

The Nigerian Diaspora Financial Inflows: A Driving Force for Socio-Economic Development at the Grassroots

¹ Nnamdi S. OKONKWO, PhD

Department of International Relations
Admiralty University of Nigeria, Ibusa.

² Innocent A. OCHOLI

Department of International Relations and Tourism Studies.
Admiralty University of Nigeria, Ibusa.

Abstract:- This paper is an examination of the role of the Nigerian Diaspora in Nigeria's socio-economic development. The Ex-Post Facto research design was adopted, using secondary data sourced from published sources such as books, academic journals and other online materials. The theoretical framework was anchored on Global Modernity and data was analyzed via content analysis. The paper found out that Nigerian Diaspora remains a positive driving force for the nation's socio-economic development via huge financial inflows from Diaspora remittances. In addition, the paper has also showed how the Nigerian government can adopt global Diaspora best practices using India and Philippines to mobilize and harness the full potentials of her Diaspora community. The paper recommends among others that more Nigerian Diaspora engagement platforms should be put in place to enable the nation benefit more from their huge capabilities.

Keywords: - Nigerian-Diaspora, Remittance, Socio-Economic, Financial-Inflows, Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The origin of the Nigerian Diaspora according to Adepoju (2005) is traceable to economic factors such as globalization and capitalism within the context of slavery, colonialism, post-colonial conflict including the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the economic difficulties resulting from the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) which collectively propelled Nigerians into the Diaspora. It is estimated that there are about 15 million Nigerian living abroad (Araia, 2013). The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives a figure of 20 million Nigerian residents in Europe and the USA. In the USA alone, Afolabi (2013) estimated 3.4 million Nigerians are living in that country.

The word translated "Diaspora" is a derivative of a Greek word "diaspeirein" which connotes "spread" or "scattering of seeds" (Araia, 2013). Historically, Diaspora was associated with forceful expulsion but modern Diaspora today

is formed by those who left their counties to search for better opportunities and livelihood abroad. The Nigerian Government had for long recognized its Diaspora as positive agents in its quest for socio-economic development. Structures such as the Nigeria in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) were established to interface between the Nigerian government and the Diaspora communities in recognition of their growing economic and human resource potentials as well as their implication for socio-economic development at the national and grassroots level.

This paper is an examination of the role of the Nigerian Diaspora in Nigeria's socio-economic development. Much of the literature on the Nigerian Diaspora have been of a cultural context, focusing on such things as the survival of Africans cultural practices in the New World or the representation of home in the process of diasporic identity formation. However, research works on the complex linkages between Diaspora and national development are few and scarce. This paper is an attempt to fill that knowledge gap.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is an examination of the Nigerian Diaspora as a socio-economic driving force for Nigeria's socio-economic development. It is therefore an enquiry after the fact. The Ex-Post-Facto research design was adopted and anchored on secondary data obtained from published sources such as books, academic journals on current research on Diaspora engagement and other online materials. Data generated was subjected to critical content analysis to provide answers to the following research questions drawn up to aid the process of data collection and analysis of same:

- Who can be classified as a Nigerian Diaspora?
- How has the Nigerian Diaspora evolved as a community?
- In what ways is the Nigerian Diaspora contributing to the process of Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development?
- What are the Socio-Economic Development Impacts of Nigerian Diaspora's financial remittances to National Development?
- In what ways can the Nigeria Diaspora be engaged as a positive force in Nigeria's Economic Development?

These questions also define the scope of the paper.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on Global modernity Diaspora analytical framework, which attempt to provide explanation for understanding contemporary Diaspora. The framework seeks to demonstrate why globalization creates a new class formation that's cut across divides as well as offer explanations between colonizers and the colonized (Adi, 2013). This framework provided insight for understanding the character of Diaspora in the era of globalization as well as provides theoretical foundation for the analysis of Nigerian Diaspora. Against this background, this paper theoretical framework of analysis was anchored on "Global modernity developed by Dirlik and Appafuran (2007).

➤ *Critical Analyses of the Concept of Nigerian Diaspora.*

In a world suffering from identity politics conceptualizing Diaspora and identifying who is a diasporic community is problematic due to the fact that around the world many different ethnic, nationalities, races and religion claim Diaspora identity for themselves, while scholars who study them use the term without an analytical precision. What constitute Diaspora and Nigerian Diaspora must begin with a clear understanding of what Diaspora is. According to the Africa Union (AU) definition, Diaspora consists of people living outside their countries irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of their homeland (Ajibewa and Sola, 2013). The Nigerian Diaspora is on the other hand conceptualized as those Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic religion, geographical and religions background, living outside the country and who are desirous or already contributing to the development of Nigeria. The Nigeria Diaspora does not consist of a homogenous ethnic group but the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria whose identities are underpinned by their country of origin. The Nigeria Diaspora is as diverse as are the destination countries for Nigeria migrants.

➤ *Socio-Economic Development within the Context of Nigerian in the Diaspora*

National Socio-economic development from an economic perspective connotes economic, political and social development. Within the context of Nigerian Diaspora, socio-economic development relates to the role of Diaspora brining about valuable and positive changers that improve the living standards of the Nigerian people. According to Mohan,(2012) developmental activities of the Diaspora are in three categories. Firstly, use of diasporic connections in the immediate locality to ensure social and economic well-being of the Diaspora members (Adi, 2013), secondly development initiated through the Diaspora engaging in global as well as local networks. Both categories of Diaspora development activities help to promote economic development in the oversea host country through trade and investment with

attendant spill-over effect to the home country of origin. The third category of Diaspora development activities consist of economic, political, social and cultural diasporic flows that facilitate development of the homeland (Mercer and Ben, 2018). According to Mohans (2012) direct Diaspora socio-economic activities are undertaken within hometown associations, thereby making diasporic development more relevant, sustainable and accountable.

Having undertaken a critical analysis of Diaspora and those classified as Nigeria Diaspora in providing answer to question 1 the paper will now analyze the evolution of Nigerian Diaspora community in providing answer to question 2.

➤ *Critical Analysis of the Evolution of Nigerian Diaspora Community*

Mberu (2010) using African migration history characterized six evolutionary stages of African diasporic evolution namely, the period of enslavement, the struggle against discrimination, adapting to a new environment while struggling to maintain their culture and reification of colour and race. Palmer (2016) posited in agreement with Gomez characterization, that the first African Diaspora was a consequence of a great movement which occurred within and out Africa over 100,000 years ago. Analysis of the evolution of Nigerian Diaspora must of necessity involve an examination of the historical factors that underpinned development as well as the critical role of global political and socio-economic forces that shaped the process of their evolution. Palmer (2016) identifies the movement of the Bantu speaking people, as the first phase in the evolution of Nigerian Diasporic process. One theory asserts that pre-modern Nigerian Diaspora evolutionary stage began about 300 B.C. when the Bantu speaking people migrated from West Africa, around the Cameroon highlands and Bauchi/Plataeau states of Nigeria. This development points to the Niger Basin as the possible cradle land of the Bantu. According to Palmer (2016) there are evidences from research showing that the Bantu-speaking people can be found in parts of Africa where variants of the Bantu language is till spoken and where pottery and iron technology are still being used linking those areas with Nigeria and Cameroon.

Within the context of the Nigerian Diaspora, the most significant evolutionary milestone was the movement of Nigerians across the Atlantic during the process of what Palmer characterized as the Trans-Atlantic slave Trade Diaspora. According to Alusine and Maizlish (2009) the earliest documented Nigerian Diaspora was a result of international migration of Nigerian as far back as the pre-colonial era which began with the Hausa transnational links in the Trans-Saharan trade with Arabs between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. The authors also noted that documentary history of migration in the territory known as Nigeria can be traced as early as other slave trades in Africa

between 1400 and 1900. In this context, this paper asserts, that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in which million of slaves in Africa were recorded to have been exported from West Africa make up the critical stage in the evolution of Nigeria Diaspora. According to Adi (2013) a comprehensive database completed in the late 1990 estimated over 11 million African including Nigerians were forcefully transported across the Atlantic during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The first set of Nigerian Diaspora were directly shipped from modern day Benin by Spanish slave traders to Lisbon in Spain as early as 15 century Adi (2013) also reported that by the early sixteenth century, as much of as 10 percent of Lisbon's population Spain was Africa of Nigeria descent. Research has shown that approximately 30 percent of all slaves sent across the Atlantic during the nineteenth century came from Nigeria (Adi, 2013).

Thus statistics shows that more slaves came from Nigeria coast than from any other country in West Africa. According to Mberu (2010) another notable stage in the evolution of Nigeria Diaspora was during the colonial era which witnessed another major migration stream with the invasion of the British as colonial power in the nineteenth century. Large scale migration of labor from Nigeria to countries such as Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, and Ghana for work in mines and in public administration. This migration stream according to Adepoju (2005) marks another critical stage in the evolution of the Nigeria Diaspora in Africa. Adepoju (2005) reported and estimated 6,500 Nigerians were said to have moved to Ghana and Benin to work on railway construction and in gold mines between 1900 and 1902. Mberu (2010) also noted that after World War I more Nigerians migrated to Cote D'voire in response to growing need for labor in cash crop plantation. Osuntokun (2008) also noted that during the colonial era a significant number of Nigerians mostly Igbos from Southeast Nigeria migrated to Equatorial Guinea to work in cocoa plantation.

Another critical phase in the evolution of the Nigerian Diaspora emerged with the scramble for Africa which led to the emergence of Nigeria as a distinct country as a result of the demarcation of African territories by the colonial powers. This development meant that with Nigeria as a single territorial unit and of Nigerians as a people belonging to that unit, also came the creation of the Nigerian Diaspora as a concept and consequently as an identity group or community. The final stage in the evolution of Nigerian Diaspora is the emergence of what is referred to as contemporary Nigeria Diaspora. These are Nigerians that migrated out of the country for economic and politics induced reasons. Mercer et al, (2013) noted over 15 million Nigeria migrated due to economic or politics induced migration. Many of these categories of Nigeria Diaspora lives in Britain, Europe, Asian, North America and neighboring African countries. It is estimated that United Kingdom (UK) is home to between 2 to 3 million Nigerian Diaspora while USA accounted for about 1.5 million by 2010 (Mercer et al, 2010).

Ajibewa and Akinrinade (2013) highlighted that during this period, the push and pull factors influenced the migration of Nigerians out of the country, namely severe economic crisis, emergence of autocratic and repressive regimes, hardship from anti-poor policies such as the Structural Adjusted Program (SAP). The African Union specifically designated African Diaspora as the sixth development 'zone' in addition to the five other designated regional development zones.

The Nigerian Diaspora acts as a driving force in the process of Nigeria's socio-economic development through the huge financial inflows that impact positively on the national economy. These financial inflows come in the forms of diasporic remittances that fuel development at the grassroots. For many years, Diaspora remittances to homeland were unnoticed until the World Bank in 2012 reported that Diaspora remittances flow to developing countries reached and estimated USD 40 Billion. Of this figure, Sub-Sahara Africa was estimated to have received USD 31 billion. The World Bank projected a growth rate of 8.8 percent in African Diaspora remittance from 2013 to 2015 which was expected to grow to USD 515 billion in 2015. According to the World Bank, Nigeria is the highest recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa due to the size and population of Nigeria Diaspora community. World Bank record also showed that as far back as 2012, USD 21 billion was injected into Nigerian's economy from remittances from Nigerian Diaspora which amount to 67 percent of West African financial inflows. The figure (USD 21 billion) was equivalent to 7.7 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and nearly 50 percent of CBN's foreign exchange reserves Afolabi, (2013). In addition, the World Bank also reported that about 50 percent of remittances inflows to Nigeria in 2011 originated from Nigerian Diaspora in the US, UK with 40 percent coming from Italy, Spain, Germany, and Ireland. This statistics highlighted the volume of financial contribution from Nigeria Diaspora into the national economy which was subsequently channeled to socio-economic development. From the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) statistics Nigeria Diaspora remittance inflow into Nigeria economy outperformed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 2012 (Agatu et al 2013). In this regard, Nigerian Diaspora remittance flows have had beneficial impact on national economic, with implication for socio-economic development, especially within the context of poverty reduction. This is the analytical focus of the paper to provide answer for research question 4.

➤ *The Impact of Nigerian Diaspora Remittance Inflows on Socio-Economic Development at the Grassroots in Nigeria*

The paper had earlier highlighted that households at the grassroots are the primary beneficiaries of Nigeria Diaspora financial inflows, through remittances. This development has implication for socio-economic development within the context of poverty reduction. Empirical studies undertaken in household surveys tend to confirm that remittances to recipient households go a long way in improving the general

welfare of such households. Household surveys Africa (2014) show that remittance receiving households have greater access to secondary and tertiary education, health services, information and communication technology (mobile handsets) and banking than households that do not receive remittances.

Olowokere (2018) concluded that Nigeria Diaspora remittances are associated with a reduction in the number of people living in poverty. Similarly, Babatunde and Martinetti (2010) study examined the impact of remittance income on food security and nutrition among farm households in Kwara State. The findings showed that farm size is positively impacted in remittance receiving household. In another study by Alusine and Maizlish (2009) found that a large percentage of Nigeria Diaspora remittance to Southeast Nigeria is predominantly used for the purpose of housing development. This preoccupation resulted in an estimated 16 million unit of houses in the Southeast region. The authors also noted that at the household level Nigeria Diaspora remittances encourage entrepreneurial activities by providing seed capital to small entrepreneurs as well as reduce credit constraints.

Another note worthy impact of Nigeria Diaspora to Nigeria's socio-economic development is in the area of intervention in the healthcare system, through periodic medical assistance in the form of free medical outreaches. The Association of Nigerian Physicians in the America from Anambra State organizes annual medical missions in six communities in the state in 2021 which has impacted over 6,000 patients that were treated for various ailments including cervical cancer (Anyim, 2013). From all these documented and visible evidences of the impact of remittances to households at the grassroots, prompts the paper to submit that Nigerian Diaspora financial inflows have the potential to reduce poverty development outcomes within the context of socio-economic development. Having analyzed research question 4, the paper would now focus attention on analysis of research question 5.

➤ *Engaging the Nigerian Diaspora to Promote Nigeria's Economic Development*

With the return to democratic governance in 1999, the Nigerian Government has initiated programs, agendas and projects of harnessing the socio and economic potentials of the Nigerian Diaspora. The primary objective of the government in initiating such policies and programs was to re-channel and redirect remittances and other sources of Nigerian Diaspora financial inflows for broader national development (Afolabi, 2013). However, according to the author, such efforts have not produced the needed outcomes due to of absence of appropriate platforms and the characteristic of the Nigerian Diaspora, their hybridized and multidirectional identifies that limit their collaboration with agencies of Nigerian government. In addition, Afolabi,(2013) also noted that the widely dispersed Nigerian Diaspora have attained some connections, goals and allegiances in their host countries that

inhibit the complete appropriation and cooption of the full potentials of the Nigerian Diaspora that could bring about a unidirectional national development. According to Adi (2013) there are over 250 ethnic Nigerian groups scattered in different parts of the world, and engaged in different occupational activities that tied them to their host nations and ancestral home state consequently affect their relations and their willingness to contribute to the Nigerian State.

Araia (2013) Observed that some countries, based on their understanding of the character of their Diaspora communities have been able to successful harness the huge development potentials of the Diaspora to engage them positively for national development, Nigeria the author noted further can learn valuable lessons from these countries experience to effectively mobilized, engaged and harnessed the resources of the Nigerian Diaspora for national economic development. According to Afolabi, (2013) empirical studies indicated that Indian and Philippines present global best practices and effectively engaged their Diaspora for national development that Nigeria can benchmark in her effort to engage her Diaspora to contribute meaningfully to national economic development. The Indians Diaspora consists of Non-resident Indians (NRIs), Indian citizens who lived abroad, persons of Indian origin (PIOs) individuals with no Indian passport but of Indian descent (Dubey, 2017). According to Dubey, the Indians government first strategy in engaging its Diaspora was the introduction of legal and tax incentives to attract financial inflows of the NRIs as well as create a PIO card. The PIO cards enable persons of Indian origin access to educational opportunities in the country; own properties as well as 20-year visa. In addition, the Indian government established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004 to co-ordinate activities aimed at reaching out to its Diaspora communities. These activities include, "Know India program" for Indian Diaspora youth, and annual awards for eminent Indian Diaspora personalities. The Indian government also set up a Global Advisory Council in 2009, consisting of Diaspora Scholars, Scientist, politicians and businessmen. With the financial resources of the Diaspora in mind, the government established the Overseas Indian investment platform to make it easier for Indians abroad to invest. Furthermore, the Reserve Bank of India, similar to Nigerian Central Bank (CBN), put in place procedures to facilitate Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) to invest in Indian Companies. In addition returnee Indian Diaspora are encourages through to a Returnee program to contribute enhanced skills (human capital) access business networks abroad (social capital), and financial capital and investment. As a result of this returnee program Dubey, (2017) stated that in the first instance Indians who returned from the United States have founded and managed successful IT companies in India. Secondly, Indians who founded companies in Silicon Valley have subcontracted work to companies in India, thirdly the success if Indian IT professionals in the United States created trust in the country's intellectual abilities abroad. This

explains why several countries and big Multinational Corporations (MNCs) recruit Indian graduates and professionals. It also explains the willingness of companies in Western countries to collaborate with and outsource to India companies and experts (Dubey, 2017).

From the Indian success story in recognizing the potentials of its Diaspora and providing appropriate engagement platforms, Nigerian government can re-direct her Diaspora engagement platforms to adopt the following template from the Indian government experience:

- Establish a Ministry of Nigerian Diaspora Affairs instead of a commission (NIDCOM) with a specific mandate to coordinate effectively all economic development activities that require inputs from the Nigerian Diaspora Communities.
- Establish annual National awards to recognize and acknowledge the contribution of eminent Nigerian Diaspora personalities to Nigeria's economic development, to motivate other Diasporan to partner with government.
- In the interim, Nigeria in Diaspora commission (NIDCOM) should engage more with Nigerian Diaspora scholars, scientists, professionals and business people to harness their inputs into policy and decision making process to secure their buy-in and participation into national development agenda.
- Established a Nigerian Diaspora investment platform to facilitate investment opportunities for those desiring to invest in Nigerian economy as well as in Nigerian companies.
- Establish a Nigerian Diaspora returnee program that will tap into the human, social and financial capital of those Nigerian Diaspora that have decided to return to the country of their origin to settle-down and contribute to the process of national development.

According to Yabes (2018) Nigeria can draw from the Philippine Diaspora engagement experience from two major areas, namely how Nigerian government can ensure the safety of her Diaspora communities in times of crisis and how it can engage her Diaspora for economic development. According to the Philippine's department of foreign Affairs, almost 10 percent of the Philippine's Population are migrants abroad (Yabes, 2018). Since the bulk of the Philippine's Diaspora are engaged in temporary work in the domestic service sector, domestic crises often erupted. To militate against the problem, the overseas preparedness and response Team (OPRT) was set up to co-ordinate actions to ensure safety of Filipinos who are caught in crisis situations abroad. The Philippine government also established the 3 Ps policies which consist of Preparedness, Partnership, and Political Will, and its

diplomatic post contingency plans involve providing assistance to the Filipinos communities abroad in times of crisis. The logic behind the policy, Yabes (2018) noted was ensuring that the Philippine Diaspora continues to be part of Philippines society, and making the connection stronger for sustained national development.

In recognition of the crucial contribution of its Diaspora to the economy of Philippine, the Filipinos Diaspora is celebrated by the government and people. The month of December every year was officially proclaimed "Oversea Filipinos Month" by the Philippine Commission on Filipinos Overseas (PCFO). In addition, the Philippine Senate enacted a bill providing for absentee voting right for Filipinos contract workers and government employees working abroad on temporary basis to vote during Philippine's general election (Okamura, 2013). The author noted further, that the Philippine government also set up programs to facilitate social, political and economic investment platforms to make it easy for its Diaspora to invest in the national economy. For instance the Land Bank of Philippines provides a Loan Facility of 2 billion PHP for Filipino workers working overseas who wish to invest in the Philippine's economy. To reduce the "Brain Drain" challenges, the Philippine government also formulated policies such as "Balik Scientist" which allow highly-Skilled Filipino specialist in the Diaspora to teach in Philippine's Universities on an internship program, to mentor young scientists or embark on community projects with local counterparts within the Philippines (Yabes, 2013). To further strengthen its Diaspora engagement, the Philippine government also established specialized Diaspora agencies to provide specific functions such as "Overseas Employment Administration", Overseas Worker's Welfare Administration" and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CTOs) to cater for Filipinos emigrants and permanent residents abroad. (Yabes, 2018). The CFO registers and provides pre-departure orientation seminars to emigrants, promotes the transfer of technology as well as the materials and financial contributions from Overseas for development projects in underserved communities all over Philippine (The commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2013).

According to Akamura (2013) the department of foreign Affairs primarily focuses on protecting Diaspora interest abroad. From the Philippine Diaspora engagement model, Nigeria taps into the following practices.

The Nigerian government must make the safety of its Diaspora a priority task. This is due to the fact, that a government primary responsibility is the projection of her citizens within and outside. In this regard, Nigerian Government learning from the Philippines experience set-up a Diaspora crisis response platforms similar to that in the Philippine

- This type of crisis response platform is very crucial especially within the context of Nigerian Diaspora living in

African countries such as South Africa, Ghana and Kenya that have been on the receiving end of xenophobic attacks.

- The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) should in conjunction with NIDCOM set up a Diaspora Bank that should cater or channel Diaspora remittances designated for economic development into appropriate investment channels to enhance economic development.
- Drawing from the Philippine experience, the establishment of specialized agencies to handle Diaspora specific functions, by unbundling NIDCOM will promote accountability and effectiveness in Diaspora engagement.

By implementing these global best practices, that have shown to be effective and successful in India, Italy and the Philippines as benchmark for Diaspora engagement, Nigerian government can mobilize and engage the huge social, human and financial capital embedded in the Nigerian Diaspora and channeling same to national economic development.

IV. CONCLUSION

Evidences from cross-cultural studies in different households in Nigeria highlighted have shown the positive impact of Nigerian Diaspora financial inflows through remittances on household income levels. This has led to poverty reduction in many households at gross root. Rise in household incomes impact positively on higher human capital accommodation, greater health and education expenditures, better access to ICT, access to formal financial sector services enhanced small business investment and better preparedness for adverse shocks. In addition, the paper has also showed how the Nigerian government can adopt global Diaspora best practices from the India, Italy, and Philippines Diaspora engagement experiences to mobilize and harness the full potentials of her Diaspora for national economic development. In this light, the paper concludes that Nigerian Diaspora is a critical and important positive driving force in the process of National, Socio and Economic Development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that since the Nigeria Diaspora have been acknowledged as an important partner in national development by virtue of the huge foreign exchange inflows from remittances, more Nigerian Diaspora engagement platforms should be put in place to enable the nation benefits more from their huge capabilities which should go beyond just remittances to households in the process of socio-economic development.
- In view of the above, it is also recommended that further research be undertaken since findings from existing researches validate the need for further study and investigate diasporic tendencies, as well as enduring avenues in which Diaspora financial transfers could make

a difference in the quest for improved level of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

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