians” in the same sense as there are “English” or “Welsh” or “French.” The word “Nigeria” is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.

4. In 2003, then Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan established the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). Whilst highlighting some negative impacts of international migration, the Commission’s main contention was that linkages between migration and development could be positive in offering a potential win-win-win scenario in which the migrant-sending countries benefit from economic remittances, the migrant-receiving countries gain skills and labor, and individual migrants have opportunities for economic betterment. A 2005 report by the Commission urged engagement with migrant populations as actors (WHO are the actors? Migrant populations or Commission?) in poverty reduction and economic growth strategies: “international migration should become an integral part of national, regional and global strategies for economic growth in both migration should become an integral part of national, regional and global strategies for economic growth in both the developed and developing world” (23).

5. Arif Dirlik, argues that past legacy struggled to revive its position. American dominating position replaced Euro-centrism. The concept of backwardness proved untrue in itself. Decolonization and socialism, once treated as alternative, were replaced by capitalism in 1980. The geo-historical diversity produced the societies more prone to modernity. The Labor Force marketing and advertising of East and Southeast Asia gave birth to the concept of management. New ways pervasiveness raised issues of class and gender, cutting across the cultural boundaries. The once-discarded traditions and ideologies regained the position. Marxist history and Confucius’s values stood (stood might not be the best word) in China. Attacks on Eurocentric modernity by Levenson, the Islamic and the Hindu revivals, nationalism, and Buddhism came up to replace the European modernity. Developed and undeveloped nations influenced the relationship of equanimity in the contemporary world. The role of post-colonial criticism in constructions of European influence and reconfiguration of the past established resurgent modernity discourse. Classical
theories of modernity and convergence of industrial society on the philosophy of Marx have been a basic and ultimate force in taking over and modernizing the contemporary world.


7-8. The “Out of Africa” theory is based on scientific researches on the origins and evolution of man, which led to testing of DNAs that confirm that all modern humans stem from a single group of Homo sapiens who emigrated from Africa 2,000 generations ago and spread throughout Eurasia over thousands of years.

9. Which has convened annually, since 2007.

10. Understood as the movement of people across international boundaries and within a country, respectively.

11. Discordant development refers to unequal development, including the way deepening inequalities and rapid progress juxtaposed with groups’ distress can generate uncertainty and violent conflict. Nigeria’s newfound status following the structural rebasing of its economy is contrasted against rising poverty rates in the country. For instance, most of northern Nigeria is weak economically and underdeveloped, and sectors that are critical for job creation and employment growth such as manufacturing seemingly remain stagnant.

12. Countercyclical refers to movement in a direction opposite to that of a normal, or current, cycle or trend. Remittances, for example, is normally counter-cyclical to the overall economic cycle: it increases during times of general prosperity (people send more money back home) and decreases during economic contraction (people send less money home).
Works Cited


