

# Nigeria's contribution to the development of international organisation in Africa: A study of African Union

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## Keywords

African Union, development international organizations, Nigeria, Structural Functionalism

## Abstract

This study examines Nigeria's contribution to the development of international organizations in Africa, with a specific focus on the African Union (AU). Utilizing structural functionalism theory, this research highlights how Nigeria has played a pivotal role in the establishment, sustenance, and evolution of the AU. Through its diplomatic initiatives, financial support, and strategic leadership, Nigeria has significantly influenced the organizational structure and functional capabilities of the AU. The study adopts a secondary method of data collection, drawing from a wide range of scholarly articles, historical records, official documents, and reports to provide a comprehensive analysis of Nigeria's impact on the AU. The findings reveal Nigeria's commitment to regional integration and its efforts to promote peace, security, and socio-economic development across the African continent. The study underscores the importance of Nigeria's contributions to shaping the operational dynamics and policy frameworks of the African Union.

## Introduction

Africa, the world's second-largest continent in terms of land area and population, is separated into small territorial units based on ethnicities, natural physical characteristics, transportation and communication links, and abundant resources, which provide an endless supply of wealth. The continent spans over 11.7 million square kilometers, including the neighboring islands. The Mediterranean Sea separates Africa from Europe, while the Suez Canal connects Africa to Asia. Africa is limited to the northeast by the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, to the southeast by the Indian Ocean, to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean (Chepkemoi, 2017). Africa

is home to diverse cultures and languages, with over 2,000 distinct ethnic groups. Additionally, the continent is known for its incredible biodiversity, housing a wide range of plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world.

Numerous compelling arguments support Nigeria's claim to African leadership. Nigeria has abundant and diverse energy resources for interstate competition. Nigeria's population strength is a key indicator of its supremacy in international affairs. Nigeria is presently the world's sixth most populous country, with an estimated population of more than 200 million people. Nigeria has the world's largest concentration of black people, with one out of every five Africans living there. Nigeria substantially outperforms and outnumbers the other top ten African countries in terms of population (Akindele, 2011; Saliu, Oshewolo 2018; Worldometer, 2020). Nigeria benefits significantly from its population advantage in regional and global affairs. Nigeria, with its enormous population, has a vast pool of human resources that can be harnessed for economic development and political influence. Additionally, the country's demographic strength gives it a strong voice in international organizations and negotiations, allowing it to assert its interests and shape global agendas.

The West African sub region has been the first line of execution in Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy. Nigeria considers itself to have a mission to wield hegemonic power in the West African sub region and in the black world, given its massive size, natural, economic, and human resources, and large market potential (Okunnu, 2010). Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy in the West African subregion has been characterized by its efforts to promote regional integration and stability. By leveraging its resources and market influence, Nigeria aims to foster economic cooperation, resolve conflicts, and strengthen political ties among its neighboring countries. This proactive approach reflects Nigeria's aspiration to play a leading role in shaping the future of the subregion and contributing to the overall development of Africa as a whole.

Nigeria's participation in various international organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has been proactive over the years, leading to its recognition as a "Frontline State" in the fight against apartheid, racism, and colonialism. Since the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 and the subsequent creation of African Union, regional integration has been a top priority in Nigerian foreign policy. As a result, to examine the fundamental premise of Africa as a centerpiece established in Nigeria's foreign policy, it is necessary to assess Nigeria's position in Africa. Nigeria's foreign policy focus considers three key tiers of international relationships: West Africa, Africa in general, and the rest of the world, referred to as the "Concentric Cycle". To study and evaluate Nigeria's involvement in the African Union, Dunmoye (2011) emphasizes that the contribution of Nigeria contribution must be understood from the historical viewpoint of its establishment, survival, and contributions to the Organization of African Union and later the African Union. Nigeria's involvement in the African Union can be traced back to its active participation in the establishment of the OAU in 1963. As one of the founding members, Nigeria played a crucial role in shaping the organization's agenda and promoting unity among African nations. Over the years, Nigeria has continued to

contribute significantly to the AU's objectives, particularly in areas such as peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and regional integration.

Thus, the leadership role played by Nigeria in the formation of the African Union has given it a perception of a leading umpire in all affairs, ranging from politics, social, cultural, and economic matters. However, Nigeria's role in West Africa can be envisaged as a stabilizer in the context of Africa. Accordingly, Nigeria can be perceived as a hegemon, and can it bring the much needed security, peace, economic, and political integration in Africa? Therefore, this study seeks to examine Nigeria's contribution to the development of international organizations in Africa, with emphasis on the African Union.

## 1. Statement of the problem

Nigeria has played an important role in various international organizations throughout the years. Nigeria, as a member of various international organizations, has long worked for and supported African issues and interests. The country has used this platform to promote Africa's interests in the true spirit of Pan-Africanism. Nigeria has been a supporter of regional conflict resolution, and its participation in peacekeeping efforts reflects its concern and regard for the importance of prioritizing and clearly expressing the value of the bond that all Africans, particularly those living on the continent's West Coast, share. Nigeria's commitment to Pan-Africanism can be seen through its active involvement in promoting economic cooperation and development within the African continent. The country has played a significant role in initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda, which aims to achieve a prosperous and united Africa. Additionally, Nigeria has been at the forefront of advocating for fair trade practices and addressing issues of inequality and poverty that affect many African nations.

The African Union, established in 2001, is a continental organization that seeks to promote unity, cooperation, and development among African nations. Despite the AU's overarching goals, there is a need to critically assess Nigeria's specific contributions to the organization, considering the challenges and opportunities that have shaped its engagement. This study aims to investigate the extent and nature of Nigeria's influence within the African Union and its implications for the organization's overall development. The main objective of the study is to examine Nigeria's contribution to the development of international organization in Africa, with focus on the African Union.

Specific objectives include:

1. To analyze the historical context of Nigeria's involvement in international organizations in Africa.
2. To examine Nigeria's role in the establishment and development of the African Union.
3. To assess the impact of Nigeria's contributions on the effectiveness and efficiency of the AU.
4. To identify challenges and opportunities faced by Nigeria in its engagement with the AU.

## 2. Conceptual clarifications

### 2.1. International organization

The term “international organizations” refers to a wide variety of formal structures with both common elements, as well as specific peculiarities, which call for clarification. As noted by Brechin and Ness (2013), scholars of international organizations “seem to typically focus on intergovernmental organizations, and at times, seem to use the term interchangeably, which can be confusing”. In the same vein, Dijkzeul and Beigbeder (2003) claim that “sometimes the term “international organizations” is used to include multinational corporations, bilateral organizations, multilateral organizations, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).” At other times, only UN organizations are covered by this term.

Most commonly, the term “international organizations” is used to refer to “all forms of non-state actors working at international or global levels” (Brechin, & Ness, 2013). According to this definition, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) can be considered a subset of the international organizations category, together with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The reference work on this topic is the *Yearbook of International Organizations* published yearly, since 1999, by the Union of the International Associations (UIA). It contains a list of all types of international organizations classified according to different criteria.

Another debated aspect concerning the definition of international organizations is the reference to international bureaucracies. In fact, some authors (Barnett, Finnemore, 2004; Reinalda, Verbeek, 2004) use these terms interchangeably, giving them the same meaning, while others (Biermann et al., 2009; Cortell, Peterson, 2004; Bauer et al., 2017) use them distinctly, considering international bureaucracies to be the administrative body of international organizations. In their study on the influence of the international environmental bureaucracy, Biermann et al. (2009) define international bureaucracies as “a hierarchically organized group of international civil servants with a given mandate, resources, identifiable boundaries, and a set of formal rules and procedures within the context of a policy area.” Along similar lines, Cortell and Peterson (2004) link the term “international bureaucracy” with the “administrative support apparatus” within international organizations.

Despite the attempt to use standard definitions to categorize international organizations, their universe is considerably heterogeneous due to their significant differences in size, geographical scope, tasks, and functions. As for the size, international organizations may include few members – three, as in the case of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – or a large number, as the United Nations, which has 193-member countries. Their geographical scope varies extensively, from specific regional organizations such as ASEAN or the African Union, to worldwide organizations that have members from all countries. Furthermore, there are single-tasks organizations, like the Organization for Petroleum Exporting (OPEC), as well as multipurpose organizations, such as the European Union or the United Nations. Consequently, their functions differ, as well. The most common ones include sharing and collecting information, monitoring trends, providing forums for collective decisions, and settling disputes (Karns et al., 2010). Again,

how international organizations serve such functions varies extensively according to their rules, financial resources, level, and degree of bureaucratization (Karns et al., 2010).

## 2.2. Regional organization

We live in a world of regions (Katzenstein, 2005). Since at least the end of the Second World War, regionalism has spread across the globe in several waves (Mansfield et al., 1999; Söderbaum, 2016; Väyrynen, 2003). Wars, power shifts, economic globalization, and the spread of new ideas about political order have led to the emergence and growth of transnational and supranational spaces, as well as a demand for new forms of governance beyond the nation-state (Buzan, Wæver 2010; Lake, Morgan, 1997; Telò, 2014; Wunderlich, 2007). One of the most far-reaching effects of these developments has been the proliferation of regional organizations. As existing organizations have grown in membership and new ones have been created, there is now hardly a state in the world that is not a member of at least one regional organization. Besides this increase in sheer numbers and geographic coverage, however, regional organizations have also taken on new tasks and assumed more authority in relation to their member states (Acharya, 2014; Börzel, Risse, 2016).

A regional organization has been described as “an organization, the members (participants) of which are national bodies (organizations) for standardization of the states included in the same geographical region of the world and (or) a group of countries undergoing the process of economic integration according to international treaties” (The Russian Federation, 2002).

According to the United Nations (1995), regional organizations (ROs) are, in a sense, international organizations (IOs), as they incorporate international membership and encompass geopolitical entities that operationally transcend a single nation-state. However, their membership is characterized by boundaries and demarcations specific to a defined and unique geography, such as continents, or geopolitics, such as economic blocs. They have been established to foster cooperation and political and economic integration, or dialogue among states or entities within a restricted geographical or geopolitical boundary. They reflect both common patterns of development and history that have been fostered since the end of World War II, as well as the fragmentation inherent in globalization. Most ROs tend to work alongside well-established multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations. While in many instances a regional organization is simply referred to as an international organization, in many others it makes sense to use the term “regional organization” to stress the more limited scope of a particular membership (United Nations, 1995).

In the literature, regional organizations are frequently associated with the term “regionalism.” According to Russett (1975), “Regionalism is not one thing, but many things.” Often, regionalism means merely an interest in regions (Spiegel, 1989). However, regional organizations represent only one facet of regionalism. The concept of integration is closely related to that of regional organizations and is used just as confusingly in the literature. Here, it refers to either the process or the end product of the political unification of separate national units (states) (Coulombis, Wolfe, 1990). When integration has been implemented fully, it means that individual states cease to exist (as happened with the unification of the United States and in the case of Switzerland or Germany).

In most cases, integration is incomplete and consists of economic or military rather than political unification. Where regional organizations are relevant, reference is sometimes made in the literature to integration – but often from different points of departure. Integration may be viewed as the dynamic force underlying the establishment of regional organizations (Hughes, 1994).

### 2.3. Regional integration

The coming together of different states within a region to achieve predetermined goals and objectives is referred to as regional integration. It is an intergovernmental activity aimed at promoting cross-border economic, social, and political cooperation between nations and their governments. States regard regional integration as a way to align their policies with those of other states, thereby promoting cross-border economic and social development. Sherriff and Nwokedi (2016) define regional integration as a balance of power aimed at bolstering weaker nations. This is because states that come together for integration tend to depend on and benefit from stronger states.

Regional integration, according to Adeniji and Agaba (2014), is a way of strengthening global trade and gaining access to foreign technology, investment, and ideas. This means that deeper regional integration will not only enable states to achieve long-term political and economic development, but will also ensure poverty reduction, improved movement of goods, services, and capital, and socio-economic policy harmonization, infrastructural development, and the promotion of regional peace and stability.

### 2.4. Nigeria's commitments to the African Union

Nigeria's role in the AU is best understood within the larger context of Nigeria's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in its foreign policy. This orientation, widely described as Afrocentrism, dates back to independence in 1960, and emphasizes that Nigeria's political leaders pursue foreign policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa. The policy is driven by the belief in Pax Nigerian, which stresses that Nigeria should play the role of Big Brother to other African countries. Nigeria's understanding of its status as Africa's Big Brother is based on characteristics peculiar to the country. Professor Gabriel Olusanya, former director general of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, captures these characteristics as follows:

Nigeria is a born leader. Nigeria's credentials as the so called giant of Africa are credentials inherent in the country itself. Nigeria is over 100 million people... So by virtue of size and population, Nigeria like America is in a situation where it cannot live outside her geographical boundary ... Nature has so placed Nigeria in a situation where she has to be her brother's keeper. If your neighbours are hungry and unhappy, you can never be happy. Nigeria's neighbours are wretched and therefore we have to be our brother's keeper (Olusanya, 1988).

It is in recognition of Nigeria's commitments and remarkable credentials in Africa that its current Minister Of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru, has reiterated that, by her sheer endowments, destiny, and disposition, Nigeria has always used its strength responsibly in defence

and pursuit of peace, and in the interests and for the wellbeing of all people of African descent, irrespective of geographic boundaries (Ashiru, 2012). This view was corroborated by Allasane Ouattara, President of Côte d'Ivoire and Chairman of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States, one of five regional blocs within the AU), when he observed that Nigeria's support for the restoration of the popular mandate in Côte d'Ivoire had contributed immensely to peace, stability, and reconstruction efforts in his country and in West Africa (Ouattara, 2012).

Successive administrations in the country have pledged their commitments to this orientation and taken several steps to pursue such commitments. Nigeria's pursuit of Afrocentrism includes its active engagement in decolonization and the eradication of apartheid – both prime objectives of the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nigeria also extended scholarships to Africans in colonized territories, encouraged the formation of ECOWAS, and invested resources in conflict resolution and peace support operations (PSO) across Africa (Okereke, & Emeh, 2009). In recognition of these commitments, Joshua Nkomo, one of Africa's leading nationalists in the 1970s, described Nigeria as the “heartland of Africa, her pulse and as Africa's dynamo” (Nkomo, 1977). Nkomo's portrayal of Nigeria at that time was apt, in view of the country's strong economic profile and assertive foreign policy in African affairs.

Nigeria's disposition to play the Big Brother role in the AU is – it must be noted – one of the contentious areas in the country's foreign policy. Critics, such as Professor Innocent Ukeje, former head of the department of political science at the University of Abuja, contend that this posture reflects the pretense of Great Power status, especially in view of Nigeria's adverse domestic socioeconomic realities, such as mass poverty and widespread infrastructural decay (Ukeje, 2000). Yet, optimists, such as Professor Adegunle Ajala, advocate the enhanced visibility of Nigeria in Africa as a basis for pursuing its national interests. Professor Ajala insists that Nigeria must be ready to carry its neighbours along if it intends to play an important role in world affairs (Ajala, 1988). Nigeria's leading role in ECOWAS is a giant leap towards this objective. It also extends bilateral assistance to its neighbours. Nigeria is surrounded by fragile states in need of foreign aid and assistance, and is therefore compelled to play a Big Brother role to protect its national interests.

## 2.5. Nigeria's role at the African Union

Nigeria's role in the African Union (AU) is motivated by its commitment to the unity, peace, and development of the continent. The country further believes that unity in Africa should be a gradual process. This position differs from the radical approach advocated by the late Libyan leader, Muammar Ghadaffi, who favoured the immediate unification of African states under a single government (BBC, 2007).

Nigeria, therefore, participated actively in the summits, conferences, and other meetings leading to the creation of the AU (Tripoli, 2000). Nigeria's position during the OAU ministerial meeting in Tripoli between 30 May and 1 June 2000 was explained by its then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Sule Lamido:

Nigeria favours the establishment of a strong African Union, one which would replace, over a period of time, existing continental institutions the OAU and the AEC. This need not be a replica of the United States of America, given the realities of our continent and the political experiences of our nation-states. But it should be of such character, content, and form as to do justice to the cherished vision of the founding fathers of the OAU and to satisfy the dreams and aspirations of the peoples of our continent (Shinkaye, 2002, pp. 17–18).

During the 36th OAU summit in Lomé, Togo, in July 2000, twenty-five member states, excluding Nigeria, ratified the draft AU Constitutive Act (Lome, 2000). Subsequently, on 27 April 2001, OAU Administrative Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim announced at an international summit on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and related diseases that the AU would come into effect on 26 May of that year. This was in compliance with the provisions of Article 28 of the Act, which stipulates that the AU comes into effect exactly 30 days after the 36th instrument of ratification (representing two-thirds of OAU member states) has been deposited at the OAU secretariat (Shinkaye, 2002). It was the submission of Nigeria's instrument of ratification that brought the AU into existence. The public unveiling of the AU as the successor to the OAU occurred in July 2002, at the summit of OAU heads of state and government held in Durban, South Africa.

Since the emergence of the AU, Nigeria has consistently pledged its commitment to Articles 3 and 4 of the AU Constitutive Act, which respectively outline the objectives of the organisation and the principles upon which it is based (African Union, 2002). Consequently, Nigeria has engaged with peace and security issues on the continent, including the pursuit of integration and development in Africa. It has also hosted important AU meetings, including the Fourth AU summit, in 2005 in Abuja, and the 44th Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Abuja in November 2008. Examples of Nigeria's commitments to the AU are discussed below.

### 3. Financial contributions

Nigeria's pledge to the AU is visible in its financial contributions to the organization. The AU inherited some of the financial problems that had handicapped the OAU. For instance, the AU's member states were the same as the OAU's, including those unable to pay their mandatory assessed OAU dues. The AU's funding challenges became more pronounced, since the organization has expanded its budgetary requirements to about five times those of the OAU budget. So far, Nigeria remains one of the five major financiers of the AU operating budget. As a major financier, Nigeria has full AU voting rights and has been able to sponsor its nationals for strategic positions requiring AU support in various international organizations. The other financiers are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and South Africa. These five countries contribute 75 per cent of the organization's operating budget, while the remaining African countries in the AU contribute 25 per cent. According to Agubuzu, each of the "Big Five" contributed US\$14.4 million towards the organization's operating budget (Agubuzu, in Ogwu, 2008). By 2012, these contributions were estimated at US\$16.7 million (Dabeng, 2012).

## 4. Pursuit of peace in Africa

In the sphere of peace and security in Africa, Nigeria has consistently played a prominent role. For instance, following the ratification of the Protocol Relating to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in December 2003, the PSC became fully operational on 16 March 2004 as the AU organ mandated to address peace and security in Africa. Nigeria's President, Olusegun Obasanjo, served as the pioneer Chairman of the council. In this capacity, he mediated during the early years of the Darfur crisis in western Sudan. During Obasanjo's term as Chair of both the AU and the PSC, peace talks related to this crisis were held in Abuja, Addis Ababa, Accra and Tripoli. The Accra talks of July 2004 also focused on the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and involved President Obasanjo as AU chairman, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, and other African leaders (Ghana, 2004). The aim was to discuss peace initiatives in both countries. Obasanjo advised the international community not to resort to action that could jeopardize peace efforts in Darfur (This Day, 2004). In addition, he appointed General Abdulsalaam Abubakar, a former Nigerian head of State, as his peace envoy to Sudan and Chad (Oche, 2005).

During August 2004, the AU PSC, under Obasanjo's leadership, convened peace talks in Abuja between the government of Sudan and the rebels in Darfur to avert UN sanctions on Sudan. This round of negotiations led to the adoption of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) on 5 May 2006 (Okereke, 2005) Nigeria's commitment to the Darfur peace process was in furtherance of its overarching commitments to security and stability in Africa and world peace in general.

### 4.1. Africa peace and security architecture

Nigeria's commitment to the AU is further demonstrated by its roles in the implementation of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Nigeria participates in AU capacity-building exercises for the military, police, and civilian components of the African Standby Force (ASF), which is an integral part of APSA (AFS, 2010). It further participates in the activities of the ECOWAS Standby Force. Nigeria's National Defence College, Abuja, is an AU Centre of Excellence for training in Peace Support Operations (PSOs) at the strategic level. These exercises and training programmes have contributed significantly to the pursuit of the AU's objective of peace and security in Africa, especially in PSO capacity-building.

Nigeria has also made commitments to the promotion and consolidation of democracy, good governance, and human rights in Africa. First, it ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and subsequently deposited the instrument of ratification with the AU. Second, the country provided material and other support to the democratic and electoral processes in Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Niger, and other African countries. Internally, the Nigerian government undertook electoral reforms in 2002, 2006, and 2010 with the aim of restoring the integrity of its electoral process so as to strengthen democracy. These commitments are anchored in the country's belief that a stable and democratic Africa is in Nigeria's national interests (Ashiru, 2012). By fostering democratic governance in Africa, Nigeria has remained

firmly committed to Article 3(g) of the AU Constitutive Act, which seeks to “promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance” (African Union, 2002) in Africa.

## 4.2 Struggles for headship of the African Union Commission

The struggle for the chair of the AU Commission between Gabon’s Jean Ping and South Africa’s former Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, suggested latent rivalries between certain major powers in Africa. The decision by South Africa to field a candidate contradicted the established convention among Africa’s “Big Five” not to seek leadership of the AU Commission. South Africa’s action was viewed as an attempt to advance her quest to represent Africa as a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, a status also sought by Nigeria, Egypt, and Ethiopia, among others (Adibe, 2012). Nigeria, therefore, supported the candidacy of former AU Commission Chair Jean Ping. The eventual victory of South Africa’s Dlamini Zuma at the July AU summit has been regarded as a pointer to Nigeria’s diminishing diplomatic clout on the continent.

Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has, however, argued that the election outcome was neither a failure of Nigeria’s diplomacy nor a diminution of its influence in Africa. The Ministry maintains that Nigeria subscribes to the promotion of inclusion, sense of belonging, and accommodation at the AU, and will refrain from actions that could discourage medium and small African countries from occupying the chair’s position, thereby ensuring greater unity and solidarity. This is consistent with Nigeria’s resolve – in tandem with its statutory responsibility as contained in the 1999 Constitution – to abide by its commitment to the continent and to go to great lengths to promote and defend Africa’s unity and solidarity (Adibe, 2012).

It is important to note that Nigeria made some gains at the July 2012 AU summit. First, Nigeria’s Ambassador, Aisha Laraba, was elected AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. The Department of Political Affairs is responsible for promoting democracy, good governance, and credible elections in Africa. This appointment coincides with the appointment of Nigeria’s Salamatu Sulaiman as Commissioner for Political, Peace and Security Affairs in ECOWAS. It is anticipated that Nigeria will leverage its headship of these two portfolios to strengthen its pursuit of peace, security, and stability in Africa within the AU Peace and Security Agenda (IFAD). Presently, other Nigerians occupying significant AU positions include Dr Kolawole Aduloju, elected Assistant Secretary-General of the Pan-African Postal Union (PAPU), and Bethel Amadi, who was elected President of the Pan-African Parliament in June 2012 (IFAD). Professor Okon Uya was appointed one of the nine Eminent Persons to serve on the Peer Review Panel of Eminent Persons during the 16th Assembly of African Peer Review Forum. Nigeria’s visibility at these AU institutions is expected to enhance its credentials to represent Africa as part of a reformed and expanded permanent membership of the United Nations (UN) Security Council.

So far, while it is accepted that the Dlamini-Zuma victory was a good showing for South Africa’s diplomacy, the response of Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs draws attention to

Nigeria's commitment to consensus building and to moderating roles in African politics. This creates room for inclusive politics designed to accommodate and actively engage other African countries in steering the AU.

### 4.3. Nigeria's role at the African Union since the Arab Spring

In the spring of 2011, the Arab world was engulfed by popular demonstrations and rebellion, generally referred to as the Arab Spring. These events erupted in Tunisia and also spread to Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, as well as leading to an escalation of insecurity in Africa. Central to the protesters' demands were greater political freedom, economic opportunity, and an end to systemic corruption in affected states. Other demands included calls for greater political pluralism, transparency, and political accountability (ACSS, 2012). These events brought about regime change in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, while Morocco, Algeria, and other Arab countries embarked on basic socioeconomic and political reform without regime change. While the rebellion to oust President Bashir Al Assad has continued in Syria, the demonstrations in Libya led to the violent overthrow of the Ghadaffi regime. Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali of Egypt and Tunisia, respectively, were compelled to leave office – but with much less that which attended the parallel events in Libya, Yemen, and Syria.

The effects of the Arab Spring were felt in Africa. For instance, the AU was compelled to intervene in the peace process in Libya. This intervention was intended to bring an end to hostilities between Colonel Ghadaffi's forces and the rebel groups comprising the NATO-supported Transitional National Council (TNC) in Libya. Besides its mediation role in Libya, the AU accepted the new regimes and leaders of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia – with their distinct orientations – into its fold. Finally, the AU was confronted with various security challenges associated with the Arab Spring. For instance, several African countries had to contend with renewed ways of forced migrations, occasioned by internal displacements and refugee movements, as well as the scourge of terrorism and arms proliferation.

In West Africa, the entry of weapons stolen from Libya heightened the sub-region's vulnerability to terrorism and rebellion. For instance, following the mass return in September 2011 of heavily armed Tuareg fighters who had previously been part of Ghadaffi's forces, Mali was faced with armed rebellion and political turbulence that resulted in a military coup. The Tuareg fighters – organized under the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) – initiated a rebellion and demanded a Tuareg state of Azawad, comprising parts of Algeria, Mali, and Niger. The MNLA initially aligned with Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Iyad Ag Ghali's Ansar ul Deen. This escalation of terrorism and related security challenges in West Africa directly threatened the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) efforts towards security and integration in the sub-region (Back, 2011).

Nigeria has not been spared from the insecurities emanating from the Arab Spring. Prominent among these are the influx of weapons into the country and the escalation of Boko Haram assaults on the Nigerian state. Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Olugbenga

Ashiru, has declared that the peace and security of the West African sub-region are tied to peace and stability in Nigeria. The menace of Boko Haram and its links to other terrorist organisations in Africa – such as AQIM – has demonstrated to Nigeria the nexus between the domestic situation and foreign policy (Ashiru, 2012). The ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mrs Salamatu Suleiman, has observed that ECOWAS’s decision to intervene in Mali is intended to curb the spread of Boko Haram and the movement of al-Qaeda groups into Nigeria and neighbouring countries. She maintained that Nigeria’s territorial and national interests are at stake, and she traced Boko Haram’s terrorism to Mali (Omonibi, 2012). It is this reality that underscores Nigeria’s commitment to the ECOWAS peace process in Mali and the implementation of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2071, which allows for military and other interventions and assistance to Mali (Omonibi, 2012).

Accordingly, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have jointly solicited Nigeria for support in tackling the deteriorating political situation in Mali. The ECOWAS Chair, President Allasane Ouattara of Côte d’Ivoire, disclosed this after a tripartite meeting with the AU Chair, President Boni Yayi of Benin, and President Goodluck Jonathan at State House, Abuja (Leadership, 2012). Nigeria has, therefore, intensified efforts to address the Malian crisis through multilateral engagements under the banner of ECOWAS, the AU, and UN. This is particularly necessary as South Africa is geographically remote from Mali, while Egypt and Libya are still addressing their own domestic challenges. Finally, Algeria – one of Africa’s “Big Five” – remains reluctant to support military intervention in Mali. It therefore behooves Nigeria, a major power in West Africa, to lead the ECOWAS initiative in Mali.

Nigeria’s credentials to lead this peace initiative in Mali rest on its accumulated experience in international peacekeeping under the UN, AU and ECOWAS, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Darfur. Nigeria possesses significant oil wealth and stands above several other countries in West Africa in terms of population, military preparedness, and willingness to intervene. It is, however, important to acknowledge that any military intervention in Mali will come with distinct challenges and peculiarities. The Tuaregs fighters and Islamists operating in northern Mali are well-armed and trained in desert warfare, and are driven by a nationalistic zeal to secure the independence of Azawad. Their ranks are increasingly expanding through the recruitment of locals and the arrival of foreign Islamist fighters (Ross, 2012).

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Research design

A research design is a strategy or blueprint that defines how data for a given topic should be collected and analyzed. It outlines the procedures for conducting a specific inquiry. This research adopts an exploratory research design. Exploratory research aims to study an issue that is not well-defined, it is carried out to gain a better understanding of the current situation, but it does not provide definite conclusions.

## 5.2. Methods of data collection

Given the nature of the study, which relied on secondary data, a qualitative data-gathering strategy was used to obtain meaningful data. Qualitative research is an inquiry technique that seeks to understand a social or human problem by constructing a complex, holistic picture, using words to provide specific perspectives on information, and is performed in a natural context (Strauss, Corbin, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017). This method allowed for a deeper exploration of the subject matter, providing rich and detailed insights that quantitative data alone may not have captured. By utilizing qualitative data gathering strategies, the researchers were able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

## 5.3. Historical factors that influenced Nigeria's involvement in international organizations in Africa

Historical factors that influenced Nigeria's involvement in international organizations in Africa include its role in the formation of the African Union (AU) in 1963. Nigeria played a key role in the diplomatic activities that led to the creation of ECOWAS, aiming to achieve economic harmonization, coordination of national policies, regional peace, stability, and human rights promotion within West Africa. Additionally, Nigeria's participation in the AU reflects its commitment to promoting the continent's development – addressing issues like poverty, technological backwardness, and enhancing regional cooperation. Nigeria's involvement in international organizations such as the AU demonstrates its efforts to strengthen African unity, enhance economic cooperation, and play a significant role in regional and global affairs (Ayodele, 2020).

Over the course of more than 50 years of independence, Nigeria's foreign policy has been focused principally on Africa. Successive Nigerian leaders have declared Africa to be the key component of the country's foreign policy. Nigeria considers itself – and is widely regarded – as the leader of Africa, and this has profoundly influenced the perception of its role both on the continent and in the world. Since gaining independence in 1960, Africa has remained the central point of Nigerian domestic and foreign policy which has manifested in its commitment to the total liberation of Africa from colonialism, racial discrimination, and apartheid. Thus, Nigeria was at the forefront of the clamor to intensify embargoes, boycotts, and economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa (Abegunrin, 2009).

Nigeria's impressive commitment to spending huge diplomatic and financial resources for the sake of the complete liberation of Africa significantly contributed to the elimination of both apartheid and colonialism on the continent. Diplomatic, moral, and financial resources were consistently provided to support liberation movements across Africa (Saliu, 2012). The need to form an Africa-oriented unity organization came as a result of the quest to create a collective anti-colonial struggle on a continental level. This quest represented the manifestation of the long-standing search for an institutionalized body, which led to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.

On September 9, 1999, the heads of state and government of the OAU at their 4th Extraordinary Summit held in Sirte, Libya, deliberated extensively on the ways and means to strengthen the continental organization. The aim was to make it more effective, so as to keep pace with the political, economic, and social developments that were taking place within and outside Africa. The primary goal was to accelerate the implementation of the Abuja Treaty. Nigeria played the leading role in the transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) (Akinsanya, 2005).

The expectations were running high at the start of the new millennium, when the African Union (AU) was established in 2002 as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The general hope was that it would overcome the long-standing problems and speed up African integration. However, it has been observed that political intentions will not always translate into action. It soon became clear that many African leaders did not want to give up any element of their national sovereignty. The Constitutive Act of 2002, that underpins the creation of the African Union (AU), was therefore a compromise between the adherents of a federal union (endowed with supranational competence) and those who resisted this ambitious vision and did not want to give up their sovereignty (Laporte, Mackie, 2010).

There is also a hindering human factor which negatively affects the African Union (AU), as manifested in widespread corruption, economic mismanagement, and inefficiency, lack of probity and accountability in government, and entrenched, long-term political leadership. Ethnic conflicts, economic recession, diseases, illiteracy, poverty, military coups or their threats, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and international terrorism have combined to undermine Africa's capacity to foster development and confront the challenges of the twenty-first century (Azaigba, 2010).

In addition, improper coordination has resulted in a low level of trade and communication among African states. Furthermore, several treaties that form the bedrock for the integration efforts remain unimplemented, leading to the failure of African states to achieve diversification and structural transformation within their economies. These challenges reflect the degree of economic and political crises fueled by globalization, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, as well as the slow rate of democratization (Oche, 2005).

#### **5.4. Nigeria contribution to the establishment and development of the African Union**

It is beyond argument that the African Union (AU) is a continuation of the major discourse that started during the periods of colonial rule on the African continent, which focused on the nature, character, and dynamics of future relations among the newly independent countries in the context of the then prevailing international system. It focused primarily on finding appropriate and effective approaches to the lingering security and developmental dilemmas that confronting the newly independent countries, which were deeply rooted within the broader Pan-African movement, moderated by developments in the dominant Cold War international system of that period of the East-West rivalry, and which the African Union's predecessor – Organization of African Unity (OAU) – had to live within (Sesay, 2008; Ogunsanwo, 2010).

Nigeria considers the African Union (AU) as a new instrument for economic emancipation and political integration in Africa, and seeks ways to use its foreign policy to promote and sustain the AU in a way that increases African capacity to respond to the emerging challenges of globalization, insecurity, governance, corruption, civil wars, refugees, migration, and climate change. Until now, Nigeria has been instrumental in the maintenance of peace and security in Africa and managed to positively influence the decolonization of the continent, therefore, Africa's position in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and thrusts can be easily explained (Ayodele, 2020).

Nigeria's role in the African Union (AU) is best understood within the broader context of the country's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in its foreign and defense policy. The orientation, which has largely been described as Afrocentrism, dates back to the period of gaining independence in 1960 and pursues the foreign-policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa. The policy is driven by the belief in Pax Nigeriana, which emphasizes that Nigeria should play the "Big Brother" role for other African countries. Its role in the AU is motivated by its commitment to the unity, peace and development of the continent, which is believed to be a gradual process, different from the radical approach of former Libyan leader, Muammar Ghadaffi who favoured immediate unification of African states under a single government (Okereke, 2012).

As such, Nigeria has been playing a unique role in Africa since gaining its independence in 1960, including its role in the eradication of colonialism and racism on the continent (Ashaver, 2014). Again, the African continent has been designated as Nigeria's primary sphere of diplomatic interest. Nations with large power capabilities, measured in terms of military strength, economic profile, favourable demographic structure and domestic political stability, are inclined to create spheres of their international influence (Saliu, Oshewolo, 2018). This underscores Nigeria's commitment to world peace as a foreign policy objective and as an element of national interest and cherished domestic values. Its contributions to various international peace-keeping and peace enforcement missions around the world serve as a confirmation of the country's commitment to world peace and security. In this vein, very few African and Third-World countries have provided comparable evidence such kind of commitment (Afinotan, 2010).

The evidences of Nigeria's role in the African Union (AU) are listed below:

1. Financial contributions: Nigeria's commitment to the AU is reflected in its financial contributions to the organization. The AU inherited some of the financial problems faced by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had affected the funding difficulties, as it increased its budget requirements by about five times compared to the OAU budget. Nigeria remains one of the five major countries funding the AU's operational budget, which allows it to have full voting rights and sponsor its nationals for key, strategic positions requiring the AU support in various international organizations. In 1987, Nigeria initiated a concert of medium powers, more widely known as the Lagos Forum, to facilitate multilateral cooperation and to enable member-states to exert greater collective influence on the world affairs (Adigbuo, 2017).
2. Pursuit of peace in Africa: As regards peace and security in Africa, Nigeria has consistently played a prominent role. Following the ratification of the Protocol Relating to the Peace

and Security Council (PSC) in December 2002, the PSC became fully operational in 2004, with Nigeria chairing the council and mediated in the Darfur crisis in western Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, and other crisis-affected areas. Nigeria's greatest contribution to Africa's agenda of decolonization and anti-racism was further demonstrated through the formation of the OAU, using the same approach of African solidarity applied in peacekeeping missions in states affected by crises (Okereke, 2012). The proactive role that Nigeria has played in various international organizations over the years has helped to articulate and consistently defend African concerns and interests (Okunnu, 2010; Ojekwe, 2010).

3. African Peace and Security Architecture: Nigeria's commitment to the AU is further demonstrated by its role in the implementation of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The country participates in AU capacity-building exercises for the military, police, and civilian components of the African Standby Force (ASF), which is an integral part of APSA, and in the ECOMOG activities. It also engages in the promotion and consolidation of democracy, good governance, and human rights in Africa by ratifying the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. Nigeria has remained committed to Article 3(9) of the AU Constitutive Act, which seeks to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, and good governance in Africa, especially in countries like Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Niger, etc. Nigeria has conducted its own reforms in this sphere in 2002, 2006, and 2010, with the aim of restoring integrity of its electoral process and strengthening democracy in Africa (Okereke, 2012).
4. Nigeria's role as a security actor has also been framed so that it resonates beyond West Africa. According to Haastrup and Lucia (2014),

While West Africa provides the space to exercise its security prowess, there is arguably a carefully constructed narrative that places Nigeria as a leader within the whole continent. The emphasis on a transnational outlook, in part, explains Nigeria's robust engagement in African security affairs especially since the creation of the AU (Haastrup, Lucia, 2014).

5. Nigeria's role in the democratization and the entrenchment of democracy in African countries is significant. One should note Nigeria's role in democratization in West Africa and beyond, within the African continent, which has become one of the hotbeds of political instability and protracted civil wars, in the post-Cold War era. Nigeria assumed responsibility for democratization and the strengthening of conflict resolution and intervention. It originally took the initiative in promoting democratization, having realized that no matter how effective these interventions were, it was difficult to establish peace and stability without a democratic therapy (Osaghae, 2010).
6. In relation to the foregoing, it is that the reality that underscores Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS peace process in Mali and the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2071, which authorizes military and other forms of intervention and assistance aimed at preventing the spread of insurgency and terrorism from having a huge impact in Nigeria and elsewhere. Nigerian contribution to the AU projects in Africa was also

manifested in the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), when Nigeria and South Africa tirelessly worked together, and with other countries, to develop the initiative adopted at the OAU summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001. Moreover, the adopted name of "NEPAD" was suggested by Nigeria, and there was also added the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was also added, which provided both vigor and meaningful direction for adopting the peace and security decisions in the new AU Commission (Umezurike, Iwu, Asuelime, Umezurike, 2017; Olagunju, 2014).

7. Another perspective through which one can understand and appreciate the role of Nigeria in the AU is through the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), which remains one of the most decisive steps taken by African leaders to save the continent from the challenges of economic underdevelopment, political instability, and insecurity (Gusau, 2013). Again, Nigeria's considerable influence was evident in the debate on what should be the methodology or modalities for realizing the African integration agenda, while there was a strong consensus on the need for integration, there were opposing views on what should be preferred— a technical framework or an institutional arrangement (Oshewolo, 2019; Okunnu, 2010).

In the recent past, the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, donated US\$500,000, about 350 electoral kits, and seven vehicles to the Government of Guinea-Bissau to facilitate a successful conduct of legislative elections in the country in 2018. Similarly, the Nigerian government also supported the MPLA government by providing military, economic, diplomatic, political, and investment assistance to maintain its consolidated power against the South African apartheid government (Dallaji, 2012). Again, the work of Dr. Peter Onu, who served as the Secretary-General of the OAU from 1983 to 1985, was remarkable, in the sense that his attempt to contest for the substantive position of Secretary-General, became controversial, since the position of the Nigerian government, based on the principle of agreement amongst the OAU's "Big Five" (Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa), was not to contest or field candidates for the position (Malcolm X, 2017).

In 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement was threatened by Nigeria's decision to close its land and sea borders with neighbouring countries, like the Benin Republic, Chad, Niger, Cameroun, and Gabon. The government intended to stop widespread smuggling activities and illegal inflows of Asian rice as well as the outflow of subsidized fuel. This closure of borders resulted in both the gains for Nigeria, and in some problems for the neighbours. However, the recently signed trade agreements between the ECOWAS and the AfCFTA are under threat, since this action has been viewed by the analysts, other African countries, and even by the AU, as the beginning of an "unsuccessful journey" if appropriate and serious measures are not taken to resolve issues related to trade – with Nigeria being the largest economy in Africa (Ghins, Heinrigs 2019; Golub, Mbaye, Golubski, 2019).

## 5.5 Nigeria's impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the African Union

Although there is no consensus in the literature that Nigeria is Africa's clear regional hegemon, it has, like no other country in the continent, contributed immensely to the decolonization and total independence of Africa, as well as to the maintenance of peace, security, and political stability in many African states such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Somalia, among others (Garba, 2021). For these and many other reasons, Nigeria has been widely acknowledged and recognized within and outside of Africa as a "regional power" (Ogunubi, Ukeke-Uzodike, 2016); as "The Giant of Africa" (Holmes, 1987; Dauda, et al., 2019); and as a "Big Brother" to many African countries because of its leadership role, benevolence, and commitments to addressing the plethora of issues and problems affecting the continent at large.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) [1963–2002] played a significant role in facilitating the attainment of independence for many present-day African countries such as by combating of apartheid in South Africa, promoting of African unity, and effectively reducing inter-state conflicts in the continent. However, after the end of colonialism, the need for deeper cooperation among the African countries to address their common economic, political, social, and security challenges within the continent – as well as the desire to have a collective position of impact in the global economy – necessitated for the transformation of the OAU into the AU, in which Nigeria also played a leading role (Eghweree, 2014).

Economically, Nigeria has enjoyed the status of the largest economy in terms of GDP volume for decades. It is Africa's number one crude oil producer (Olusola, 2013), and the world's 7<sup>th</sup> as of 2022 (Punch, 2023). It is a source of crude oil exports to many countries of the world, including Africa. Although, South Africa challenges Nigeria's position as the region's largest economy, the latter has maintained its hold on that position since 2013, after the rebasing of its economy (Olanrewaju, Olorunkanmi, 2020). As of 2022, Nigeria's GDP was \$477 billion, which is higher than Egypt's \$476 billion and South Africa's \$405 billion (World Bank, 2023b). Moreover, even though Nigeria ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in terms of military capability in Africa – after Egypt (1<sup>st</sup>), Algeria (2<sup>nd</sup>), and South Africa (3<sup>rd</sup>) – as of 2022 (Elijah, 2023), it has been recognized as a major contributor to UN, AU and ECOWAS peacekeeping programmes (Dauda, et al., 2019; Mustapha, 2020).

Nigeria has never nursed the ambition of dominating or taking over the territory of its fellow African states, but rather that of promoting brotherliness through its benevolence. This was made clear in the maiden speech of its Prime Minister Abubakar Bafawa Balewa's at the United Nations in October 1960, in which he categorically stated: "We shall never impose ourselves upon any other country, and shall treat every African territory – big or small – as our equal, because we honestly feel that it is only on that basis that peace can be maintained in our continent" (Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations, 2015).

Nigeria has enjoyed remarkable influence in Africa since 1960, until 1994, when South Africa gained independence from the apartheid regime. During General Sani Abacha's military regime, South Africa challenged Nigeria on the need to return to democratic rule. It even led the call for

Nigeria's sanctions at the Commonwealth of Nations over its human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine other human rights activists (Olanrewaju, Olorunkanmi, 2020). Unlike at the continental level, Nigeria's position as a regional hegemonic power in the West African sub-region is clearly uncontested by any of the other 14 independent states – namely, Benin, Ghana, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Liberia, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Guenea Bissau, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, and Niger. Nigeria played a significant role in the formation of the ECOWAS in 1975, whose headquarter is situated in Abuja, the Nigerian capital city.

## 5.6 Challenges faced by Nigeria in engagement with the African Union

Nigeria's continuous "Big Brother" role in Africa, especially under the AU platform, has been contentious, because there is a clear misalignment between the socio-political economy of the country and its Afrocentric foreign policy. Some critics are of the view that Nigeria's unmatched role under the AU platform is a typical pretense of great power status for the country, when in reality, its domestic socio-economic realities point in a different direction; such syndromes as mass poverty, corruption, political instability, and widespread infrastructural decay contradict Nigeria's pivotal role in the AU (Ukeje, 2000). Many, on the other hand, also argue that Nigeria is an affluent state in Africa, and that it has the clarion obligation of assisting its neighbours, and, in turn, Nigeria would place itself in a position of strength in order to realize its foreign policy objectives in the service of its national interest (Okereke, 2012). Notwithstanding, many have argued that Nigeria has not utilized its full potentials since independence from Great Britain on the 1 October 1960, to the benefit of the country (Ogbeidi, 2012; Balkaran, 2011). There is a wide range of problems in the socio-economic system of the country, particularly poverty, decay of public infrastructure, military establishment in politics and economics, leadership failure, and pervasive corruption prevalent in the country (Maiangwa, 2012; Ogbeidi, 2012; David, Asuelime, Onapajo, 2015). These factors have plunged Nigerian state into several political crises, including especially the three year civil war from 1967-1970, tribal riots, and counter religious conflicts. Others include June 12, 2003, presidential election crises, Niger Delta militancy and Boko Haram terrorism. As a result, Nigeria has continued to be characterized by a culture of political violence culture mostly directed at the socio-political system, to the extent that the country continues to drift towards the wrong end of the annual Failed State Index produced by Foreign Policy magazine (David et al., 2015). In an attempt to explore the socio-economic condition of Nigeria amid the wave of security threats by Boko Haram, David et al. (2015) provided the following general framework for analysis and description of the political economy of Nigeria: the nature of state-economic symbiosis, the oil-centric economy, corruption among the elites, the economic crises in Nigeria, and the high poverty level.

In the case of Nigeria, since independence in 1960, it has continued to experience the loss of its economic and political leverage that was predicted to have the capacity to catapult the African socio-political economy into a new level in the international political economy. The Nigerian economy is afflicted by neo-imperialism, largely because of its structural asymmetry and

Western-oriented unequal exchange trade pattern. It is noteworthy that this systematic unequal exchange was already established in Nigeria before its independence from Great Britain. Western multinational companies determined the structure of the colonial Nigerian economy – a structure largely geared towards maximizing the selfish interest of the British economy at the expense of the objective interests of Nigerians (David et al., 2015; Chidozie, 2014). We argue here that one of the major causes of Nigeria's poor economic growth lies in neo-imperialism through consolidated unequal exchange between Nigeria's developing economy and the developed capitalist states of Britain and its Western allies. Thus, Nigeria's continuous push for African unity and progress under the umbrella of the AU may not deliver much change in Africa because of the structural contradictions in Nigeria's political economy. Effectively, the Nigeria state has not been a good example in terms of stability – including in politics, economics, and socio-cultural cohesion.

Prior to the discovery of petroleum in commercial quantities in Nigeria, it was one of the world's leading producers of groundnut, cocoa, rubber, palm tree products, hides, skin, and cotton. In fact, before the emergence of its oil-dependent economy in the 1970s, Nigeria was an agriculture-based economy, as agriculture accounted for over 85% of the nation's total exports (David et al., 2015). As the mainstay of the national economy, accounting for almost 60% of GDP and over 70% of total export earnings in the 1960s, the agricultural sector not only provided employment for over 75% of the population, but also funded notable national development projects (Ileso, 2000). However, the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Nigeria led to the neglect of virtually every other economic sector of the Nigerian economy including solid minerals. This situation, which spans especially from 1970s, ultimately led to serious economic crises beginning in the 1980s, and the consequence of mismanagement were reflected particularly in the macroeconomic and macrosocial implications of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) (David et al., 2015). This programme was a complete failure in Nigeria, both at policy formulation and implementation levels. The situation has led to high levels of poverty in Nigeria, which seem to have defied all economic measures, especially the SAP. Accordingly, the basis and objectives of post-independent Nigerian foreign policy make its participation in global and African regional peace support operations (PSOs) inevitable. Thus, it has contributed both personnel and other resources to peace operations, especially in Africa. Nigeria's efforts in peacebuilding and peacekeeping have been felt at the continental level in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, and Côte d'Ivoire. Beyond the African continent, it has participated in peace building in Lebanon, former Yugoslavia, and in Kuwait (Sule, 2013). As of 2013, it was recorded that Nigeria had contributed armed military contingents, unarmed military observers, military staff officers, uniformed police units, and police advisors, as well as civilian experts, to more than 40 UN, OAU/AU, and ECOWAS missions (Sule, 2013). Nigeria's notable participation in international peacekeeping often earns its praise at both continental and global levels. However, has incurred human, material, and financial pressures on the Nigerian socio-political economy (Sule, 2013). Noteworthy is the opinion held by some that Nigeria has failed to take advantage of its active participation in the numerous peacekeeping operations around the world by not getting commensurate economic, military, and political remuneration for its involvement.

## Conclusions

The study concludes that Nigeria has played a significant role in African affairs, particularly within the AU framework. Its commitment to African unity, peace, and development is evident through its financial contributions, peacekeeping efforts, and advocacy for democracy and good governance. However, Nigeria also faces challenges, including domestic socio-economic issues such as poverty, corruption, and political instability, which affect its ability to fully leverage its potential within the AU. Despite these challenges, Nigeria continues to be a key player in regional and international diplomacy, working towards finding solutions to complex issues facing the continent. It is also noted that Nigeria's leadership in areas such as conflict resolution, economic development, and security cooperation further solidifies its position as a prominent African nation.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Nigeria should prioritize addressing its internal challenges, such as poverty, corruption, and political instability, to strengthen its position and influence within the AU.
2. Nigeria should continue its financial support for the AU and actively participate in diplomatic efforts to address regional conflicts, and promote peace and stability.
3. Nigeria should work towards enhancing regional integration within Africa, fostering closer cooperation among African nations to address common challenges effectively.
4. Nigeria should advocate for good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights, both domestically and across the continent, to contribute to the AU's objectives effectively.
5. Nigeria should leverage its economic potential and position as a regional economic powerhouse to drive development initiatives within the AU and promote economic integration across Africa.

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## Citation

Ahmed Isa, F., Abdulyakeen, A. (2025). Nigeria's contribution to the development of international organisation in Africa: A study of African Union. *Acta Politica Polonica*, 2 (60), 41–64. DOI: 10.18276/ap.2025.60-03.