

Nigeria's Leadership Role in Africa: An Appraisal of the Impacts and Challenges

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Abstract

Nigeria's leadership role in Africa and the West African Subregion is the focus of this paper. It analyzes Nigeria's responsibilities to decolonization, political soundness, economic and financial liberation as well as security. Her steadfast pursuit for the formation of regional organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which later became the African Union (AU), and others. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which is The New Organization for African Turn of events and the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) the economic hub was likewise given comprehensive view as sub-territorial drives for African Solidarity, Political, socio-cultural change and monetary collaboration. Nigeria's passionate and resolute commitment to peacekeeping missions for regional and subregional peace and stability is equally captivating. The paper provides a brief analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy and identifies both positive and negative outcomes in her quest for African leadership. It is relevant to note that this task which Nigeria saw as foreordained threw up a few upsetting results, ranging from uncalled for reactions to designated assaults and abuse of Nigerians by a few African States, giving her that irritation on her picture, confidence and renown. The level of appreciation that Nigeria receives from the very Africans it sacrificed for is now a problem that leaves a lot to be desired. Nigeria should make painstaking efforts to get her house in order and restructure her leadership capabilities in order to avoid this terrible scenario. She should also work to address political and socioeconomic instability, the rule of law, and other vices like corruption, advanced fee fraud, and drug-related offenses. In order to sharpen her image and fully realize her foreign policy goals. The primary focus of this study's efforts was placed on secondary data sources like books, articles, and the internet.

Keywords: *Nigeria's Leadership Role, Africa, Impacts and Challenges*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria's role as an African leader began when she gained independence in 1960. In line with her Afro-Centric foreign policy, her search for this position was influenced by a strong desire for Africa's integration. The creation of a united Africa with concurrent economic benefits, mutual trust, and minimal regional conflicts was the ultimate goal and guiding principle. Nigeria's leadership efforts and strives for a free and united Africa, orchestrated this forefront community which she was poised to play this role. The end of the cold war and Africa's subsequent marginalization had a negative impact on Africa, resulting in untold poverty, underdevelopment, and conflicts. This made regional integration and a commitment to political, economic, security, and sociocultural issues easier. According to Aboagye (2007), the aggressive efforts of such architects of regional integration and establishment of an African peace and security mechanism have generally been cited as the fundamental reasons for the vicious cycle of poverty, underdevelopment, disease, and internecine conflicts. Additionally, the end of the cold war and the marginalization of Africa have also been cited. Defenders of integration have areas of strength that it won't just make economic advantages for the nations but likewise act as a solid instrument for upgrading individuals and security in the region by duplicating points of collaboration among individuals and groups with comparable interests (Rugumamu, 1997: 283) a review.

Simultaneously, particularly on a territorial level, we should be careful with statism. Numerous regional associations, particularly those engaged with security, have offered more to system security than the security of individuals of the region. Regional integration's multiplier effect has the potential to enshrine unpopular and anti-democratic regimes that can rely on one another and each other's military for support (Ayoob, 1996: 61-65). One is tempted to reiterate that Nigeria's foreign policy goals placed Africa at the center of her external relations is tempting. From a historical perspective, one might say that the direction of Nigeria's foreign policy from the first Republic under Tafawa Balewa 1966–75, through the Shagari Administration 1979–83, and then Obasanjo's Administration 1999–2007, which marked the return of a democratically elected government, shared similar policy characteristics. Despite the fact that the aforementioned highlights regarding the various administrations' foreign policy goals were selected at random for the purposes of analysis, they suggest a nearly constant direction towards African affairs with few shifts, likely sparked by leadership perceptions and economic and political policies.

Nigeria was looking forward to playing a stronger stabilizing role in Africa. Her purposive and passionate commitment to African integration and its indispensability for Africa's political and socioeconomic growth was the foundation for her foreign policy trust which placed Africa at its center. The liberation of Africa from colonialism, as well as the enhancement of economic cooperation, security, political stability, and socio-cultural growth, were Nigeria's primary blanks in its foreign policy. Her robust economy balanced her assertive foreign policy. As a matter of fact, Nigeria's economy became her primary instrument for achieving her foreign policy objectives. These responsibilities were considerably really glaring to the effect that Nigeria did not see these missions for African fortitude, as a road for double-dealing and monetary advantages. There were no strings attached.

Nigeria's contributions to the formation of international organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which later evolved into the African Union (AU), which aimed to strengthen integration initiatives and national sovereignty, exemplified her efforts to integrate Africa. The new Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) for African turn of events for fast monetary and economic development like other Regional Economic Committees (RECs) were shaped to animate political and financial participation among part state and excite refereeing. The African road map was anchored by these continental organizations to encourage initiatives for collective security, political gains, economic and agro-based development, social and cultural development, and more.

There were different strategies to integrate Africa, including those made by Pan-African movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Throughout Europe, six Pan-African congresses were held. Leaders at these congresses expressed optimism that Asian and African people would soon end their colonial ties. Then, as independent nations, they would bond together to preserve and consolidate their freedoms and protect their independence from neocolonialism (K.I.E., 1986). Part of AU's objectives include the following: "Cooperation in the areas of the economy and social welfare, education and culture, and collective defense, as well as the possible establishment of regional economic groups."

The leaders of the struggle for African liberation thought that using a foreign language to communicate was a way to keep neo-colonialism alive. The problem of Africans relying on foreign languages as their lingua franca poses a significant obstacle to African integration. According to Ndegwa (1986), the following are some of the essential pillars of a strategy for successful cooperation: "Education on the need to cooperate, public acceptance of the need to cooperate, and language that is generally accessible for effective communication." The need for an effective means of information to promote and drive home the advantages of integration is a desideratum. Nkrumah has advocated for a strong need for African unity since the 1950s in order to reduce her susceptibility to external influence. Nkrumah and other leaders from Africa held the following viewpoint that; "Africa's political independence and the dignity of its people could not be fully achieved and protected without a "United States of Africa."

Statement of Problem

The study, Nigeria's leadership role in Africa: can appraisal of impacts and challenges, is of critical importance, in view of the benefits accruable to the continent from regional integration. The end of the cold war which created some devastating effects and the marginalization of Africa, resulted in exploitation and untold poverty, under development and conflicts. Nigeria's role in Africa was therefore geared towards the creation of a United States of Africa with a concomitant economic benefit, mutual trust and minimal regional conflicts. This forefront role was propelled by her Afro-centric foreign policy. Nigeria committed enormous human and financial resources with a view to achieving this goal and it was glaring that Nigeria did not see this commitment as a means of monetary advantages and economic gains. An awful scenario to this well-intended role was the lack of desired goodwill and appreciation of her role by some African countries. In spite of Nigeria's commitments and

efforts in African unity and economic development, solidarity as well as political commitment, and participation in peace missions and in some cases resulting in paying the supreme price, there has not been any quantifiable appreciation for her role. Nigerians were harassed and maltreated in some African countries, a situation that negates shared vision, mutual trust and capable of threatening the much-needed African integration. If we accept that regional integration in Africa was inevitable and that Nigeria actually played a pivotal role in African integration process, then it is important to explore what informed Nigeria's role and the extent.

Research Questions

1. Why did Nigeria play this leadership role?
2. What was the impact of this role on Nigeria's economic and human resources?
3. To what extent did this role affect regional integration in Africa?
4. What is the influence of Nigeria in African politics towards achieving her national interest?

Objectives of study

The broad objectives of this study are to highlight the importance of regional integration and Nigeria's role in achieving this objective. African integration process was to lay the foundation for African unity, solidarity and growth and participation in the global economy on an equal basis.

The key objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine the importance of regional integration.
- ii. To examine the rationality behind Nigeria's role.
- iii. To assess the impact of this role on African integration.
- iv. To assess the consequences of this role on Nigeria's political soundness and image.
- v. To determine the influence and effects of this role on Nigeria's foreign policy.

Significance of Study

Power and relevance are of vital importance in the foreign policy of a nation. National interest also plays a key role. The study is of immense importance as it will determine the necessity of the integration arrangement, its contributions to African unity and prosperity and the constraints that confronted the process. The study could be useful to scholars, leaders and regional and global actors in politics. It will also serve as a yardstick to assess the imperatives of foreign policy.

Scope of Study

The scope of this study was confined to Nigeria's role in African integration and how national interest can influence a nation's foreign policy, in-view of Nigeria's commitment towards African integration process. The study took a critical look at the dimensions and consequences of Nigeria's role and the benefits accruable. Every research work has its constraints and this work is not an exception. The study was therefore limited by time and the inability to obtain some materials from the right primary source. Some social factors also impinged on the process of this study.

Organization of Study

This research work is structured into a title, an abstract, and introduction which gives the general background to the study, statement of problem, research questions, objective of study, literature review, theoretical frame work which highlights the direction of the basis of the study, methodology, the analysis and conclusion which provides a compact and refreshing view of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Review

Regional Integration is an important subject that requires meaningful discussions. There are various perceptions to African integration including scholars who have written on this subject matter. The review is therefore to expose few ideas.

Concept of Foreign Policy

Foreign Policy is an important factor in political and policy direction of a nation. It concerns, and displays the core interests of a nation on the international arena. Interstate relations cannot be understood without a clear understanding of a nation's foreign policy. It is a vital aspect of international politics. Chandra (2004), states that the foreign policy is of the most important instruments that nations employ to promote their interests. Foreign policy as a concept has attracted different definitions, influenced by various perceptions, few of which will be considered in this study. Hill (1954), defines foreign policy as the content or substance of a nation's effort to promote its interest vis-à-vis other nations. Gambari (1989), defines foreign policy as an interaction between identifiable domestic forces and the dynamics of international political relations. Aluko (1981) defines foreign policy as an interaction between internal and external forces. Foreign policy is strategic to external relations and is therefore a means of projecting the national interest of a nation.

Research Methodology

This is a means and method of data collection and analysis adopted in the study. It applies secondary source including published and unpolished works and also covering the internet.

Nigeria's Leadership in Africa: Impacts and Challenges

President Robert Mugabe in 1982 spoke about the relationship between Nigeria and Africa, he said that; "Africa is hollow without Nigeria and that Abuja would sooner or later be Africa's center."

The impact of this viewpoint on Nigeria's leadership role in Africa cannot be overstated. The ending of colonial rule in Africa brought to the fore a new agenda for Africa to own and direct her affairs and coordinate a new beginning for African civilization and intra-regional cooperation. As a matter of fact, the majority of African nations were just emerging from the shackles of colonialism and required a united front, consequently, integration was required to enable the continent adjust to the new circumstances. Post-independence era of Africa, calls for a pragmatic and practical strategy for collective efforts through a shared vision and understanding for a common destiny. It became clear that the African nations needed to work

on regional cooperation, peace and security, and socioeconomic development. Ndegwa (1986) said that, "the solution to our problems can only come through strategies based on collective self-reliance, also argues that we need to develop a basis of cooperation that takes into account our unique circumstances." Nigeria's leadership efforts towards African peace and stability were undaunted, culminating in her pivotal role in restoring democracy in Liberia in 1990 and championing a similar feat in Sierra Leone through ECOMONG operations in 1997. Imbued with her Afrocentric foreign policy, Nigeria flexed its muscles with the racist South African government and put an end to minority rule. Nigeria's open support for armed liberation fighters in Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, and South Africa shows how far she went.

Africa has remained a primary focus in Nigeria's foreign policy. During the fourth republic, President Obasanjo's prompt mediation efforts saved some African nations from crises, such as the military uprising in Sao Tome and Principe and Guinea Bissau. These commitments encompassed everything from security and political stability to social, economic, and cultural development, as well as the frontiers of regional cooperation. According to Dauda, Ahmed, and Keling (2017), Nigeria actively participated in the 1975 conflict between Benin Republic and Togo and oversaw a peaceful resolution, sending troops to Chad to maintain peace (Okunnu, 2010). Even as other states actors like South Africa emerged, Nigeria's frontline role in African affairs remained prominent. Adebajo and Landsberg (2003), Saliu and Omotola (2008), Tavares (2011), Ogunnubi (2014), Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016), and Dauda and Ameen (2017), among others, agreed that Nigeria, in comparison to South Africa and other contenders, qualifies to be hegemon in Africa.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which was established within the framework of NEPAD to pursue honest implementation of laudable goals, had Nigeria as one of its primary initiators. Obasanjo declared,

In the pursuit of good governance, we have introduced a unique scheme known as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which would enable us to peer review ourselves, in other words, we can assist, we can pressure one another and we can learn the best practices from one another, we would set standards that would govern the performance of each nation.

Sadly, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was beset by contradictions that prevented it from achieving its objectives. Economic Integration and cooperation were essential components in promoting regionalism. An African initiative for regional economic cooperation was ECOWAS. It was established to make trade promotion, which involves allowing investment funds, goods, and services to flow freely, easier. This creates a large single market for comparative advantage, which has numerous benefits. It is important to note that the establishment of ECOWAS was a crucial policy decision to further the integration process. These fundamental goals were deep rooted in the European Union.

Nigeria did not lose sight of the critical and imperative significance of sound financial standing in territorial arena. Nigeria's policy direction aligned with economic integration and

cooperation for sustainable development from this perspective. As a result, she continued attending commodity stabilization conferences in 1963 to promote viable African products as a driver of economic growth, integration, and opportunities for African growth. In addition, Nigeria helped establish the Cocoa Producers Alliance and the West African Groundnut Council in 1964 with the help of other countries in order to advance the integration of export stability programs. With these resolute commitments, it was not surprising that She played a prominent role in UNCTAD's in the formulation of commodity agreements on cocoa, rubber, and tin for export visibility. According to Essien and Omanukwue (2004), one vital area of economic integration includes liberating trade, goods, and services from restrictions. Production efficiency will increase as a result of lower trade costs (Iyakurwa, 1997). However, as Baldwin pointed out (1997, p. 46) that "one very important but neglected aspect of integration is the effect of trade arrangement on the region's economic geography."

According to Teshome (1998), the activities of these economic initiatives have received the significant positive attention of scholars. Six RECs within the continent were perceived as the primary building blocks for such continent-wide integration initiatives. They were; The Arab Maghreb (AMU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African State (ECAS), the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are some of the countries included in this group. This was in line with the treaty the African Economic Community treaty in 1991, the Abuja treaty. In 1994, it went into effect. In an interview with the Munich-based newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, then-German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel pleaded for regionalism in Africa. He stated, referring to OAU, "this large regional organization, with membership of 53 countries, should take over a considerably large responsibility for Africa than it has done until now. And we should help in doing that."

Nigeria provided integration initiatives with the necessary support. The African Heads of State's agreement in 1991 to form an agreement on economic cooperation across the continent appears to have rekindled interest and strengthened commitment. Understanding the trade theories and flaws was appropriate. For example, Krugman's 1991 'financial geology' model which endeavors to make sense of the determinants of local groupings of monetary action is yet to be completely investigated and its viable significance to be tried (especially in the African setting). In 1987, Nigeria established the Technical AIDS Corps (TAC) as a benchmark for supporting integration initiatives. The plan was laid out to impart skill and aptitude to African Caribbean and Pacific nations after due evaluation of necessities.

Nigeria has a large population and abundant natural resources, making it a strategic African player. She is serving as a foundation, particularly in the areas of capacity for regional peace and conflict resolution and financial support for human and financial resources. In Nigeria's bid for African leadership, economic power—now known as economic diplomacy—was a crucial factor. The country has a lot of resources, like iron ore, crude oil, coal, and so on. which serves as a tool for influencing decisions, earning respect, fulfilling and executing her leadership expectations for liberation, in addition to generating revenue.

According to the Nigerian population census that was conducted in 2006, the country had a population of more than 140 million people. World Bank (2018), Adebawale Fagbamigbe and Bamigboye, 2014). It could even be argued that a nation's foreign policy is directly influenced by the state of its economy, resulting in increased national pride and international respect. Inductively, Nigeria's foreign policy reflects her core interests in the international arena, as do others. Evidently, there is an economic, social, and political component to every of foreign policy direction, including self-esteem. As a consequence of this, the majority of nations, including the United States of America, have an economic agenda when it comes to their external relations. Additionally, the United States of America has publicly attempted to intervene in other countries in order to safeguard democratic principles and put an end to dictatorship, particularly in less powerful and third-world nations. They create a market for the acquisition of weapons by countries under so-called protection agreements, capturing some benefits through influenced agreements. Curiously, after the devastation caused by a single American or coalition attacks in so-called military interventions, this attracts rebuilding and reconstruction works and which in most cases are done by American contracts.

Obviously, the international strategy of a state is two dimensional - homegrown and outer. The domestic content is one strategy that is used as an economic tool to make it easier to achieve the goals of foreign policy. In Nigeria's bid for African leadership, economic power—not economic diplomacy—was a crucial factor. The country has a lot of resources, like crude oil, coal, iron ore, and other things. which is used to make money, make decisions, gain respect, and carry out her leadership's expectations for liberation. Nigeria has expended a significant number of resources in this capacity, sometimes to the detriment of her citizens, who were denied basic amenities and comfort. Numerous human and material resources are devoted to African affairs and solidarity. Her capable men and women even paid the ultimate price during peace missions, which resulted in a number of painful casualties. Nigeria helped the United Nations (UN) achieve its goals, led the creation of a regional organization, and hosted UN conferences for action against apartheid in 1997 in Lagos, which she presided over at the UN anti-apartheid committee level from 1970 to 1994.

Challenges and Consequences on Nigeria's Leadership Role

The leadership position that Nigeria holds does not come with a platter of gold; rather, it has faced and continues to face a number of challenges, including criticism from a number of African nations and an effort to hold onto that position despite all odds (Aluko, 1981). It should come as no surprise that Nigeria's leadership did not achieve all of its successes overnight. Through participation in UN missions and advocacy for regional peacekeeping operations, it was the result of persistent and laborious efforts. It requires a lot of money and carries significant risks.

There were painful casualties, and in some instances, the ultimate sacrifices and ultimate price were paid. Sadly, these endeavors didn't get wanted generosity, and honors especially inside the landmass. The commitments did not receive desired goodwill and accolades. Disregarding these freedom endeavors and complete obligation to African issues, there has not been any essentially quantifiable local appreciation for her job. In the midst of what appears to be a

regional conspiracy, Nigeria's reputation continued to plummet. A few territorial players even appear not to see Nigeria's significance, putting forth her attempts and commitment unsure.

In some African nations, such as Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, Nigerians were ridiculed and mistreated in every way possible. It is important to note the Chadian soldiers' incessant harassment of Nigerians in the lake Chad region, prompted the Nigerian government to deport many Chadians in 1983. In 2015, Nigerians in South Africa were the targets of xenophobic attacks, and Ghanaian authorities also harassed and mistreated Nigerians over trade issues. Nigerians were once more subjected to stringent visa requirements from South Africa, which led to retaliatory requirements. South Africa's strong opposition to Nigeria's bid for membership in the UN Security Council and its antagonistic stance toward Nigeria are instances of ingratitude. This lack of respect and thoughtlessness by a few African nations went excessively far past Nigeria's imagination. Even though the station apologized, Southern African radio station 94.7 insulted President Obasanjo so severely that it implied that he had cocaine in his bag while he was in South Africa to attend President Mbeki's inauguration in 2004.

France assumed the role of protector of her former colonial West African territories. She was concerned about Nigeria's dominance over the Subregion and the continent. She felt that Nigeria's size and growing influence might be a challenge to her authority. France engaged in subversive activities to destabilize and frustrate Nigeria's efforts as a result of these and other issues, which resulted in a frosty relationship. France took a lot of steps to reduce Nigeria's size and make this role harder to play. France had gone so far as to use her former colonial states "to reduce Nigeria to size" in her attempt to achieve her abominable goal (Nwokedi, 1986; 287). France saw as an open door when the then Eastern Nigeria endeavored to withdraw from Nigeria and pronounced herself the province of Biafra. According to Dudley; "there were grounds to believe that France was putting pressure on the France-phone African states to accord 'Biafra' recognition as an independent state...."(1982:286).

As a result, France pressured Gabon and Ivory Coast to recognize "Biafra" as a separate nation. Even though neither Zambia nor Tanzania was part of the France territory, they agreed to recognize Biafra under French pressure. Ogwua (1986; 128) was enraged by France's efforts to limit Nigeria's efforts to achieve her foreign policy goals in Africa. He expresses regret that; "on a regional level, France has continued to thwart Nigeria's efforts to attain stability in Africa. Indeed, France has become a thorn in Nigeria side." The disorganization of Nigeria by France and her colonial territories is bad news for subregional and regional cooperation and has multiplier effects that hurt African integration.

Nkrumah spoke, like a prophet, about the need for African unity in the 1950s in order to be less susceptible to outside influence. African leaders, including Nkrumah, argued that; "Africa's political independence and the dignity of its people could not be fully achieved and protected without a 'United States of Africa'." Nigeria's leadership has largely encouraged interstate interaction within the African region. Nigeria's efforts and commitments have made it easier for integration institutions like the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS), the NEPAD, and other regional economic communities (RECs), especially for continent-wide economic cooperation. It has been observed that these organizations, particularly the NEPAD and AU, are contributing to the improvement of regional stability as well as economic, security, and socio-cultural issues. They have also established mechanisms to remove obstacles to intra-regional trade and Africa's participation in global economic relations.

Since Africa is at the center of Nigeria's foreign policy, she has worked hard for regional integration and cooperation to achieve mutual gains. Nigeria has played forefront role in the development of mainland associations, with manifest interest in decolonization, monetary and political liberation. She put a lot of emphasis on the fact that she gave a lot of money to peacekeeping and conflict resolution missions to keep politics stable. She played a significant role in Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as end apartheid in South Africa. Therefore, the hostile behavior of other African nations towards Nigeria and its citizens is not only mind-boggling but also thought-provoking. The conspiracy to balkanize Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war negates shared vision, mutual trust, and the development of the much-desired African integration process, the negative undercurrent against Nigeria's bid for membership in the UN security council is worrisome. This naughty and vexing circumstance has comprised an incredible affront and smearing impacts on Nigeria's straightforward commitments and picture, a sheer negligence and broad unfortunate results on landmass wide solidarity.

A nation's foreign policy is essentially influenced by its prestige. As a result, the success of a nation's foreign policy is largely determined by how well-liked it is among other states in the international system. The comity of nations runs the risk of treating a state with contempt and disrespect if it does not have an acceptable international reputation. It's important to remember that a country's unstable political and economic system, lack of transparency and rule of law, unacceptable attitudes, and notorious tendencies like advanced fee fraud and drug-related crimes not only make things more difficult, but they also hurt goodwill and affect her foreign policy.

According to Goodling (2003), Nigeria has the third highest poverty rate in the world despite being the eight largest oil producers in the world. According to Kirk Green and Rimmer (1981), the best way to address issues and establish democratic governance in Nigeria is to have a leadership government that adheres to good governance principles and is especially accountable to the Nigerian people. Nigeria was also rated poorly by Transparency International for its corruption and other economic problems. Nigeria has everything necessary to sharpen her leadership perspective and become an African hegemon, including a large population, highly productive topography for food and cash crops, and human and natural resources. Nigeria's vivacious military has the potential to make her a regional power if the leaders properly nurture it. According to Ogunnubi and Okeke – Uzodike (2016), "this is another attribute that a regional hegemon should possess in a given environment." Alden and Schoeman (2015) and Adebajo and Mustapha (2008) contend that a nation's population and distribution of its natural resources alone are not sufficient for it to be a regional hegemon.

Conclusion

Nigeria's leadership role has, to a large extent, encouraged inter-state interaction within the African region. Initiatives and commitments by Nigeria have facilitated the formation of integration institutions such as the AU, ECOWAS, NEPAD and other Regional Economic Communities (RECs), particularly for continent-wide economic cooperation. These organizations, especially the NEPAD and AU have been seen to be making contributions to strengthen regional stability as well as economic, security and socio-cultural issues, set in motion instruments to clear barriers for intra-regional trade and Africa's participation in global economic relations.

Africa is the main focus of Nigeria's foreign policy, consequently, she has vigorously worked towards regional integration and cooperation to achieve mutual gains;

“Some scholars have posited that Nigeria's foreign policy targets African development and stability”

Nigeria has played frontline role in the formation of continental organizations, with manifest interest in decolonization, economic and political emancipation. For purposes of emphasis, she committed enormous resources to conflict resolution and peace keeping missions to sustain political stability. Her role in Sierra Leone and Liberia including the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa are pointers to this role and commitment. It is therefore not only mind boggling but thought provoking too, the unfriendly attitude demonstrated towards Nigeria and her citizens by fellow African countries. The negative under current against Nigeria's bid for membership of the UN security council, the conspiracy to balkanize Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war negates shared visions, mutual trust and development of the much-desired African integration process. This mischievous and vexing situation has constituted a great insult and smearing effects on Nigeria's honest contributions and image, an utter disregard and far-reaching negative consequences on continent-wide unity.

Basically, the foreign policy of a nation is guided by national prestige. A nation's successful foreign policy is therefore, to a large extent, dictated by positive perceptions of that country, by other states in the international system. A state that is not seen as maintaining a good reputation in the international system is at risk of being treated with disrespect and disdain among the comity of Nations. It must be noted that a country's unstable political and economic system, lack of transparency and rule of law, unacceptable attitudinal practices as well as notorious tendencies manifesting in issues of advanced fee fraud and drug related offences not only complicates but also dampens goodwill and therefore impinge on her foreign policy.

Nigeria has all it takes including a large size, dominant population, highly rich topography for varieties of food and cash crops, human and natural resources to sharpen her leadership perspective and be an African hegemon. Nigeria has a vibrant military that can make her a regional power if well nurtured by the leaders. “This is another attribute which a regional hegemon should possess in a given environment” (Ogunnubi and Okeke – Uzodike, 2016). Adebajo and Mustapha (2008), Alden and Schoeman (2015) argue that using population

and disposition of natural resources in a country is not enough for such country to be a regional hegemon. It is pertinent at this point to state that Nigeria must take keen and deliberate steps as well as painstaking efforts to address issues of her self-esteem and work towards credible leadership and consolidated principles of good governance and accountability, to guide her relevance and commanding leadership heights in the continent to check and ward off challenges being posed by her adversaries, in order to achieve national prestige and international respect.

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