

## Foreign Policy and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria from 2019 – 2024

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### Abstract

*This study examines the relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy and socio-economic development between 2019 and 2024. Guided by the objectives of establishing whether a correlation exists between foreign policy and socio-economic development, and assessing the impact of the manner in which foreign policy resources and opportunities are applied, the study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach. Drawing on the national interest, dependency, and game theories, it interrogates how Nigeria's foreign policy has been conceptualised, implemented, and reviewed during the period under study. The analysis demonstrates that while Nigeria possesses significant opportunities for leveraging foreign policy to advance income per capita, infrastructure, employment, education, and technological growth, weak institutional frameworks, inconsistent policy application, and leadership deficits have limited these outcomes. The findings emphasise the need for a recalibrated foreign policy anchored on economic diplomacy, stronger domestic bargaining power, and a deliberate orientation towards socio-economic transformation. The study concludes that only through a pragmatic and strategically applied foreign policy can Nigeria achieve sustainable development and greater influence in the international system.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Socio-Economic Development, Nigeria

**Introduction**

Nation-states design foreign policy as a strategic tool to safeguard national interests and to advance socio-economic and political goals in an increasingly competitive global system. Handrieder (1967) rightly observed that foreign policy is a coordinated strategy by which decision-makers manipulate the international environment to achieve domestic objectives. This suggests that beyond security and diplomacy, foreign policy must also serve as an instrument for national development. For countries such as Nigeria, the test of foreign policy relevance lies in its ability to improve citizens' welfare, raise income levels, strengthen institutions, and foster socio-economic transformation.

Scholars such as Akindele and Ate (1988) have emphasised that the ultimate purpose of foreign policy is to protect sovereignty while enhancing the economic and social well-being of citizens. In practical terms, this means that external engagements should translate into tangible outcomes like employment creation, infrastructural growth, technological advancement, and poverty reduction. This study is therefore concerned with two interrelated issues: first, whether there exists a meaningful relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development; and second, whether the way foreign policy resources and opportunities are applied has a measurable impact on domestic socio-economic outcomes.

Nigeria's historical foreign policy trajectory reveals mixed results. While the country has pursued an Africa-centred agenda, peacekeeping missions, and regional integration efforts, the dividends for domestic socio-economic progress have been limited. Despite vast natural resource endowments and significant international engagements, Nigeria continues to face chronic poverty, unemployment, weak infrastructure, and underdeveloped industrial capacity. This paradox raises important questions about the effectiveness of its foreign policy in delivering socio-economic dividends.

The Nigerian case therefore illustrates a pressing need to interrogate how foreign policy can be recalibrated to achieve economic and social transformation. A purposeful foreign policy must go beyond symbolic engagement. It must deploy diplomacy, trade agreements, investment partnerships, and multilateral cooperation to serve as catalysts for development. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine both the relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development and the extent to which the application of foreign policy resources and opportunities influences Nigeria's progress between 2019 and 2024.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite Nigeria's extensive foreign policy engagements, which range from peacekeeping operations, regional integration efforts, bilateral treaties, and participation in multilateral organisations, the expected socio-economic dividends have

remained elusive. The country continues to struggle with chronic poverty, unemployment, weak infrastructure, insecurity, and underdeveloped industrial capacity. This paradox raises critical questions about whether Nigeria's foreign policy has been effectively deployed as a tool for socio-economic development. The problem, therefore, lies in the evident gap between Nigeria's foreign policy commitments abroad and the limited socio-economic outcomes at home.

### **Research Objectives:**

The main objective of this study is to determine the prospects and challenges of Nigeria achieving the factors of socio-economic development through the instrumentality of foreign policy. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Find out if there is a relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development.
- ii. Determine whether the manner of applying foreign policy resources and opportunities has an impact on socio-economic development.

### **Research Questions**

- i. Is there a relationship between foreign policy and the socio-economic development of Nigeria?
- ii. Does the manner of applying foreign policy resources and opportunities have an impact on socio-economic development?

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i. There is a significant relationship between foreign policy and the socio-economic development of Nigeria.
- ii. The manner in which foreign policy resources and opportunities are applied has a significant impact on socio-economic development.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Clarifications**

##### **Foreign Policy and Socio-Economic Development**

Foreign policy has been described as “the coordinated strategy with which institutionally designated decision-makers seek to manipulate the international environment in order to achieve certain national objectives” (Handrieder, 1967:6). The central argument is that foreign policy is not an end in itself but a purposive and goal-oriented mechanism through which a state protects and advances its interests. Akindele (in Akindele & Ate, 1988) similarly affirms that the goal of any nation's foreign policy is to promote sovereignty while safeguarding the socio-economic well-being of its citizens.

Socio-economic development refers to the expansion of economic capacity alongside improvements in social indicators such as health, education, and living standards. Dudley Seers (1969) conceptualises development around three key questions: What is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment? What is happening to inequality? By this definition, true development is realised only when these indicators show consistent improvement. Crowther (1998) adds that economic development relates to production, trade, and money supply in ways that satisfy the needs of society, while Appadorai (1978) emphasises its connection to the material requisites of human well-being.

For Nigeria, the paradox has been that despite its vast natural resources, ranking as the 11th largest crude oil producer by 2019 (CIA World Factbook, 2019), its socio-economic performance remains weak. Challenges of corruption, weak institutions, poor leadership, insecurity, and policy inconsistency have constrained the translation of foreign policy engagements into domestic socio-economic progress (Achebe, 1981; Ate, 2001). This raises the twofold concern central to this study: (i) whether a relationship exists between Nigeria's foreign policy and socio-economic development, and (ii) whether the application of foreign policy resources has been sufficiently strategic to influence development outcomes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **National Interest Theory**

The National Interest theory posits that foreign policy is primarily the pursuit of a state's domestic needs projected externally (Morgenthau, 1973). In Nigeria's case, the expectation is that foreign policy should directly contribute to socio-economic growth by promoting trade, investment, and industrialisation. This framework directly supports the first objective of the study: to determine if a relationship exists between foreign policy and socio-economic development.

#### **Dependency Theory**

Dependency theorists such as Gunder Frank (1969) argue that underdevelopment in the global South persists because of structural dependence on developed economies. Nigeria's heavy reliance on crude oil exports, external loans, and foreign aid exemplifies such dependency (Nte, 2016; Saliu, 2013). The implication is that even well-crafted foreign policy strategies may yield limited socio-economic results if external dependence is not reduced. This provides a useful lens for addressing the second objective of this study: assessing whether the manner of applying foreign policy resources has a real impact on development.

**Game Theory**

Game theory, as applied in international relations, views foreign policy as a strategic interaction where states seek to maximise benefits and minimise losses under conditions of interdependence (Rosenau, 1976). Nigeria's foreign policy outcomes, whether in bilateral negotiations, ECOWAS integration, or multilateral forums, depend not only on its stated objectives but also on how effectively it bargains with other actors. The theory highlights that the way foreign policy resources are applied, through strategic engagement and negotiation, is crucial in determining socio-economic dividend.

**Methodology**

Research design provides the blueprint that guides a study from the formulation of research questions through to data collection and analysis. As Frankfort–Nachmias (1996, in Udoms, 2016) explains, it is the plan, structure, and strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research questions, while Kerlinger (cited in Okwandu, 2004) describes it as the framework that specifies methods and procedures for generating and analysing data. Against this background, the present study employed a historical and descriptive survey design. This approach allowed for the systematic collection of data on Nigeria's foreign policy and socio-economic conditions with a view to describing and interpreting prevailing realities. It was considered particularly suitable since the study sought to establish relationships and impacts between two interrelated variables: socio-economic development, identified here as the dependent variable, and foreign policy, serving as the independent variable.

The research covered the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the Fourth Republic, focusing specifically on the period 2019 to 2024. This period was selected because of its peculiar political and economic contexts, including the second term of President Muhammadu Buhari, the transition to the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the disruption of socio-economic patterns by the COVID-19 pandemic. These conditions made it imperative to explore the extent to which foreign policy could serve as an instrument of national development.

The study population comprised elected and appointed officials, academics, and senior civil servants in key institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the National Assembly, and the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission. Staff of eighteen Nigerian diplomatic missions across the globe, as well as scholars from the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Akwa Ibom State University, the University of Uyo, and Baze University in Abuja, were also included. This produced an estimated population size of 450 individuals with relevant knowledge of foreign policy and socio-economic dynamics. From this population, a sample size of 300 respondents was drawn using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across groups with specialised expertise. Structured questionnaires were administered, and 250 copies were accurately completed and retrieved.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilised. Primary data were gathered through the questionnaires administered to respondents, including some distributed electronically through SurveyMonkey to senior embassy staff abroad. Secondary data were drawn from textbooks, journal articles, government publications, official gazettes, institutional reports, and electronic media sources. The instrument used consisted of a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: the first captured demographic information about respondents, while the second addressed issues directly related to the study's objectives. Efforts were made to ensure the validity of the instrument through expert review, modification, and triangulation, while reliability was established by ensuring that the procedures and findings were consistent and replicable.

Data were analysed thematically to allow for the identification of patterns that spoke directly to the research objectives. Following Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2007) guidance, the process involved familiarisation with responses, generation of initial codes, clustering into themes, and refining categories before presenting findings in narrative and graphic forms. The analysis was guided by national interest theory, dependency theory, and game theory, which together provided explanatory insights into the extent to which Nigeria's foreign policy relates to socio-economic development and the degree to which its resources and opportunities have been effectively applied.

Although the study faced limitations such as time constraints, restricted access to certain information, and the general challenge of working in a field with limited local research history, deliberate efforts were made to ensure validity and ethical rigour. Informed consent was obtained from participants, confidentiality was protected, and the risk of harm was minimised. Furthermore, due acknowledgement was given to the contributions of other scholars to maintain academic integrity.

## Findings and Discussion

**Table 4.1: Classification of Respondents.**

Responses	Number of People	Number Issued Questionnaire	Number Invalidated	Number Used	% Percentage of Used Questionnaire
Nigeria Diplomatic Missions Overseas	130	70	5	65	26%
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	105	70	15	55	22%
NIIA	50	35	5	30	12%
Ministry of finance/ budgeting national planning	20	15	3	12	4.8%
Nigerian Diaspora Commission	35	25	5	20	8%

Staff of Senate and House Committee on Foreign Affairs and other Relevant Committees	35	25	5	20	8%
University Lecturers	25	20	2	18	7.2%
Scholars	50	40	10	30	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Field Work, 2024.*

A total of 300 respondents were administered optioned questions, and 250 were adopted and utilised in data analysis, as shown in Table 4.1 above. The data was then analysed quantitatively through simple percentage calculations.

### **Research Questions One:**

Is there a relationship between foreign policy and the socio-economic development of Nigeria?

**Table 4.2: Responses on the Relationship between Foreign Policy and Socio-economic Development**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	235	94%
No	10	4%
Undecided	5	2%

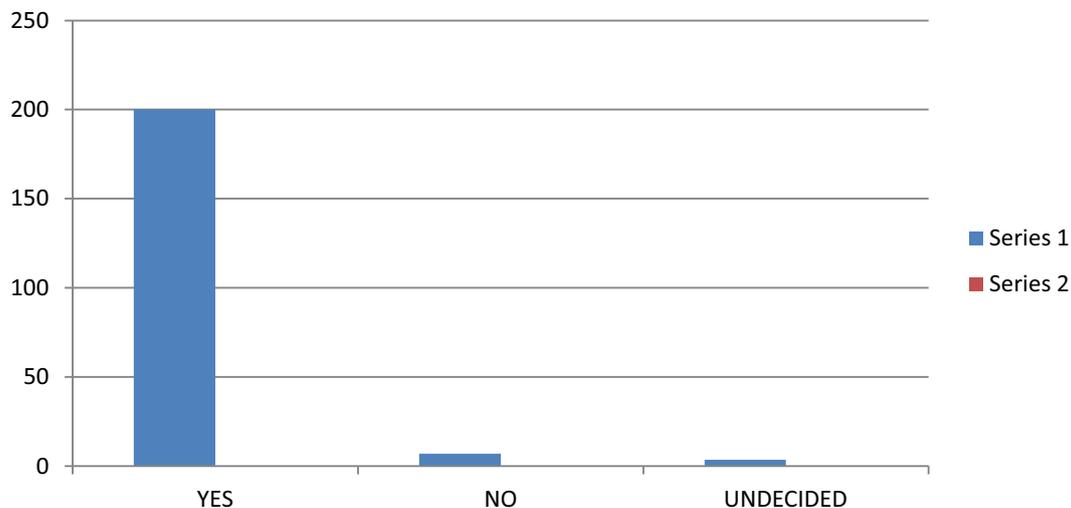
The first objective of this study was to establish whether there is a relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development in Nigeria. Data from the field survey reveal a strong consensus among respondents. As shown in Table 4.2, an overwhelming 94 per cent affirmed the existence of such a relationship, while only 4 per cent disagreed and 2 per cent remained undecided. This demonstrates a near-unanimous view that foreign policy and socio-economic development are interconnected.

The implication of this finding is that the conduct of foreign policy cannot be separated from the socio-economic realities of a state. If foreign policy is the sum of actions adopted by a government in its relations with other states, and socio-economic development refers to the material well-being of citizens, then it follows that a purposeful foreign policy should consciously be deployed as a tool for enhancing domestic development. However, the Nigerian experience suggests otherwise. Respondents noted that the trends in the management of foreign policy have not revealed a manifest desire by the political leadership to prioritise socio-economic advancement through external engagements. Opportunities in international organisations, bilateral relations, and multilateral negotiations have often been underutilised, resulting in missed prospects for economic transformation.

This apparent disconnection is not due to the absence of opportunities but rather a lack of strategic foresight and policy consistency. Other developing countries have deliberately aligned their foreign policy with domestic development priorities, harnessing diplomacy to attract investment, technology transfer, and trade expansion. Nigeria's inability to replicate this approach reflects what many respondents described as a display of naivety and ineptitude in appreciating how the international system works to advance national interests.

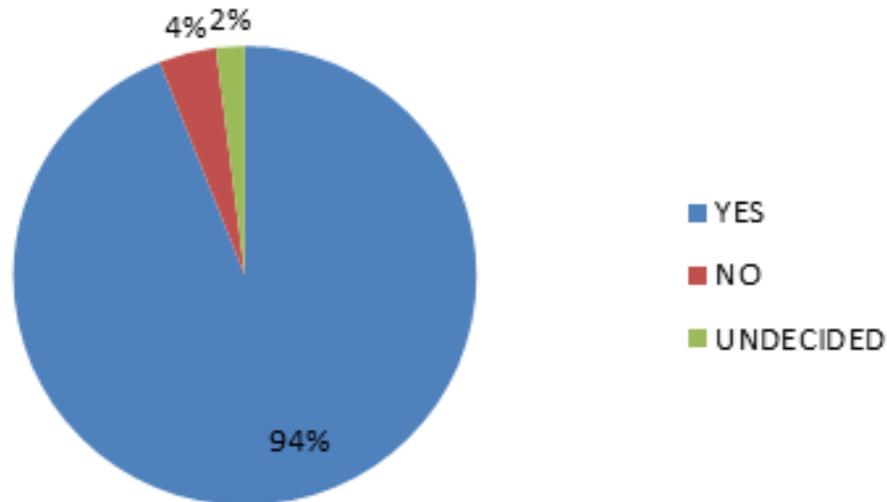
The findings therefore confirm that there is indeed a strong nexus between foreign policy and socio-economic development. The challenge lies not in the absence of a relationship but in Nigeria's failure to consciously exploit it to the nation's advantage. This reinforces the argument advanced in the literature (Akindele & Ate, 1988; Seers, 1969; Holsti, in Obi, 2006) that foreign policy is most meaningful when it directly contributes to reducing poverty, unemployment, and inequality and to improving infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

These findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1, which posited that there is a significant relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development. The overwhelming agreement among respondents reveals that the way Nigeria engages externally has measurable consequences for domestic socio-economic transformation. By affirming this hypothesis, the study highlights the importance of aligning foreign policy with developmental priorities.



*Source: Field Work, 2024.*

**Figure 4. 1: Bar Chart Showing Relationship between Foreign Policy and the Socio-economic Development of a Nation**



*Source: Field Work, 2024.*

**Figure 4. 2: Pie Chart Showing Relationship between Foreign Policy and the Socio-Economic Development of a Nation**

**Research Question Two:**

Does the manner of applying foreign policy resources and opportunities have an impact on socio-economic development?

**Table 4.3: Responses on the Manner of Application of Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Socio-economic Development of a Nation**

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	235	94%
No		
Undecided	15	6%

The survey results, as presented in Table 4.3, indicate that 94 per cent of respondents affirmed that such an impact exists, while only 6 per cent disagreed. This strong consensus suggests that beyond the mere existence of a relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development, the effectiveness of that relationship depends critically on how foreign policy is conceptualised, prioritised, and executed.

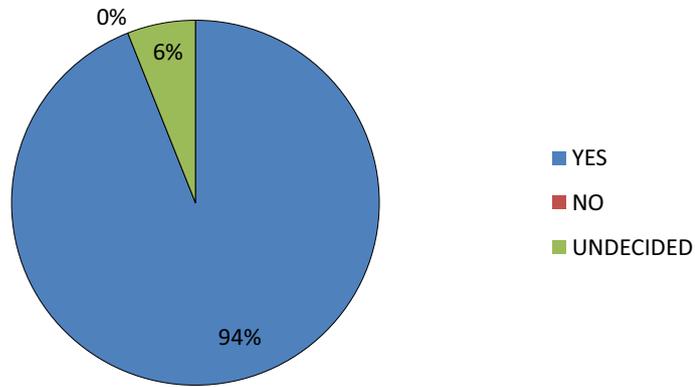
In principle, the foreign policy of a state should serve as an extension of its domestic interests. Salami (2007:74) identifies four broad objectives that foreign policy should aim to achieve: defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, restoring human dignity to black people through anti-colonial struggles, promoting the economic

well-being of citizens, and contributing to global peace with justice. While Nigeria has consistently defended its sovereignty and made significant contributions to African liberation and peacekeeping, its fixation with Afrocentric solidarity has often overshadowed the equally important goal of promoting the economic well-being of its own citizens. This imbalance has constrained the socio-economic dividends of Nigeria's foreign policy.

The findings reveal that Nigeria's foreign policy resources (whether in the form of diplomatic capital, natural resource wealth, or participation in multilateral organisations) have not been prudently deployed to generate optimal socio-economic benefits. For example, trade agreements, foreign direct investment opportunities, and bilateral partnerships have often been pursued without a coherent developmental strategy, leading to outcomes that are misaligned with national priorities. This contrasts with the experience of other emerging economies, which have deliberately aligned their foreign policies with developmental objectives such as industrialisation, technology transfer, and infrastructure expansion.

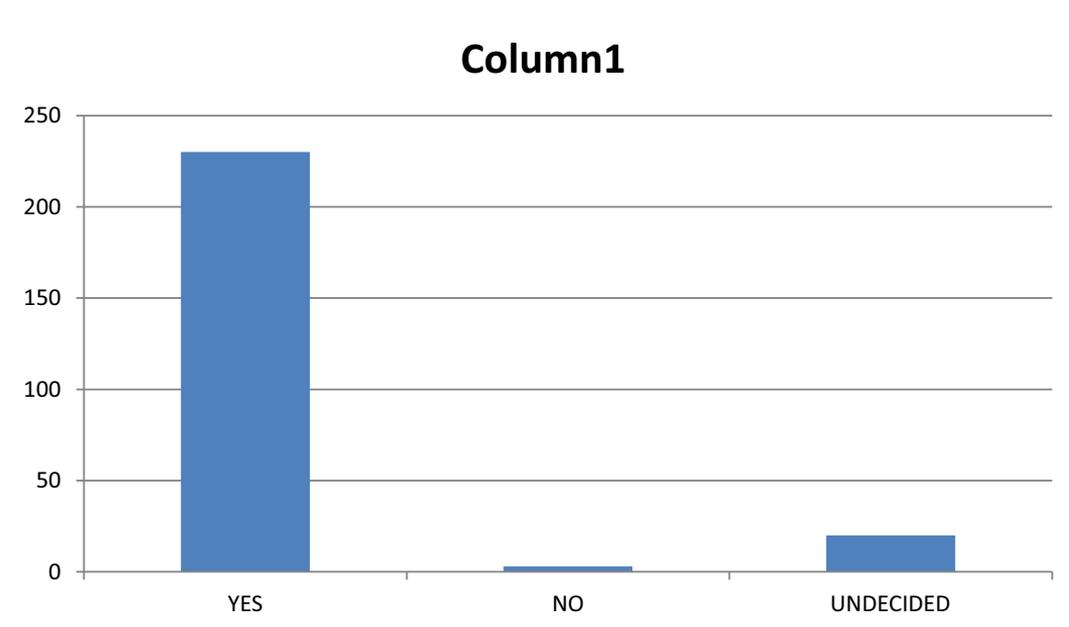
The overwhelming agreement among respondents therefore confirms that the way foreign policy resources are applied has a direct bearing on Nigeria's socio-economic outcomes. The challenge lies not in the absence of opportunities but in the reactive, inconsistent, and often symbolic approach that has characterised Nigeria's foreign policy in recent decades (Ate, 2001; Obi, 2006). Unless foreign policy is recalibrated to focus deliberately on economic diplomacy and the material well-being of citizens, Nigeria risks continuing a cycle of external activism without corresponding domestic transformation.

The results equally confirm Hypothesis two, which suggested that the manner of applying foreign policy resources and opportunities has an impact on the socio-economic development of a nation. With the vast majority of respondents concurring, it is clear that not only the existence of foreign policy matters, but also the quality, focus, and strategic application of such policies. This affirmation points to the need for Nigeria to recalibrate its foreign policy tools towards tangible developmental outcomes.



Source: Field Work, 2024

**Figure 4.3: Pie Chart Showing Manner of Application of Foreign Policy Resources and Opportunities Impact on the Socio-Economic Development of a Nation\**



**Figure 4.4: Bar Chart Showing Manner of Application of Foreign Policy Resources and Opportunities Impact on the Socio-Economic Development of a Nation**

**Conclusion**

This study set out to examine the relationship between foreign policy and socio-economic development in Nigeria between 2019 and 2024, with particular attention to whether such a relationship exists and whether the application of foreign policy resources influences developmental outcomes. The findings provide compelling evidence on both counts. First, there is overwhelming consensus that foreign policy and socio-economic development are interconnected, and that the manner of engagement with the international system has significant implications for domestic welfare. Second, it is evident that Nigeria has not adequately harnessed foreign policy as an instrument of socio-economic transformation, largely due to weak institutional frameworks, leadership deficits, and an overly Afrocentric orientation that has often relegated the economic well-being of citizens.

The study concludes that Nigeria's foreign policy has remained largely reactive and symbolic rather than proactive and developmental. While the country has invested considerable resources in external commitments, the socio-economic dividends at home have remained limited. Theoretical insights from National Interest Theory, Dependency Theory, and Game Theory reinforce the view that only a purposeful, strategic, and development-oriented foreign policy can align Nigeria's external engagements with its domestic needs.

**Recommendations**

In light of these findings, the study recommends the following:

First, that Nigeria should consciously recalibrate its foreign policy to prioritise socio-economic development as the centrepiece of its external engagements. This requires a deliberate shift from symbolic activism to pragmatic economic diplomacy aimed at attracting foreign direct investment, enhancing trade relations, and facilitating technology transfer.

Second, foreign policy resources should be deployed strategically and consistently in ways that align with national development plans, ensuring that diplomatic capital and international partnerships are translated into tangible improvements in infrastructure, employment, education, and healthcare.

Third, the institutional framework for foreign policy formulation and implementation should be strengthened through greater synergy among the Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Assembly, and other key agencies such as the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, the Central Bank of Nigeria, and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. Fourth, Nigeria should draw comparative lessons from other emerging economies that have successfully leveraged foreign policy to promote domestic growth, adapting such strategies to its unique context.

Ultimately, foreign policy must no longer be treated as a routine expression of sovereignty but as a deliberate instrument for advancing national development. If

prudently applied, Nigeria's vast foreign policy resources and opportunities can become a catalyst for socio-economic transformation, positioning the country not only as a regional leader but also as a credible global actor.

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