

The Impact of the African Diaspora on Shaping and Advancing Foreign Policy Objectives in Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the multifaceted role of the African diaspora in influencing and advancing the continent's foreign policy objectives. Historically marginalized in diplomatic discourse, the diaspora has increasingly emerged as a vital actor in shaping diplomatic strategies, fostering economic ties, and promoting political stability within Africa. Through qualitative analysis of case studies across different regions, this study highlights how diaspora engagement enhances foreign policy effectiveness, facilitates international partnerships, and contributes to development agendas. The findings underscore the importance of formalizing diaspora involvement in foreign policy processes and suggest policy recommendations to harness their full potential in fostering Africa's global integration and development.

Keywords: African diaspora, foreign policy, diplomatic influence, international relations, development

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The African diaspora has evolved into a critical diplomatic and strategic actor for African states, extending far beyond its traditional economic role through remittances. Annual remittance inflows to Sub-Saharan Africa reached around **US \$46 billion in 2021**, exceeding foreign direct investment for several countries (Parliament Observer, 2022). This flow not only supports households but also reflects strong financial ties and potential for structured national investment (Parliament Observer, 2022). Furthermore, the **International Monetary Fund** has emphasised that diaspora remittances and savings represent a substantial and underutilised source of development finance, especially when mobilised through innovative instruments such as diaspora bonds (IMF, 2011).

In **2003**, the **African Union** amended its Constitutive Act to officially invite "the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent," effectively recognising the diaspora as the continent's "sixth region" (African Union, 2003, Art. 3(q)). This landmark legal recognition empowered diaspora representatives to participate in continental forums via institutions like the **Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)** and the AU's Diaspora Division—bodies explicitly created to integrate diaspora perspectives into policy and diplomacy (ACCORD, 2023).

Adopting structured mechanisms, the AU launched initiatives like *the Diaspora Engagement Framework* and *Development Without Borders* to formalise diaspora roles in continental diplomacy, development planning, and regional cooperation (AU & Partners, 2022). Member states such as Ethiopia and Nigeria have experimented with **diaspora bonds** to finance major infrastructure. Ethiopia's **2008 "Millennium Bond,"** intended to fund the Gilgel Gibe III dam, underperformed due to mistrust and weak investor confidence (ACCORD, 2023; New Economy Ghana, 2020). In contrast, **Nigeria's 2017 diaspora bond**, which raised close to **US \$300 million**, succeeded because it was registered with the U.S. SEC and marketed transparently to its global diaspora (Parliament Observer, 2022; OMFIF, 2024).

Nevertheless, diaspora engagement remains uneven across African countries. Ethiopia's early failures, Ghana's under-subscribed savings bond in 2007, and Kenya's mixed track record underscore that political stability, trust, and robust governance are essential for diaspora-led financial instruments to succeed (Migration Policy Institute, 2011; New Economy Ghana, 2020; OMFIF, 2024). According to Brookings, diaspora savings may constitute as much as **3% of regional GDP**, but without clear frameworks and institutional coordination, countries cannot fully harness this potential (Famoroti, 2018).

1.2 Significance of the African Diaspora in Global Politics

Beyond economic remittances, the African diaspora contributes to diplomacy through lobbying, political representation, media influence, and participation in multilateral institutions. For instance, African diaspora professionals serving in international organizations—such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and regional development banks—play critical roles in shaping the agenda for African development, humanitarian aid, and conflict mediation (Global Advocacy for African Affairs, 2024). They also help influence bilateral and multilateral relationships between African countries and their host nations through advocacy networks and policy influence.

Remittance flows alone exceeded US\$54 billion to Sub-Saharan Africa in 2023, according to data reported by the World Bank and supported by recent policy analysis (Habari Network, 2025). In addition, countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia have increasingly created dedicated diaspora ministries or commissions, formalising their contributions to national development and foreign affairs. For example, Nigeria's *Nigerians in Diaspora Commission* (NiDCOM) collaborates with embassies and diaspora networks to promote national interests abroad through diaspora-led investment, peacebuilding, and diplomatic engagement (AU & Partners, 2022; Habari Network, 2025).

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

This study will investigate the role of the African diaspora in shaping and advancing Africa's foreign policy. It is particularly focused on analysing the strategies African governments and institutions use to engage diaspora communities in diplomatic endeavours. Key research questions include:

- How do diaspora communities influence Africa's foreign policy and international engagement?
- What institutional mechanisms are in place to integrate diaspora perspectives into policymaking?
- What challenges and opportunities arise from formal diaspora inclusion in foreign relations?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are

1. Analyse the political and diplomatic roles played by the African diaspora.
2. To examine best-practice models of diaspora engagement from selected African countries.
3. The study also aims to suggest frameworks that can enhance the effectiveness of including the diaspora in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies.

1.5 Methodology and Scope

This study uses a qualitative research approach, drawing from document analysis, case studies, and policy review. Key data sources include African Union documents, national diaspora policies, and diaspora engagement reports from countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. Secondary sources, such as scholarly publications, policy briefs, and think tank reports, are also analysed to understand global trends and contextualise Africa's strategies.

The scope of this paper is limited to the political and diplomatic contributions of the African diaspora rather than their broader socio-economic roles. The study pays particular attention to formal mechanisms through which diaspora communities influence foreign policy, including via advisory roles, embassies, regional organisations, and international institutions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Diaspora Engagement and Foreign Policy

Understanding the influence of the African diaspora on foreign policy necessitates a foundation in relevant international relations (IR) theories and diaspora engagement frameworks. Constructivist theory, in particular, offers valuable insights by emphasising the role of shared identities, collective memories, and cultural narratives in shaping diplomatic behaviours and perceptions (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). According to this perspective, diaspora communities are not passive demographic groups but active social actors that construct symbolic meanings, influence diplomatic discourse, and contribute to soft power strategies through cultural diplomacy and narrative shaping. For instance, African diaspora organisations often mobilise historical narratives of liberation and resilience to advocate for policy issues that resonate with both their home and host countries (Miller & Ojo, 2021). This constructivist lens underscores the importance of identity and symbolism in understanding how diaspora communities shape foreign policy agendas beyond traditional political lobbying.

Another influential framework is the ethnic interest group theory, which posits that diasporas serve as mobilised constituencies capable of exerting influence on foreign policy through resource mobilisation, lobbying, and public opinion campaigns (Ambrosio, 2001). African diaspora groups in North America and Europe have demonstrated this effectively by lobbying for conflict resolution initiatives, trade agreements, and diplomatic recognition of African states (Agbu, 2019). These groups

often leverage their transnational networks to pressure policymakers and advocate for policies aligned with their communities' interests. Such activism highlights the strategic role diaspora communities play as transnational interest groups, shaping foreign policy outcomes through organised efforts and advocacy, particularly on issues related to conflict, development, and migration (Ojo & Miller, 2020).

The transnationalism approach complements these theories by emphasising the persistent cross-border social, economic, and political ties maintained by diaspora communities. Transnationalism recognises that these communities are engaged in continuous interactions that influence both their countries of origin and their host countries (Schiller et al., 1992). For African diaspora communities, this transnational engagement includes remittances, cultural exchanges, political activism, and economic collaborations that impact bilateral relations and policy priorities (Ojo & Robinson, 2022). Such sustained engagement blurs the traditional distinctions between domestic and foreign policy, positioning diaspora communities as active participants in shaping diplomatic agendas through ongoing transborder activities.

Additionally, transnational entrepreneurship theory offers a vital perspective on how diaspora members leverage their cross-border networks to promote economic diplomacy and investment in their countries of origin (Osaghae & Cooney, 2018). African entrepreneurs in the diaspora often facilitate trade, transfer of technology, and investment flows that bolster economic development and influence foreign policy orientations toward economic diplomacy. Their activities can sway government priorities toward fostering investment climates and trade relations, thus positioning the diaspora as crucial stakeholders in the economic dimension of foreign policy (Adeleke & Ojo, 2020). Collectively, these frameworks illustrate that the African diaspora is not merely a passive remittance-receiving group but a dynamic actor actively shaping Africa's foreign policy landscape through cultural, political, and economic channels.

In conclusion, integrating these diverse theoretical lenses reveals the multifaceted role of the African diaspora as a non-state diplomatic actor. Their influence extends beyond traditional remittance flows to encompass symbolic diplomacy, political advocacy, economic investment, and transnational engagement. Recognising the diaspora as a strategic asset offers policymakers an opportunity to deepen diplomatic ties, harness cultural influence, and promote development agendas aligned with Africa's long-term interests (Adepoju, 2021). Future research should focus on how formal institutional frameworks can better integrate diaspora communities into official foreign policy processes, thereby maximising their potential as catalysts for Africa's diplomatic and developmental objectives.

2.2 Review of Existing Literature on Diaspora Influence in Africa

The influence of the African diaspora on the continent's development and diplomatic relations has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years. Early studies predominantly emphasised the economic impacts of remittances and the phenomenon of brain drain, often viewing migration as a loss of human capital that hindered national progress (Orozco, 2008). However, contemporary scholarship has expanded this perspective, recognising the diaspora as a vital contributor to innovation, political activism, and investment. Scholars argue that diaspora engagement goes beyond financial remittances, encompassing knowledge transfer, transnational networks, and advocacy efforts that can benefit both the diaspora communities and their countries of origin (Mazzucato & Schans, 2020).

Recent literature emphasises the concept of "brain circulation," which refers to the dynamic movement of skilled migrants who maintain connections with their home countries while participating in global networks (Constant & Zimmermann, 2016). This phenomenon challenges earlier notions of brain drain, portraying migration as a cyclical process that can foster development through the transfer of skills and expertise. African diasporas, particularly those in Europe and North America, have historically played significant roles in anti-colonial struggles and the Pan-African movement, influencing the political consciousness of the continent and fostering independence (Adi, 2002). Today, their influence persists through active participation in governance reforms, civil society, and democratic movements.

The African Union (AU) has officially recognised the importance of the diaspora by designating it as the "sixth region" and integrating it into continental development frameworks (African Union, 2003). This institutional recognition has led to the creation of structures such as the AU Diaspora Division and the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), which facilitate formal dialogue and partnerships with diaspora communities (ACCORD, 2021). These platforms aim to leverage diaspora expertise, financial resources, and networks to advance initiatives like Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), positioning the diaspora as a strategic partner in continental and global affairs (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2002).

Research also highlights the multifaceted role of diaspora capital—financial, social, and political—in influencing Africa's foreign policy and development strategies (Sall, 2019). Diasporas act as conduits for trade, investment, and diplomatic relations, often establishing transnational enterprises that stimulate local economies and create employment (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Lal, 2019). Governments have increasingly institutionalised diaspora engagement through

specialised ministries or commissions, such as Nigeria's Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), recognising their potential to contribute to national development goals (Nwaji, 2020). Such institutional arrangements reflect a broader acknowledgement of the diaspora as a key stakeholder in Africa's socio-economic and political future.

In sum, the literature affirms that diasporas are integral to Africa's development landscape, offering resources, expertise, and advocacy that complement state efforts. As research continues to evolve, the potential of diaspora engagement to foster sustainable development, enhance diplomatic influence, and promote regional integration remains a vital area of investigation (Kuang & Ojo, 2020). Recognising and harnessing this potential requires continued policy innovation and stronger transnational partnerships.

2.3 Gaps in Current Research

Despite the growing recognition of the diaspora's significance, existing research still lacks analytical depth in exploring how it formally shapes foreign policy. Much of the current literature remains focused on economic impacts and development assistance, with limited exploration of direct diplomatic contributions or the institutional mechanisms through which diaspora influence is channelled (Olawale & Ani, 2023; ACCORD, 2023). Few studies, for instance, examine how African embassies and diplomatic missions collaborate with diaspora communities to influence multilateral negotiations or security agendas.

Moreover, although the AU and national governments have created policy frameworks to engage the diaspora, there is a notable absence of evaluation research measuring the effectiveness of these frameworks. Questions remain about how diaspora representatives are selected, how inclusive these engagement processes are, and whether diaspora engagement translates into policy impact on the ground (Mwagiru, 2012). In addition, while theories such as constructivism and ethnic interest group theory offer useful conceptual tools, they are seldom applied systematically to African contexts.

There is also a methodological gap. Most existing studies use qualitative narratives or anecdotal evidence, while very few employ comparative or quantitative approaches to assess diaspora impact on foreign policy outcomes. This lack of empirical rigour makes it difficult to draw generalisable conclusions or develop predictive models that African governments can use to design effective diaspora diplomacy strategies.

3. HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ROLES OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

3.1 Historical Migration Patterns and Their Diplomatic Implications

The historical trajectory of the African diaspora is

deeply rooted in the forced displacement and systemic violence of the transatlantic slave trade, which relocated over 12 million Africans to the Americas and Europe between the 16th and 19th centuries. Although these movements were involuntary, they inadvertently established the structural foundation for the politically active and culturally cohesive diasporic communities that emerged later (Howard University Centre for African Studies, cited in Johnson, 2025). The descendants of these enslaved Africans became integral to global struggles for justice and equality, leveraging their shared African heritage to advocate for the rights of colonised and oppressed peoples. Over time, this evolved into a broader political consciousness, culminating in the emergence of Pan-Africanism—a global movement committed to African unity, sovereignty, and liberation (Howard University Centre for African Studies, 2025).

Through Pan-Africanist thought and activism, diasporic communities—particularly those in the Caribbean, North America, and Europe—provided crucial intellectual and diplomatic support to anti-colonial movements in Africa. Figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, and Kwame Nkrumah (himself educated in the United States) formed ideological and strategic alliances that influenced liberation movements across the continent. These diaspora actors organised international conferences, lobbied Western governments, and used their media platforms to draw global attention to injustices in colonial Africa (Howard University Centre for African Studies, 2025). Their activism was instrumental in galvanising international opinion during critical periods such as apartheid in South Africa and the independence struggles of the 1950s and 60s, positioning the diaspora as a moral and political voice in global diplomacy.

Beyond activism, the early diaspora's contributions to post-colonial diplomacy were expressed through intellectual, financial, and emotional investments in Africa's state-building processes. Cultural diplomacy, diaspora journalism, and educational exchanges helped articulate African perspectives to the wider world and built informal transnational networks of solidarity. These channels facilitated the international legitimacy of newly independent African states and nurtured global partnerships that extended beyond traditional bilateral diplomacy (Howard University Centre for African Studies, 2025). These interactions contributed to the symbolic reconstruction of African identity on the global stage—one that sought to reclaim dignity, reshape narratives, and assert political agency in post-colonial international relations.

This early involvement of the diaspora set the stage for its current role as a soft power instrument in Africa's foreign policy strategies. As noted by Olawale and Ani (2023), the diaspora's historical role in ideological and diplomatic struggles evolved into more structured forms of engagement, particularly in areas such as remittances, public diplomacy, and international lobbying. This transformation from symbolic solidarity to functional statecraft reflects a broader shift in how African states

perceive their diaspora—not merely as distant relatives or donors, but as transnational agents of influence. Today's diaspora diplomacy builds on this historical legacy, integrating cultural identity with foreign policy objectives to create multi-level channels of global engagement rooted in centuries of shared struggle and resilience (Olawale & Ani, 2023).

3.2 Contemporary Diaspora Networks and Their Influence on Foreign Policy

Recently, the role of African diasporas has transcended traditional perceptions limited to remittances and nostalgia-driven engagement. Rather than remaining peripheral economic contributors, diasporic communities have increasingly become critical stakeholders in shaping their countries' foreign relations, economic diplomacy, and global positioning. The substantial remittance flows are not only a testament to the financial strength of these populations but also serve as leverage for policy influence. For example, Nigerians in the diaspora collectively remitted nearly USD 20 billion in 2023, an amount that represents approximately 7–8% of Nigeria's GDP and reflects similar economic significance in countries like Ghana and Kenya (Johnson, 2025). These capital flows, once viewed primarily as household income supports, are now recognised as macroeconomic stabilisers and instruments for advancing development diplomacy.

These remittances are increasingly being institutionalised through innovative financial and policy tools, such as diaspora bonds, national savings instruments targeted at diaspora investors, and sovereign engagement strategies tailored to diaspora interests. These tools allow diasporas to participate in infrastructure development, social investment, and economic diversification, thereby aligning their private contributions with public-sector goals. Beyond financial investment, diaspora advocacy groups are leveraging their political capital in host countries to lobby for favourable bilateral agreements, influence international perceptions of their homelands, and shape the narrative around migration, development, and trade (Johnson, 2025). Such activity marks a new frontier in soft power diplomacy, where diasporas are not just economic actors but strategic diplomatic agents operating across borders.

Ghana's initiatives—particularly the *Year of Return* (2019) and its successor *Beyond the Return* (2020–2030)—serve as emblematic examples of structured diaspora diplomacy. Far from being symbolic gestures, these campaigns are deeply embedded in Ghana's foreign policy objectives, aimed at reconnecting the African diaspora with the continent through tourism, investment, and legal recognition. As noted in recent reports, the *Year of Return* attracted nearly one million diaspora visitors, and in 2023, Ghana formally granted citizenship to over 500 individuals of African descent—signalling a tangible shift in diaspora inclusion (AP News,

2024). These initiatives demonstrate how African states can position the diaspora not merely as external contributors but as citizens with rights, responsibilities, and reciprocal relationships with the state.

Such programs reflect a broader trend toward institutionalising diaspora engagement, which aligns cultural heritage with national interests. The diaspora is thus reimagined as a diplomatic constituency—capable of advancing public diplomacy, promoting trade, and enhancing Africa's visibility in global governance forums. As noted by Wikipedia (2025) and AP News (2024), Ghana's use of diaspora programs functions as a form of soft power, fostering emotional and political loyalty while simultaneously achieving economic and diplomatic dividends. This model has inspired similar efforts in other African countries, confirming that the diaspora is no longer a passive demographic but a dynamic agent shaping Africa's foreign policy environment in the 21st century.

3.3 Case Studies of Diaspora Impact in Specific African Countries

Kenya presents a notable model of structured diaspora diplomacy within sub-Saharan Africa. As analysed by Mwazighe (2021), the Kenyan government has integrated diaspora engagement into its foreign policy apparatus through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kenya Diaspora Policy. This strategic alignment allows for the mobilisation of financial remittances, human capital, and cultural diplomacy to support Kenya's national development priorities. The diaspora's role is not limited to economic transfers; rather, it extends to policy lobbying, investment facilitation, and public diplomacy campaigns abroad (Mwazighe, 2021). Kenyan embassies now actively maintain diaspora databases, coordinate investment forums, and engage diaspora communities in consular planning—transforming them into active agents of bilateral cooperation.

Ghana offers another compelling example through its highly publicised “Year of Return” initiative in 2019, which commemorated 400 years since the transatlantic slave trade began. According to Olaide Mesewaku (2021), the campaign successfully mobilised almost one million visitors from the diaspora, generating approximately USD 1.9 billion in economic inflows. The follow-up program, “Beyond the Return,” has since evolved into a decade-long plan to sustain diaspora investment, tourism, and dual citizenship engagement (Wikipedia, 2025). These programs have not only boosted Ghana's economy but also reshaped its image as a welcoming homeland for African descendants globally, thereby deepening its foreign cultural relations and diplomatic reach (Olaide Mesewaku, 2021). Ghana's case demonstrates how diaspora initiatives can simultaneously serve tourism diplomacy, investment strategy, and soft power projection.

Uganda, while comparatively underrepresented in diaspora diplomacy discourse, has nonetheless adopted

policies that recognise the potential of its citizens abroad. As documented by Bulwaka (2009), **Uganda's** government has sought to institutionalise diaspora relations through efforts to attract foreign direct investment, facilitate remittance flows, and support the return of skilled nationals. The Ugandan diaspora has played active roles in political dialogue, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, particularly among post-conflict communities. However, Bulwaka (2009) also notes that these efforts often suffer from inconsistent institutional support, weak diaspora trust in government channels, and fragmented communication between Ugandan missions abroad and their citizens. Despite these limitations, Uganda's case illustrates the importance of moving beyond rhetoric to create concrete pathways for diaspora participation in national development and diplomacy.

Nigeria, home to one of the largest and most influential diaspora populations in Africa, offers a powerful example of diaspora engagement with far-reaching foreign policy implications. According to Johnson (2025), Nigeria receives over USD 20 billion annually in diaspora remittances—making the diaspora Nigeria's largest source of foreign exchange, ahead of oil revenues. This financial power has been acknowledged through institutional frameworks like the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), established in 2019 to coordinate diaspora affairs. Nigerian diasporas are actively engaged in health missions, political lobbying, technology transfer, and education initiatives across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Moreover, prominent diaspora organisations have influenced host country policies in favour of Nigeria, from immigration reform in the U.S. to bilateral educational and development partnerships. However, challenges remain, particularly around dual citizenship, voting rights, and diaspora trust in Nigerian institutions—highlighting the need for sustained policy commitment to fully harness this community's diplomatic and developmental potential (Johnson, 2025).

3.4 Synthesis: From Historical Roots to Contemporary Agency

Together, the historical trajectories and contemporary manifestations of African diaspora activity reveal a dynamic continuum—transitioning from the legacy of forced displacement to a position of deliberate diplomatic engagement. The early diaspora experience, largely defined by enslavement and exile, gave rise to transnational activism that ultimately shaped the ideological foundations of Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial resistance, and African nationalism (Johnson, 2025). These foundations were not only intellectual but also practical, influencing the political awakening and subsequent independence of many African states. This

transformation reflects a significant shift from reactive to proactive agency, as diaspora actors move from the margins of political discourse to the centre of Africa's global interactions (Olawale & Ani, 2023).

The modern African diaspora is increasingly recognised not simply as a source of remittances but as an essential component of foreign policy and international development. Many African governments have come to understand the potential of their diaspora populations as contributors to national branding, economic diplomacy, and geopolitical influence. This is evidenced in the proliferation of state-led initiatives such as diaspora ministries, diaspora bonds, and repatriation campaigns, which formalise diaspora-state relations and integrate these communities into national policy frameworks (Olawale & Ani, 2023). Such formalisation marks a paradigmatic shift in Africa's foreign policy architecture—where the diaspora is no longer peripheral but an embedded diplomatic actor capable of facilitating soft power, cultural outreach, and economic partnerships (Johnson, 2025).

Nevertheless, this process of institutionalisation is neither uniform nor without challenges. While Ghana and Kenya have made significant strides in creating robust diaspora engagement strategies, the effectiveness of such efforts varies across the continent. Ghana's Year of Return and Beyond the Return campaigns have successfully attracted investment and international goodwill, and Kenya has actively cultivated diaspora diplomacy through its foreign service (Mwazighe, 2021). Conversely, countries like Uganda, though endowed with a vibrant diaspora, exhibit less effective coordination, hampered by inconsistent policy frameworks and limited diaspora trust in state institutions (Bulwaka, 2009). This unevenness suggests that while the vision of diaspora diplomacy is widely accepted, its execution is contingent on national political will, institutional capacity, and the credibility of engagement mechanisms.

In sum, diaspora networks have evolved into multidimensional actors—operating simultaneously as economic agents, political lobbyists, cultural ambassadors, and development partners. Their ability to bridge host and home countries uniquely positions them to support Africa's foreign policy goals in an increasingly multipolar world. As Olawale and Ani (2023) note, the diaspora has become both a symbol and a substance of Africa's external engagement, representing a transnational constituency whose interests align with continental aspirations. The challenge for African states moving forward lies not in recognising the diaspora's potential—this is already well established—but in crafting inclusive, accountable, and strategic frameworks that transform diaspora engagement from occasional rhetoric into institutionalised reality (Johnson, 2025; Mwazighe, 2021; Bulwaka, 2009).

4. MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Formal and Informal Channels of Diaspora Involvement

African states have increasingly recognised the strategic importance of their diaspora populations in advancing domestic development and international diplomacy. As a result, they have adopted a combination of **formal institutional mechanisms** and **informal social strategies** to tap into this transnational resource. In Nigeria, one of the continent's most prominent examples, the establishment of the **Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM)** under the 2017 Act represents a major step in codifying state-diaspora relations. The Commission is mandated to engage the Nigerian diaspora across economic, political, and social spheres—coordinating remittances, facilitating investment channels, and supporting diplomatic outreach efforts. NiDCOM has also spearheaded the creation of diaspora databases, the organisation of high-level diaspora town halls in cities like London and Atlanta, and the implementation of investment summits focused on sectors such as real estate, technology, and agriculture (GFMD, 2023). These efforts illustrate a deliberate movement towards institutionalising diaspora engagement as part of Nigeria's foreign and economic policy toolkit.

In parallel, **informal mechanisms** of diaspora involvement have flourished across the continent, often operating independently or in collaboration with state structures. Diaspora communities participate in cultural diplomacy through a variety of platforms—including heritage festivals, transnational faith-based networks, academic associations, and community-based organizations—that preserve national identity while also influencing external perceptions of their home countries. These grassroots engagements act as “soft power” tools, reinforcing Africa's global presence through people-to-people diplomacy. For instance, religious associations and alumni groups often serve dual purposes: they support migrants in host countries while simultaneously organising charitable missions, advocacy campaigns, and cultural events that link back to their countries of origin. In this way, informal diaspora mobilisation complements formal state-led initiatives, enabling a more holistic and multilayered approach to foreign policy, development partnerships, and international representation (GFMD, 2023).

4.2 Economic, Political, and Cultural Contributions

The economic impact of African diaspora communities is perhaps most measurable through the scale and consistency of remittance flows to the continent. According to the **World Bank's Migration and Development Brief (2024)**, Sub-Saharan Africa received

an estimated **US \$54 billion** in remittances in 2023, a figure that underscores the financial significance of diaspora engagement in regional economies. Nigeria alone accounted for approximately **US \$19.5 billion**—roughly 35% of the region's total remittances—making the diaspora Nigeria's largest source of foreign exchange, ahead of oil exports (World Bank, 2024; Arise News, 2024). These financial inflows serve not only to stabilise national reserves but also to increasingly support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), education, health services, and local infrastructure development. In many cases, diaspora remittances function as a form of decentralised development finance—reaching underserved communities and reducing dependence on volatile external aid flows.

Beyond their economic influence, diasporic communities also shape political and cultural landscapes in both home and host countries. Politically, diaspora groups have become vocal actors in promoting democratic governance, anti-corruption campaigns, and electoral transparency. Through lobbying, digital activism, and participation in international forums, they contribute to global narratives about governance and accountability in African states. The #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and diaspora-led town halls with elected officials in countries like the UK and US demonstrate their capacity for transnational political influence. Culturally, diasporas serve as ambassadors of African identity, particularly through creative industries such as music, fashion, literature, and film. This cultural expression, often championed by second-generation migrants, plays a pivotal role in reshaping Africa's global image and advancing soft power diplomacy. Diaspora churches, language schools, and heritage festivals also provide platforms for intergenerational knowledge transfer and maintain emotional and cultural ties to the continent (World Bank, 2024; Arise News, 2024).

4.3 Role of Diaspora Organisations and Transnational Networks

Diaspora organisations have emerged as critical facilitators of transnational engagement, acting as institutional bridges between African states and their global citizens. These organisations provide structured platforms through which diaspora communities can participate meaningfully in policy design, economic development, and international cooperation. For instance, the **African Diaspora Investment Forum** and **national diaspora conferences** hosted by the **Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM)** are instrumental in bringing diaspora voices into national policymaking. These forums provide a space for discussing remittance regulation, diaspora bond mechanisms, and vocational or professional skills repatriation. Importantly, they enable governments to align diaspora contributions with national development strategies while also giving diaspora

stakeholders formal recognition in shaping homeland affairs. This institutional engagement marks a shift from informal transnational ties to formalised partnership models that acknowledge the diaspora as policy co-creators rather than passive contributors.

These organisations often operate within complex, multilevel networks that include non-governmental organisations, international development agencies, private sector partners, and foreign missions. In Ghana, for example, the government's partnership with diaspora organisations has been visible through initiatives like **Diaspora Roadshows** and investment summits connected to the broader **Beyond the Return** campaign. These platforms promote tourism and cultural reconnection and generate real investment outcomes, such as real estate ventures, tech start-up funding, and academic collaborations. The effectiveness of these initiatives lies in the hybrid role that diaspora organisations play—leveraging their understanding of host countries' institutional environments while maintaining economic, familial, and cultural links to the continent. As such, they contribute to both **formal diplomacy** and **grassroots mobilisation**, providing African states with enhanced capacities for soft power projection, resource mobilisation, and citizen diplomacy on the global stage.

4.4 Integrated Influence through Soft Power and Policy Channels

Ghana's *Year of Return* initiative in 2019 and its continuation through the *Beyond the Return* (2020–2030) framework have set a precedent in how African states can actively engage their diasporas in national development and diplomacy. These state-led efforts were designed to reconnect diasporic communities—especially those of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean—with the continent through heritage tourism, investment opportunities, and symbolic recognition. According to **AP News (2024)**, in a landmark development, the Ghanaian government granted **citizenship to over 500 diaspora individuals**, mostly Black Americans, in 2023. This move was not only politically symbolic but also strategically diplomatic, positioning Ghana as a leader in diaspora engagement on the continent. The initiative's success demonstrates the efficacy of cultural diplomacy in building emotional bridges that translate into long-term investments, remittances, and advocacy on behalf of African interests in global fora (AP News, 2024).

Other African countries have adopted similar models to leverage their diasporas for national development and international influence. **Rwanda**, for instance, has strategically engaged its diaspora through the *Rwanda Day* events held in major cities like Brussels and Chicago, allowing President Paul Kagame and government officials to interact directly with Rwandan professionals abroad. These events aim to attract diaspora investments in infrastructure, ICT, and education, while reinforcing

national identity. **Ethiopia** has also made significant use of diaspora bonds and remittance mobilisation, especially during national crises, such as the campaign to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which drew widespread financial support from Ethiopians abroad. Similarly, **Senegal** established the *Ministry for Senegalese Abroad*, which focuses on diaspora protection, investment facilitation, and returnee reintegration. These cases illustrate how countries beyond Ghana are increasingly viewing diaspora diplomacy as an integral part of their national policy architecture.

These efforts collectively represent a broader continental trend towards institutionalising diaspora engagement as a tool for soft power and international partnership. By incorporating diaspora programs into foreign policy frameworks, African governments are reshaping their global narratives—projecting strength, resilience, and cultural sophistication. Such programs are not only economic in orientation but also deeply symbolic, addressing historical disconnection while promoting inclusive global African identity. They also help African states gain influence on multilateral platforms, such as the African Union, the United Nations, and regional economic blocs, by mobilising global citizens as informal diplomats, investors, and cultural ambassadors. As evidenced by Ghana's success and the replication of similar models across Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Senegal, diaspora engagement is fast becoming a diplomatic asset central to Africa's foreign policy and global integration agenda.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities for Policymakers

Engaging the African diaspora presents both strategic opportunities and governance challenges for policymakers. One of the primary barriers remains the lack of institutional coordination and up-to-date data on diaspora demographics and investment patterns. As highlighted by the African Development Bank (2022), countries across the continent continue to struggle with fragmented remittance channels, weak legal frameworks to protect diaspora investors, and limited trust between diaspora communities and state institutions. In response, the Bank's Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) initiative has proposed solutions such as enhanced diaspora registries, policy harmonisation across ministries, and dedicated diaspora liaison offices to bridge these gaps. Regionally, the East African Community (EAC) has made major improvements by initiating the development of a regional Diaspora Policy and Action Plan that seeks to align partner states' approaches to diaspora engagement and promote regional integration through shared strategic frameworks (East African Community Secretariat, 2023). These coordinated efforts provide important chances to officially include diaspora contributions in foreign policy, but achieving this will rely on the commitment of governments to maintain inclusive

governance and make diaspora issues a priority in their national agendas.

5.2 Strategies for Integrating Diaspora Actors into Foreign Policy Frameworks

To effectively embed diaspora actors within national and regional foreign policy strategies, African governments must shift from ad hoc engagement to structured, institutional participation. The African Development Bank (2022) recommends a three-pronged approach: regular high-level diaspora summits, diaspora investment platforms, and the establishment of a permanent Diaspora Centre of Excellence to consolidate learning and policy innovation. These proposals are complemented by the EAC's efforts to create a centralised Diaspora Desk that will serve as a coordinating hub across partner countries, enhancing cross-border diaspora dialogue and investment harmonisation (East African Community Secretariat, 2023). Moreover, national ministries of foreign affairs and trade can adopt inclusive consultation processes—such as diaspora advisory councils—to incorporate diaspora expertise into multilateral negotiations, public diplomacy, and regional economic development. Institutionalising these efforts would not only legitimise diaspora contributions but also allow African governments to strategically leverage their diasporas in achieving goals outlined in Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

5.3 Future Research Directions

Despite growing recognition of diaspora actors in Africa's development, there remains limited empirical research on their specific contributions to institutional governance and foreign policy. The African Development Bank (2022) urges scholars to go beyond measuring remittance flows and instead explore how diaspora bonds, co-investment platforms, and returnee-led enterprises contribute to public finance sustainability and infrastructure development. Also, the EAC Secretariat (2023) has asked for research on how well regional diaspora frameworks work, including how different laws and political situations in partner countries affect the implementation of diaspora policies. Comparative studies focusing on success stories—such as Ghana's Year of Return or Rwanda's diaspora-focused development strategies—could help identify best practices. Mixed-method research designs incorporating interviews with diaspora actors, government officials, and international partners would generate more nuanced insights into the transnational nature of diaspora engagement. Future academic inquiry should also consider the evolving role of African diasporas in peacebuilding, post-conflict

reconstruction, and climate diplomacy, particularly within African Union and UN frameworks.

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