

Multilateralism and National Development: An Assessment of Nigeria's Roles in the Development of International Organizations (IO) in Africa (1960-2025)

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Abstract

Nigeria's participation in international organizations (IOs) has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy since gaining independence. Despite being a founding member of various IOs, including the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria's engagement has not yielded the expected benefits. Based on this backdrop, this research investigates Nigeria's participation in IOs and the role of Nigeria's multilateral foreign policy in the development of Nigeria. Qualitative methods and liberal institutionalism were used to investigate Nigeria's role in IOs in Africa. It has been revealed that despite Nigeria's active participation and contribution to these organizations, they do not benefit as they should. This study has demonstrated that Nigeria played a significant role as a regional leader within African multilateral organizations, particularly the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria had contributed to regional security and promoted trade and cooperation. The study recommends that Nigeria should be more conscious of its gains while pursuing its multifaceted foreign policy.

Keywords:

Multilateralism; Development; National Development; International Organizations; Africa.

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Introduction

Nigeria, a country that is rich in diversity, culture, and resources, plays a significant role on the global stage, especially in Africa, through its multilateral foreign policy. Multilateralism is the practice of engaging multiple countries in collaborative efforts to address shared challenges and promote mutual interests, particularly in the areas of security, trade, and development ([Ayoob 1991](#)). Like other countries on other continents, multilateralism has become increasingly important for African nations to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Nigeria and many African countries are part of regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which promote cooperation and collective decision-making on political, economic, and social issues ([Anyaoku 2012](#)). Scholars have argued that these multilateral efforts have helped to address challenges such as security threats, climate change, and economic development, allowing African nations to leverage their collective strength ([Barbara 2024](#)). By engaging in multilateralism, African countries have participated in fostering partnerships with other regions, attracting foreign investment, and promoting peace and stability ([Oduwole 2014](#)).

Historically, Nigeria, as one of the largest countries in Africa, has been a key player in several African countries, demonstrating commitment to regional cooperation and integration. Nigeria participated in various organizations, some of which include the United Nations (UN), where Nigeria actively participates in peacekeeping missions and discussions on global issues like climate change and human rights ([Adebajo 2008](#)). Additionally, Nigeria is a member of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Commonwealth of Nations, among others ([Obi 2021](#)). This membership enables Nigeria to engage with other countries. However, despite being a founding member of various international organizations (IOs), Nigeria's engagement has not yielded the expected benefits for the country. Efforts have been made by scholars and policymakers to address this issue, yet the problem persists. It is manifested in many ways. The economy remains vulnerable, and infrastructure and human development indicators continue to lag. The country's participation in IOs could only be explained as ineffective and inefficient ([Oshewolo et al. 2023](#)).

Thus, this paper aims to investigate the level of Nigeria's participation in IOs and to assess the impact of its engagement on national development. This introduction is followed by a chapter on methodology, literature review, and theoretical framework. The next chapter is focused on determining the level of Nigeria's participation in IOs in Africa since obtaining independence and the impact of this participation on the development of the country. The last segment consists of the conclusion and recommendations.

Methods and materials

In order to investigate the intricate relationship among multilateralism, national development, and Nigeria's contributions to the growth of international organizations (IOs) in Africa, this study uses qualitative research methods and a case study approach. Because it makes it easier to gather comprehensive, nuanced, and contextual insights about social phenomena, such as behaviors, attitudes, and experiences pertinent to Nigeria's involvement with IOs, qualitative research is especially useful for this study. A multifaceted data collection technique has been used to accomplish the study's goals. The study mostly uses secondary data from a wide range of sources, such as official publications, scholarly works, policy documents, and credible media sources. A thorough grasp of Nigeria's history and current roles within various international institutions, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is made possible by this extensive compilation of information.

Content analysis has been adopted as the main method for the analysis of the gathered data. This analytical technique enables a methodical analysis of textual data to find trends, themes, and patterns pertaining to Nigeria's involvement in and contributions to international organizations. The study examines the effects of Nigeria's international participation on national development results and challenges prevailing narratives by examining the substance of documents and literature. Furthermore, the case study method allows for a concentrated investigation of particular examples of Nigeria's engagement with different IOs, placing the results in the larger context of Africa's political and developmental environment. This method makes it easier to identify important players, their motivations, and the way internal and foreign issues interact to influence Nigeria's foreign policy choices.

Thus, the approach described here offers a solid framework for analyzing the complex dynamics of multilateralism in Africa, especially as they relate to Nigeria's goals for regional leadership and national development. This study aims to shed light on Nigeria's successes and difficulties in using the potential of international organizations for its development objectives through a methodical collection and analysis of qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the approach of liberal institutionalism. This tool of analysis is quite relevant here because it focuses on specialized international agencies as the main actors in international politics. Also, liberalism, a subset of international relations, posits that morality, law, and IOs can indeed set the basis for relations between states (Moravcsik 1997). It was asserted that cooperation among states is possible and there is a possibility of states acting as a community rather than an autonomous unit (Keohane 1984). Even though realism argues that the international

system is anarchical in nature and states pursue self-interests, Neo-liberalism, a critique that emerged in the 1980s, debunked this view held by the realists, as it rather lays emphasis on international institutions as a means of reducing conflicts (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2007). This school of thought believes that human beings are not only rational but also cooperative to seek mutual and long-term gains rather than maximizing short-term gains, hence the term liberal institutionalism.

Formal institutions, such as neo-liberalism, promote international cooperation through rules, regulations, and decision-making procedures. Neo-liberalism focuses on economic and environmental cooperation, analyzing state behavior and the international system (Keohane 1984). It posits that increased economic contacts between states lead to dependence for national goals like growth, employment, and price stability. ECOWAS, from a neo-liberal perspective, can act as a regional ally for states to achieve economic objectives. Liberal institutionalism promotes economic cooperation, integration, trade barriers, and peace. AU and ECOWAS are responsible for ensuring free movement of people and goods, smooth trade relations, and peace and security within the region (Moravcsik 1997). The theory is used to justify Nigeria's involvement in IOs in Africa, especially the AU and ECOWAS. The theory is also used to explain what Nigeria has gained from these multilateral relations.

The Theory Employed and the Empirical Analysis

The theory of Liberal Institutionalism employed in the study provides a fundamental framework for comprehending Nigeria's interactions with international organizations (IOs) in Africa. According to liberal institutionalism, international organizations and institutions are essential for fostering state cooperation, peace, stability, and reciprocal economic gains. This theory highlights the importance of group action and the notion that states can work together to accomplish shared objectives through common frameworks, regulations, and standards rather than being purely self-interested actors.

Nigeria's active involvement in the establishment and administration of important African IOs, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is evaluated in the empirical analysis in light of its foreign policy aims and national development goals. By identifying particular instances when Nigeria has used its participation in these organizations so as to achieve regional stability, economic integration, and collective security, the analysis supports the argument. The paper, for example, highlights Nigeria's crucial role in setting up the OAU and ECOWAS, demonstrating how its ideological dedication to African growth and unity is consistent with the principles of liberal institutionalism. The practical implementation of liberal institutionalism is demonstrated by Nigeria's financial contributions and diplomatic interactions with these organizations, which have sought to promote cooperative projects that tackle urgent regional problems and increase Nigeria's influence on the continent.

Furthermore, the empirical findings highlight an area where the principles of liberal institutionalism may need to be reevaluated because, despite Nigeria's substantial contributions to these multilateral institutions, the anticipated developmental gains for Nigeria have not been completely realized. According to the theory, institutional cooperation can benefit both parties, but the precise results rely on the internal and external difficulties that member nations confront, such as corruption, poor governance, and regional instability, all of which Nigeria still faces.

Deductively, liberal institutionalism and the empirical analysis are related in that the theory offers the analytical framework for understanding Nigeria's participation in international organizations, and the empirical results show how these interactions affect both Nigeria's domestic development and its larger regional goals.

Literature Review

This part reviews some related literature on relevant concepts in this paper, which include multilateralism, development, national interest, and national development.

Multilateralism: Multilateralism, according to Ruggie (1992), is the coordination of interactions among three or more nations, based on common values and norms such as diffuse reciprocity, generalized behavior, and indivisibility. It places a strong emphasis on using shared frameworks to promote international cooperation in the political, economic, and security spheres. According to Bayne and Woolcock (2017), multilateralism plays a significant role in Africa, especially in advancing sustainable development, peacekeeping, and regional integration through institutions like the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS. They also highlight how trade and financial cooperation help to maintain economic stability.

Ikenberry (2011) argues that multilateralism strengthens global governance by promoting inclusivity, accountability, and legality in international decision-making, setting it apart from bilateralism and unilateralism. Dauda, Ahmad, and Keling (2019) highlight the peacekeeping and conflict-resolution functions of multilateralism, especially through institutions like the UN, AU, and ECOWAS, which lessen the possibility of violence and encourage diplomatic interaction. Through organizations like the WTO, ECOWAS Free Trade Area, and ACFTA that promote investment, employment, and technical advancement, Bhagwati (2008) links multilateralism to economic development and trade liberalization.

As demonstrated by the Paris Agreement and the WHO's cooperation during COVID-19, Kickbusch (2020) emphasizes its significance in tackling global issues like pandemics and climate change by facilitating resource sharing and collaborative action. Lastly, Abdel-Latif (2023) argues that through organizations like the UN Human Rights Council and the ICC, multilateralism upholds international law and a rules-based global order, guaranteeing justice, human rights, and predictability in international relations.

Development: According to the different experts, development is a multifaceted, collaborative process that includes moral, social, and human improvement in addition to economic success. According to Oguonu (2012), development entails collaboration between the governed and the government, whereby both work to raise social well-being and living standards. While acknowledging the traditional economic indicators of progress, such as national income and per capita growth, Onah (2010) contends that true development should go beyond economic growth to include advancements in human welfare and quality of life.

In a similar vein, Todaro and Smith (2011) define development as a process that combines social change and economic growth with the goal of lowering poverty and inequality while improving freedom, health, and education. Sen (1999) broadens this concept by characterizing progress as the growth of individuals' liberties and the elimination of limitations such as social deprivation and poverty. A normative dimension is added by Goulet (1971), who contends that genuine growth must ensure freedom, self-worth, and life-sustenance to demonstrate respect for human dignity. According to Seers (1969), progress should not just be evaluated based on economic indicators but also on the way it affects poverty, unemployment, and inequality. In order to guarantee inclusion and sustainability, Chambers (1997) argues that development must be led by the people, particularly the excluded.

The ability of a society to use resources to improve human situations and achieve structural transformation is the final way that Rodney (1972) places development within a historical-materialist framework. Together, these academics see development as a comprehensive, people-centered, and transformational process that aims to improve the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

National Interest: Scholars generally agree that a country's national interest serves as the foundation for both its foreign and domestic policies. According to Ukhani and Kumapayi (2023), it is the tenet that directs governmental acts, which are influenced by a nation's domestic requirements and constitution, which in turn affect its interactions with other countries. Agaba and Ukhani (2015) show how many governments struggle to articulate their national interests, pointing out that a country loses focus in both its foreign and domestic policies when its national interests are not properly defined.

According to Nester (2001), national interest includes both broad aims like peace, security, and economic expansion, as well as particular purposes exclusive to each state that are frequently achieved by the use of force. From a realist perspective, Morgenthau (1948) claims that the quest for power is a fundamental aspect of international politics and defines national interest only in terms of survival and power. Rosenau (1969), on the other hand, broadens the idea to encompass both tangible and intangible components, such as culture, ideology, and leadership views, which influence the definition and pursuit of national interests.

For Holsti (1967), national interest is multifaceted, encompassing short-term security requirements, medium-term objectives like economic cooperation, and long-term ambitions like world peace. According to Schwarzenberger (1951), the idea of national interest is dynamic and ever-changing, responding to shifts in both internal and external circumstances. As governments put their own growth and survival first in their interactions with others, Ebegbulem (2019) emphasizes its crucial significance in foreign policy.

All things considered, the writers agree that national interest is a dynamic, multifaceted, and context-driven idea that integrates aspects of welfare, security, power, and values to influence how nations behave and engage with one another in the international system.

National Development: According to the experts, national development is a thorough and multifaceted process that aims to enhance residents' general well-being and quality of life. According to Bhawna (2016), it is the overall progress of a country in all areas – economic, social, political, and cultural – with a focus on lowering inequality, raising living standards, and ensuring the safety of people and property. It is defined by Adagbabiri and Okolie (2016) as the long-term enhancement of the material and spiritual facets of national life, as evidenced by improved housing, food, education, transportation, and general happiness, all accomplished in a manner that upholds human dignity. According to Todaro and Smith (2006), growth is a transforming process that involves raising society via freedom, self-worth, and sustenance, three essential components that propel human-centered advancement.

National development in Nigeria is defined as the government's endeavor to improve the welfare of its people via economic diversification, infrastructure, healthcare, and education. This devotion is demonstrated by programs such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which places a high priority on institutional reform, human capital development, and poverty reduction.

All of the academics agree that national development is a wide, inclusive, and people-centered process that combines economic expansion with social advancement, human dignity, and long-term enhancement of the standard of living for the populace.

Results and Discussion

Nigeria's roles in the development of IOs in Africa

Nigeria's role in the development of IOs in Africa cannot be overemphasized because, since the attainment of independence, it has made Africa its centerpiece. It makes its foreign policy towards the development of Africa a *sine qua non*. Nigeria's commitments are majorly felt in its active participation in the establishment of major IOs and the management of those organizations in Africa.

a. Establishment of IOs in Africa

Nigeria has participated substantially and proactively in the establishment and

development of major African international organizations. Its participation is both ideological and practical, shaped by its post-independence foreign policy, population size, geographical positioning, and aspiration to provide leadership on the African continent. Nigeria's engagement has been guided by principles of African unity, regional stability, and economic integration. Over the decades, this engagement has manifested in leadership roles, founding memberships, and consistent diplomatic activity across the continent ([Adebajo 2008](#)).

One of the earliest and most significant examples of Nigeria's contribution to the establishment of IOs in Africa was its involvement in the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Nigeria was among the 32 independent African countries that signed the OAU Charter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a foundational moment in the continent's post-colonial history. This marked not only Nigeria's early commitment to continental solidarity but also demonstrated its willingness to take a leadership role in Africa's collective efforts to safeguard independence, resist neo-colonialism, and promote integration. The establishment of the OAU came at a time when African countries were deeply divided along ideological lines, with two major blocs: the radical Casablanca Group, which supported rapid political integration, and the more cautious Monrovia Group, which favored gradual cooperation while preserving national sovereignty. Nigeria, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, strategically aligned with the Monrovia Group, advocating a more moderate and pragmatic approach to unity that emphasized functional cooperation in key areas such as education, trade, culture, and diplomacy, rather than immediate political federation ([Adebajo 2022](#)).

Balewa's position was grounded in Nigeria's broader foreign policy outlook, which prioritized non-alignment, respect for state sovereignty, and peaceful coexistence. He believed that unity should emerge organically through mutual respect and shared interests, rather than through political pressure or ideological compulsion. In his address during the Addis Ababa Conference, Balewa emphasized that while political unity was desirable, the diversity of Africa's colonial experiences and political systems necessitated a cautious, cooperative approach to integration. This moderate vision was key in bridging the ideological gap between the two rival blocs and helped create a broad consensus that enabled the adoption of the OAU Charter ([Akinoye 2017](#)).

General Yakubu Gowon played a decisive role in the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Following the Nigerian Civil War, Gowon sought ways to foster regional cooperation and prevent future conflict by promoting economic integration. He initiated high-level discussions with President Gnassingbé Eyadéma of Togo in the early 1970s to lay the groundwork for a regional economic bloc ([Arise 2022](#)). These discussions culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Lagos on 28 May 1975, officially establishing ECOWAS, with Nigeria as a founding and leading member. Gowon's leadership was critical in garnering regional consensus, and Nigeria under his administration provided

both political and material support to ensure the successful establishment of the organization ([Nnoli 1980](#)).

Olusegun Obasanjo, who succeeded Gowon after the 1975 coup, continued Nigeria's strong engagement in regional and continental diplomacy. As a military head of state (1976–1979) and later as a civilian president (1999–2007), Obasanjo was deeply committed to African integration. During his military tenure, he reinforced Nigeria's role in ECOWAS and promoted liberation movements across Southern Africa, including the ANC in South Africa and MPLA in Angola. He also hosted the 1977 FESTAC (Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture), symbolizing Nigeria's commitment to pan-African cultural and political solidarity ([Nwanegbo 2008](#)).

In his civilian presidency, Obasanjo was central to the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU). Nigeria was among the first countries to ratify the Constitutive Act of the African Union on 26 April 2001, an action that brought the AU into full legal existence. Obasanjo also led peace mediation efforts across the continent, including in Liberia, Sudan, and Côte d'Ivoire, and proposed the establishment of an African standby force to deal with conflicts, reinforcing Nigeria's role in institutionalizing African solutions to African problems. Through the initiatives of Gowon in establishing ECOWAS and Obasanjo's efforts in strengthening both ECOWAS and the African Union, Nigeria not only helped form these key organizations but also provided leadership, funding, and strategic direction. Their efforts positioned Nigeria as a central force in Africa's multilateral development and integration ([Adebajo 2002](#)). In accordance with liberal institutionalism, this paper concludes that Nigeria has contributed immensely to the emergence and development of international organizations. These contributions relate to the Nigerian belief that human beings are rational and cooperative, seeking mutual and long-term gains, rather than maximizing short-term gains.

b. Management of IOs in Africa

Nigeria has played a significant and influential role in the management of IOs across Africa. It has contributed financially and diplomatically to IOs to foster regional and continental development. As the continent's most populous country and one of its largest economies, Nigeria's influence is felt in various international bodies, reflecting its commitment to Africa's political stability, economic development, and global representation. Nigeria has provided key leadership within major African organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigerian diplomats have taken on prominent roles, shaping policies that address peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and regional integration. Nigeria's commitment to peace is evident in its leading role in ECOWAS-led peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, and the Central African Republic, where it has deployed troops and offered financial resources to stabilize conflict-affected areas ([Onuoha 2013](#)).

Nigeria is one of the largest contributors to African IOs, playing a crucial role in supporting the continent’s political stability and development. The country provides substantial funding to key bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and various peacekeeping and humanitarian initiatives. These financial contributions help ensure that these organizations can operate effectively, respond quickly to regional crises, and sustain long-term development programs. Its funding is vital in supporting peacekeeping missions across Africa, particularly in conflict zones within West Africa. By underwriting the costs associated with deploying troops, logistics, and humanitarian aid, Nigeria strengthens the capacity of organizations like ECOWAS to maintain peace and security (KFF 2022). This financial backing not only facilitates immediate conflict resolution but also supports post-conflict reconstruction efforts, enabling affected countries to rebuild infrastructure and institutions. Nigeria’s financial commitments contribute to regional economic integration projects (Congressional Research Service 2020). These include infrastructure development, such as roads, energy, and trade facilitation initiatives that aim to boost intra-African trade and economic growth. Nigerian leaders like Olu Femi Adeniran have held chairmanship roles in financial committees within ECOWAS and the African Development Bank, helping to shape policies that promote regional economic integration and financial stability. Despite challenges such as political instability and corruption, Nigeria’s geopolitical importance and economic strength keep it central to Africa’s international cooperation and governance efforts (Nwankwo 2021; Adeniran 2023). Table 1 and Figure 1 depict the level of Nigeria’s financial commitments to international organizations.

TABLE 1. Financial Contributions of Member States of ECOWAS S

No.	Member Country	Financial Contributions for ECOWAS Sustenance
1	Benin	3.9%
2	Burkina Faso	2.6%
3	Cape Verde	1.5%
4	Cote D’ Ivoire	13%
5	The Gambia	6%
6	Ghana	12.9%
7	Guinea Bissau	1.5%
8	Liberia	6.7%
9	Mali	1.9%
10	Mauritania	2.6%
11	Niger	2.1%
12	Nigeria	32.8%
13	Senegal	5.4%
14	Sierra Leone	4.4%
15	Togo	3.6%

Source: ECOWAS Secretariat, Lagos (Library document on member’s contributions), 2013

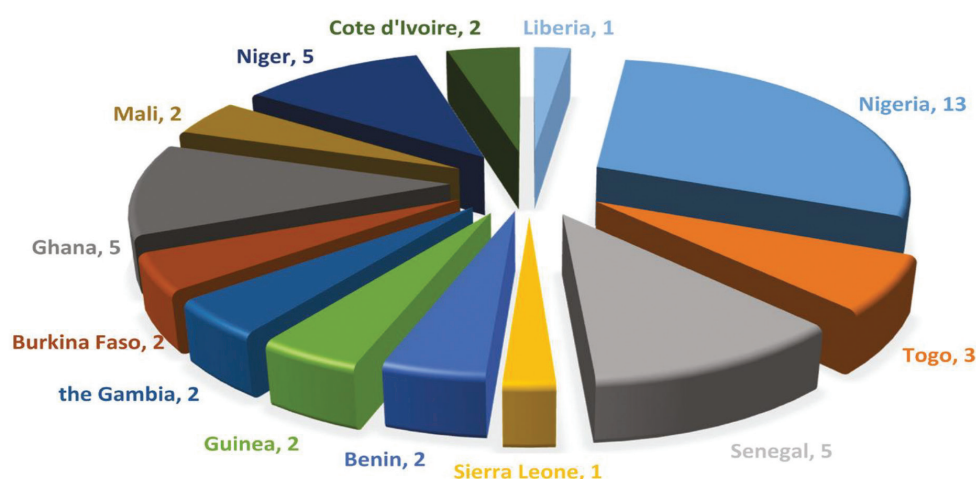


Figure 1 Years Spent by Member-countries as Chair of ECOWAS.
Source: Oshewolo et al. (2023) Nigeria in ECOWAS Politics: Major Contributions, Dividends and Setbacks.

Following the analysis above, this paper argues that Nigeria is not only the major financial hub of ECOWAS but also a force behind the successes of the union. Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment and belief in cooperation with other states to attain greater happiness for Africans in general and Nigerians in particular.

Multilateralism policy and Nigeria’s development

The position of Nigeria in Africa, resulting from human and natural resource endowment, made Nigeria pursue an Africa-centered foreign policy, which is also in line with liberal institutionalism. In this quest, the only viable option available was multilateral diplomacy. Therefore, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Nonaligned Movement, the United Nations (UN), and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) became the earliest medium with which Nigeria pursued its national and African interests (Agaba and Ukhami 2015). The fundamental tenets of Nigeria’s foreign policy are “non-alignment, African solidarity, economic diplomacy, peacekeeping, international cooperation, national interest, regional integration, multilateralism, cultural diplomacy, and national sovereignty (Danyaya 2025). These tenets influenced Nigeria’s relations with the international community, fostering economic growth, peace, and cooperation while safeguarding national interests. Nigeria’s involvement in international organizations, participation in global governance, and bilateral and multilateral interactions with other nations all clearly reflect the aforementioned ideals.

On many occasions, Nigeria had cooperated with other states to fight against insurgent groups in Sub-Saharan regions. Nigeria played a significant role in regional peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone and Liberia between 1990 and 2002, mainly to bring peace and stability to these two nations. Nigeria has benefited from this policy by ensuring peaceful coexistence in the world, which, in turn, brings about peace to Nigeria. The image of Nigeria is boosted through multilateral policy, even

though, on many occasions, official activities by Nigerian peacekeeping forces have raised ethical concerns ([Danyaya 2025](#)).

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), ratified by Nigeria in December 2020, remains a cornerstone of regional integration. The agreement aims to eliminate tariffs on 90 percent of goods, promoting a freer exchange of goods and services across Africa. This paper is of the view that the full implementation of AfCFTA has boosted Nigeria's exports significantly, provided greater market access, and reduced reliance on crude oil exports. The benefits of AfCFTA to the Nigerian economy equally include larger market access, free movement of labour, goods, services, and capital. The AfCFTA agreement has also motivated Nigerian SMEs to expand their businesses to other African countries.

Before the enactment of the AfCFTA agreement, ECOWAS was in place to manage the African economy. Nigeria was not only an active member when it was first established, but also continues to be active since its formation in 1975. Like AfCFTA, Nigeria benefited from the free trade policy of ECOWAS. This policy has favored Nigeria in exporting its goods to West African states. Nigeria also benefited, through its multilateral policy, from ECOWAS, through increased trade opportunities, access to a larger regional market, and the free movement of labor, visa facilitation for our businessmen and women, and students. Nigeria earned \$823.06 million from exports to ECOWAS countries and \$2.72 billion from shipping out products to Africa in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, exports to the whole of Africa were estimated at N401.4 billion, while goods worth N149.3 billion were exported to ECOWAS. This, according to analysts, is set to expand owing to the AfCFTA. In 2018, Nigeria equally benefited from \$5bn in projects from China through its visit to ECOWAS members at the Forum on China – Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) ([Akinyemi, Okoli, and Chidozie 2021](#)). Nigeria has also managed to achieve its vision in prompting the commitment of ECOWAS Member States to deepening and strengthening institutions in the sub-region, through good governance, the fight against corruption, combating terrorism, violent extremism, and organized crime.

The influence of Nigeria in the AU and its participation in the union equally improved Nigeria's development. Though Nigeria expended its oil boom funds on the liberation of some African countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and South Africa. It is on record that the High Commissioner of Sierra Leone to Nigeria, Dr. Solomon Gembeh, says that Nigeria spent over \$13bn on the liberation of his country and Liberia ([Adebajo 2022](#)). Despite this humongous amount spent on achieving multilateralism of Nigeria's foreign policy, it equally benefited from the policy because this action projected the image and prestige of Nigeria among member states in the entire continent of Africa. Another benefit is security and support from African member states during the Nigerian civil war. Nigeria, for instance, benefited from the loyalty of Niger to the extent that the Nigerian president, Ahmadu Diori, was quoted to have said that he could abandon it at its challenging time ([Dele 2017](#)). Justifying his position, Diori said that given how extensively Niger depends on

Nigeria for economic survival, he could not support Biafra, because according to him, “when Nigeria sneezes, Niger not only catches a cold, it is already on admission in the hospital” (Dele 2017).

Moreover, Nigeria is a member of OPEC, which regulates the price and export of oil. Being a member of this organization has assisted Nigeria in maximizing opportunities from crude oil export. In 2021, the then Minister of State Petroleum Resources, Chief Timipre Sylva, highlighted the critical benefits of Nigeria’s 50-year membership in OPEC, which began in 1971 (Leadership 2021). He stated that OPEC has enabled Nigeria to coordinate oil policies, secure stable oil prices, and influence the global oil market. Sylva emphasized that this membership has fostered the development of Nigeria’s oil industry and has been mutually beneficial, facilitating policy harmonization and the sharing of expertise among member countries (Leadership 2021). Nigeria has significantly benefited from OPEC’s efforts to stabilize the oil market, due to its reliance on oil revenue. The country has played a crucial role in OPEC’s success, producing six Presidents of OPEC conferences and four Secretaries-General.

Multilateralism has propelled and showcased Nigerian values among the committee of nations. Since 1960, when it attained its independence, it has extended its influence to other parts of the world. This is done by joining the United Nations Organization (UNO), now known as the UN, and being active in the activities of the Union. It maximized the opportunity to the extent Nigeria tops the list of African countries to have been on the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent seat member with a record of five times from 1966 – 1967, 1978 – 1979, 1994 – 1995, 2010 – 2011, and 2014 – 2015.

Systematic Analysis of the Impact of Nigeria’s Multilateral Foreign Policy on National Development

Nigeria’s foreign policy emphasizes multilateral diplomacy to enhance African-centered initiatives, leveraging its strategic location and resources. Key organizations aiding this pursuit include the OAU, UN, Commonwealth of Nations, and Non-Aligned Movement. The following systematic analysis of the impacts of these multilateral initiatives on Nigeria’s national development is quite essential:

1. Economic Growth: Nigeria’s involvement in multilateral trade agreements such as ECOWAS and the AfCFTA has significantly enhanced its economic growth. The ratification of AfCFTA in December 2020 facilitated free trade across Africa by eliminating tariffs on 90% of goods, allowing Nigerian companies better market access and promoting economic diversification away from crude oil dependence. Nigeria’s longstanding participation in ECOWAS since 1975 has also provided its products access to a broader West African market, with exports to ECOWAS nations generating approximately \$823 million in the first half of 2020. This economic integration supports the growth and resilience of Nigerian SMEs in other African

markets by providing them with increased opportunities for trade, access to larger consumer bases, and the ability to compete more effectively against larger firms.

2. Security and Reputation: Nigeria's contributions to regional peacekeeping, especially in Sierra Leone and Liberia from 1990 to 2002, have significantly enhanced its national security and international reputation. By fostering a stable environment in West Africa, Nigeria's actions have indirectly benefited its own security and positioned it as a regional leader, earning respect from neighboring countries despite some ethical issues associated with its peacekeeping operations.

3. International Standing and Political Leverage: Nigeria's political clout in international fora has been strengthened by its proactive diplomacy. Nigeria's 50-year membership in OPEC has been essential to maintaining oil price stability and boosting the nation's oil-dependent economy. Nigeria has been able to boost its export revenue, which is essential to its national growth, and influence global oil policies thanks to the strategic advantages of OPEC membership. Participation in the UN: Nigeria's dedication to global governance has been highlighted by its history as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Nigeria has actively participated in international debates over its five periods in this position, which has improved its reputation internationally and given it the opportunity to promote African concerns on a global scale.

4. National Sovereignty and Security Cooperation: Nigeria has strengthened its security arrangements by pursuing multilateral collaborations. Collaborative Security Efforts: Nigeria has improved regional security cooperation in the fight against organized crime and terrorism by cultivating alliances within ECOWAS and the African Union (AU). This strategy has been crucial for resolving internal security issues and bolstering Nigeria's influence in the region. Assistance in Times of Crisis: A spirit of solidarity that further strengthens national stability and sovereignty is fostered by Nigeria's established links with other African states, as demonstrated by historical circumstances such as the Nigerian Civil War.

5. Cultural diplomacy and image: Nigeria's image in the world has been greatly influenced by its multilateral foreign policy, which promotes international collaboration and cultural interchange. Cultural diplomacy: Nigeria's foreign policy is based on the principles of African solidarity and cultural diplomacy, which have enabled the nation to showcase its rich cultural legacy internationally and gain soft power that facilitates international interactions and cooperation. International Aid and Cooperation: Despite being expensive, Nigeria's financial contributions to the liberation of nations like Sierra Leone and Liberia have improved its reputation as a pan-African leader. As a result, neighboring nations have offered Nigeria reciprocal support, which could be crucial for Nigeria's international relations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria's historical dedication to African unity, regional stability, and collective prosperity is demonstrated by its long-standing participation in multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States. This paper has demonstrated that Nigeria has continuously asserted itself as a key player in Africa's multilateral architecture, from its groundbreaking role in the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to its leadership in peacekeeping, crisis resolution, and regional integration. These contributions, which are based on the ideas of liberal institutionalism, show how Nigeria views collaboration, common standards, and institutional frameworks as means of achieving mutual advancement.

This paper, however, highlights a glaring paradox: despite Nigeria's massive financial, military, and diplomatic investments in the growth and maintenance of international organizations in Africa, the country's own progress has been unequal and limited. The main contribution is that the expected benefits of global participation, including improved governance, infrastructure development, economic change, and human development, have not yet materialized. This disconnect is not primarily the result of multilateralism's failure; rather, it is a reflection of enduring domestic obstacles that make it difficult to effectively translate external engagements into internal development outcomes, such as governance deficiencies, corruption, weak institutions, and inconsistent policy ([Chidozie 2021](#)).

Furthermore, the paper has shown that rather than a well-defined and deliberately pursued national interest, Nigeria's multilateral involvement has frequently been motivated more by ideological commitments to African solidarity and leadership aspirations. Although this has increased Nigeria's stature and power throughout the continent, it has also resulted in a trend of disproportionate contributions in comparison to observable national gains. As a result, Nigeria's participation in international organizations might be described as having an impact on the region but not being the best at achieving its own development goals.

All things considered, Nigeria's experience from 1960 to 2025 shows that, despite its importance, multilateralism is not intrinsically sufficient for national growth. Strong institutional frameworks, cogent national interest articulation, and alignment of external engagements with internal capabilities are all necessary for its efficacy. Suffice it to say that Nigeria participates extensively but does not benefit sufficiently.

This article proposes that Nigeria must change from broad, ideology-driven global involvement to a strategic, interest-based strategy. In its interactions with institutions like the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States, Nigeria should prioritize and clearly define its national interests, making sure that involvement results in quantifiable national advantages. Aligning global commitments with domestic development objectives is a top issue, especially

by making use of frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area to support industrialization, trade expansion, and economic diversification. To successfully convert foreign activities into observable development achievements, it is also crucial to strengthen domestic institutions, enhance governance, and combat corruption. Nigeria could also improve economic diplomacy, take on a more strategic and selected leadership role, and set up robust monitoring systems to assess the advantages of its global engagement. The nation's ability to gain from multilateralism will be further enhanced by investing in human resources and supporting the private sector, particularly SMEs. In order to ensure that its involvement in regional security, diplomacy, and cultural influence translates into tangible economic, political, and developmental gains at home, Nigeria must finally align its financial and military contributions with anticipated rewards.

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