

Leveraging Foreign Policy and Sustainable National Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Orlunga, Bartholomew Godstime PhD, & Amadi, Goodnews Chimaobi. (2026). Leveraging foreign policy and sustainable national development in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. UKR Journal of Education and Literature, 2(5), 77-84.	<i>Nigeria's foreign policy has traditionally focused on protecting national interest, promoting African unity, maintaining diplomatic relations, and supporting regional peace and security. However, in an increasingly interconnected world, foreign policy can also serve as an important instrument for achieving sustainable national development. This position paper examined how Nigeria can leverage its foreign policy to promote economic growth, investment, international trade, technology transfer, human-capital development, and regional economic integration. The paper is anchored on the Complex Interdependence Theory developed by Keohane and Nye (1977), which explains how countries are increasingly connected through economic, political, institutional, and social relationships. The paper argued that Nigeria has significant opportunities to turn its diplomatic relationships and international influence into practical development benefits. However, challenges such as policy inconsistency, weak institutions, corruption, insecurity, overdependence on crude oil, inadequate infrastructure, and poor implementation of international agreements continue to limit these opportunities. The paper further identified economic diplomacy, AfCFTA, technology partnerships, diaspora engagement, economic diversification, and stronger regional cooperation as major prospects. It recommended a more consistent and development-oriented foreign policy, stronger diplomatic institutions, improved governance, greater economic diversification, and closer coordination between foreign policy and national development priorities. The paper concluded that Nigeria's foreign policy will have greater developmental value when its international engagements are deliberately connected to domestic needs and translated into tangible improvements in employment, investment, technology, infrastructure, security, and citizens' welfare.</i> Keywords: Foreign policy, Sustainable development, National interest, Economic diplomacy, Complex Interdependence Theory.

Introduction

Foreign policy is an important instrument through which a state protects its national interest, promotes its sovereignty, and advances its political, economic, and security objectives in the international system. For Nigeria, foreign policy has traditionally focused on maintaining cordial relations with other states, promoting African unity, protecting national security, and strengthening Nigeria's position in global affairs. However, in today's interconnected world, foreign policy is expected to go beyond diplomatic representation and political cooperation.

It should also contribute directly to economic growth, employment creation, investment, technological development, and improved welfare of citizens. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) argued that Nigeria needs to strengthen the connection between its foreign policy objectives and domestic development priorities.

Nigeria occupies an important position in Africa because of its population, natural resources, economic potential, and political influence. Since independence, the country has played active roles in African politics, regional integration,

peacekeeping, and international diplomacy. Nigeria has also used its diplomatic influence to support African liberation movements and conflict-resolution efforts. Despite these achievements, there remains a noticeable gap between Nigeria's international influence and the development benefits experienced by its citizens. This situation raises questions about whether Nigeria's foreign policy is being sufficiently used as an instrument of national development. Oshewolo (2024) notes that Nigeria's international ambitions are sometimes constrained by domestic political and institutional weaknesses.

Leveraging foreign policy for sustainable national development means using Nigeria's diplomatic relations, international partnerships, and political influence to achieve long-term national objectives. This includes attracting foreign direct investment, expanding international trade, promoting Nigerian products, accessing technology, strengthening human capital, and obtaining international support for development programmes. It also involves economic diplomacy, where diplomatic institutions actively promote the country's economic interests abroad. Hassan and Adejumo (2023) observe that economic diplomacy has become increasingly important to Nigeria's foreign policy because of the need to connect international relations with domestic economic development.

However, Nigeria faces several challenges in achieving this objective. Political instability, corruption, policy inconsistency, insecurity, weak institutions, and poor implementation of international agreements can limit the benefits of foreign policy. In addition, excessive dependence on crude oil has made Nigeria vulnerable to changes in the global economy. These challenges weaken the country's bargaining power and can reduce the confidence of foreign investors and international partners. Edet and Etim (2025) identify institutional weaknesses, inconsistent policy implementation, and leadership challenges as important constraints on Nigeria's ability to convert foreign policy opportunities into sustainable development outcomes.

Despite these challenges, there are significant prospects. Nigeria can strengthen its economic diplomacy, diversify its economy, promote non-oil exports, attract productive foreign investment, develop technological partnerships, and take greater advantage of regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area. Its large market and strategic position also give it considerable bargaining potential in international politics. Therefore, Nigeria needs a coherent and consistent foreign policy that places national interest and sustainable development at the centre of its diplomatic engagements. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy should be measured not only by its diplomatic visibility abroad but also by its ability to

improve the economic, political, and social conditions of its citizens.

Conceptual Clarification

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to the principles, decisions, and actions through which a state manages its relationships with other states and international organizations in order to protect and promote its national interests. It covers issues such as diplomacy, international trade, security, defence, regional cooperation, investment, and participation in global institutions. In Nigeria, foreign policy is also closely connected to the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, economic interests, and political influence. It provides the framework through which Nigeria interacts with other countries and seeks opportunities that can contribute to national development. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) explain that Nigeria's foreign policy must increasingly respond to economic and technological realities if it is to support the country's broader development objectives.

Foreign policy is not limited to the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Nigerian diplomatic missions abroad. It involves different government institutions and actors whose decisions affect Nigeria's relations with the outside world. The President, National Assembly, ministries, security agencies, diplomats, and economic institutions can all influence the direction of foreign policy. Political leadership is particularly important because governments determine the priorities and strategies through which national interests are pursued internationally. In this sense, foreign policy reflects both a country's domestic political circumstances and its perception of the international environment. Oshewolo (2024) observed that the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy is strongly influenced by the country's domestic institutional and political conditions.

National Development

National development refers to the overall improvement of the economic, political, social, technological, and institutional conditions of a country. It goes beyond economic growth because development is concerned with the welfare and quality of life of citizens. A developed nation should be able to provide employment opportunities, functional infrastructure, quality education, effective healthcare, security, political stability, and opportunities for citizens to participate meaningfully in society. For Nigeria, national development therefore involves transforming the country's human and material resources into improved living conditions and greater national productivity. Alikor and Okachiku-Agbaraeke (2025) explained that sustained investment in education raises productivity, encourages

innovation, reduces poverty and enlarges the pool of skilled workers, and this places education at the centre of any serious effort at national development.

National development also has a strong political dimension. Good governance, democratic accountability, rule of law, effective institutions, and political stability are essential for sustainable development. Where institutions are weak and public resources are poorly managed, economic resources may not translate into meaningful development. Edet and Etim (2025) argue that institutional weaknesses and leadership challenges remain important barriers to Nigeria's ability to achieve broad-based development. Thus, national development requires not only economic resources but also responsible political leadership and effective governance.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development refers to a pattern of development that meets present needs without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing economic progress with social welfare, environmental protection, and institutional stability. In Nigeria, sustainable development is particularly important because the country faces challenges such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, infrastructure deficits, and dependence on natural resources. Development policies must therefore focus on creating lasting benefits rather than short-term gains.

Sustainable development also requires the responsible use of natural and financial resources. Nigeria's heavy dependence on crude oil demonstrates the danger of relying excessively on one resource for national revenue and foreign exchange. A sustainable approach requires economic diversification into agriculture, manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, and other productive sectors. Saleh (2023) argued that Nigeria's foreign economic relations need to contribute more effectively to industrialization and diversification if the country is to achieve sustainable development.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy refers to the use of diplomatic relations and international negotiations to promote a country's economic interests. It involves activities such as attracting foreign direct investment, promoting exports, opening international markets, encouraging tourism, facilitating technology transfer, and supporting domestic businesses abroad. For Nigeria, economic diplomacy is particularly important because the country needs to reduce its dependence on oil and expand its participation in global production and trade.

Effective economic diplomacy requires close cooperation between political leaders, diplomats, private businesses,

and economic institutions. Nigerian embassies and diplomatic missions can serve as channels for identifying investment opportunities and promoting Nigerian products in foreign markets. Hassan and Adejumo (2023) maintained that economic diplomacy can contribute to Nigeria's development when diplomatic activities are properly connected to domestic economic priorities.

Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

Sustainable national development in Nigeria can be understood as the continuous improvement of the country's economic, political, social, technological, and environmental conditions in a manner that benefits both present and future generations. It requires effective governance, economic diversification, social inclusion, political stability, environmental responsibility, and strong institutions. Foreign policy can support this process by connecting Nigeria to international resources, markets, technologies, knowledge, and strategic partnerships.

Therefore, leveraging foreign policy for sustainable national development requires Nigeria to move beyond diplomatic visibility and political influence towards practical development-oriented diplomacy. The country's foreign relations should be used strategically to advance national interest, strengthen economic diplomacy, improve international bargaining power, and create sustainable opportunities for its citizens. This makes foreign policy not only an instrument of international politics but also an important tool for achieving Nigeria's long-term national development objectives.

Foreign Policy and Sustainable National Development

Foreign policy and sustainable national development are closely related because the way a country interacts with the international community can significantly affect its domestic development. Foreign policy provides a framework through which Nigeria protects its national interest, builds strategic partnerships, attracts investment, promotes trade, and obtains access to technology and international development opportunities. In this regard, foreign policy should not be viewed only from the perspective of diplomacy and political relations. It should also be considered as a practical instrument for improving the economic and social conditions of citizens. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) noted that Nigeria's foreign policy needs to respond more effectively to economic and technological challenges if it is to contribute meaningfully to national development.

Sustainable national development involves achieving economic growth while improving social welfare, strengthening political institutions, protecting the environment, and ensuring that development benefits are available to both present and future generations. For

Nigeria, this requires reducing poverty and unemployment, improving infrastructure, strengthening education and healthcare, promoting industrialization, and diversifying the economy away from excessive dependence on crude oil. Foreign policy can support these objectives by creating opportunities for international cooperation, direct foreign investment, technology transfer, and access to global markets. Hassan and Adejumo (2023) argued that economic diplomacy can serve as an important channel for linking Nigeria's international relations with its domestic development objectives.

The relationship also operates through international trade and investment. Nigeria can use its diplomatic missions and bilateral relationships to promote locally produced goods, attract investors, and negotiate favourable economic agreements. Participation in regional initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area can further expand the market available to Nigerian producers and encourage regional economic integration. However, the benefits of such opportunities depend on Nigeria's ability to address domestic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, policy inconsistency, insecurity, and weak institutions. Edet and Etim (2025) emphasized that institutional and leadership challenges can limit the ability of Nigeria to convert international opportunities into meaningful development outcomes.

Foreign policy can equally promote human-capital and technological development. Nigeria's partnerships with other countries, universities, international organizations, and private-sector institutions can provide opportunities for skills development, research collaboration, technology transfer, and innovation. Such partnerships are important because sustainable development depends increasingly on knowledge, technology, and skilled human resources rather than natural resources alone. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) argue that strengthening Nigeria's technological capacity is necessary for the country to derive greater developmental benefits from its international engagements. Nwuke and Nwanguma (2024) observed that planned capacity building improved the performance of staff in public institutions, and this suggests that Nigeria will only retain the gains of international cooperation where the officials and institutions that manage such engagements are themselves well trained.

However, foreign policy can only contribute effectively to sustainable national development when it is supported by sound domestic governance. Political stability, accountability, rule of law, policy continuity, and strong institutions are necessary for attracting credible international partners and ensuring that foreign resources are properly utilized. Nigeria's foreign policy therefore needs to be coordinated with its domestic economic and

political priorities. Ultimately, the success of foreign policy should not be measured only by Nigeria's diplomatic influence or participation in international organizations, but also by its ability to generate tangible improvements in national development and the welfare of citizens.

Theoretical Framework

Complex Interdependence Theory

The Complex Interdependence Theory, developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in 1977, is suitable for explaining the relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy and sustainable national development. The theory challenges the traditional realist assumption that international politics is driven mainly by military power and competition among states. Instead, it argues that countries are connected through multiple channels, including economic relations, trade, diplomacy, technology, international organizations, and social interactions. In today's globalized world, these connections mean that what happens in one country can have significant consequences for others.

The theory is particularly relevant to Nigeria because the country cannot achieve sustainable development in isolation. Nigeria depends on international markets, foreign investment, technology, development partnerships, regional trade, and diplomatic cooperation. At the same time, Nigeria's large market, natural resources, human capital, and strategic position make it an important partner for other countries. This creates a relationship of mutual dependence. For example, Nigeria can attract foreign investment and technology through diplomatic relations, while foreign investors gain access to Nigeria's large market and economic opportunities. Such relationships demonstrate how foreign policy can be used to pursue national development objectives.

Complex Interdependence Theory also helps to explain the importance of economic diplomacy. Under contemporary international relations, diplomatic missions are not concerned only with political negotiations and security matters. They also promote trade, investment, tourism, technology, education, and other economic interests. Nigeria can therefore use its foreign policy to open new markets for its products, attract productive foreign direct investment, encourage technology transfer, and strengthen partnerships in areas such as renewable energy, digital technology, agriculture, and manufacturing. These international connections can contribute to sustainable development when they are properly aligned with domestic priorities.

The theory further highlights the importance of international and regional institutions. Organizations such as the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, and

institutions supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area provide platforms through which Nigeria can pursue its interests collectively. Rather than relying solely on its individual political or military strength, Nigeria can use these institutions to negotiate, cooperate, resolve disputes, and promote regional economic integration. This is particularly important because many contemporary development challenges, including climate change, terrorism, pandemics, trade, and technological development, cannot be effectively addressed by one country acting alone.

However, Complex Interdependence Theory also helps to expose some of Nigeria's challenges. Interdependence does not necessarily mean that all countries benefit equally. States with stronger economies, technology, institutions, and bargaining power may gain more from international relationships than weaker states. Nigeria's dependence on crude oil exports, foreign technology, imported products, and external capital can therefore create vulnerabilities. If foreign policy is poorly managed, international interdependence may reinforce economic dependence rather than promote sustainable development.

The theory therefore supports the position that Nigeria should pursue strategic and mutually beneficial interdependence rather than excessive dependence. Nigeria needs to strengthen its domestic productive capacity while maintaining strong international relationships. This means diversifying the economy, developing human capital, strengthening institutions, promoting Nigerian businesses abroad, and negotiating international agreements from a position of greater bargaining power. In this way, foreign policy can become a practical instrument for national development rather than merely a means of maintaining diplomatic relationships.

Leveraging Nigeria's Foreign Policy for Sustainable National Development

Leveraging Nigeria's foreign policy for sustainable national development is about more than diplomacy in the traditional sense. It is about intentionally using Nigeria's relationships with other countries, international organizations, and global institutions to improve the everyday lives of its citizens. In simple terms, it means asking a very practical question: *How can Nigeria's presence in the world help create jobs, reduce poverty, improve education, strengthen industries, and build a more stable economy at home?*

For too long, foreign policy in many developing countries, including Nigeria, has been seen mainly as political representation, peacekeeping roles, or regional leadership. While these are important, they are not enough on their own. Today's global system is deeply interconnected, and

countries that succeed are those that connect their foreign relations directly to domestic development goals. This includes attracting investment, building trade relationships, accessing technology, and developing human skills. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) emphasized that Nigeria's foreign policy must be more closely tied to economic and technological development if the country is to fully benefit from its international engagements.

One of the most practical ways Nigeria can achieve this is through economic diplomacy. This means using embassies, consulates, and diplomatic visits not just for political discussions, but also as platforms for economic growth. Nigerian diplomats can actively promote the country as an attractive destination for investment by showcasing opportunities in agriculture, energy, manufacturing, fintech, and the creative industry. They can also help Nigerian entrepreneurs connect with foreign markets, investors, and business partners.

For example, a well-functioning embassy should be able to assist a Nigerian agribusiness company in finding buyers abroad or help a tech startup connect with venture capital investors in Europe or Asia. In addition, diplomatic negotiations can be used to secure trade agreements that protect and support local industries while opening new markets for Nigerian goods and services. This is especially important because Nigeria's heavy dependence on crude oil makes its economy vulnerable to global price fluctuations. Hassan and Adejumo (2023) noted that economic diplomacy provides a powerful bridge between Nigeria's external relations and its internal economic transformation.

Beyond investment and diplomacy, Nigeria's foreign policy can also be used to strengthen regional trade and economic integration. Nigeria is not only the most populous country in Africa but also one of the largest economies on the continent. Its geographical position gives it a natural advantage as a regional economic leader in West Africa. Through active participation in ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Nigeria can expand its economic reach far beyond its borders.

This means Nigerian farmers could sell more produce across African markets, manufacturers could export goods more easily, and service providers such as banks, telecom companies, and creative artists could reach millions of new customers. If properly managed, this kind of regional integration can create millions of jobs, reduce unemployment, and encourage industrial growth. However, for Nigeria to truly benefit, it must also address internal challenges such as poor infrastructure, high production costs, and limited competitiveness of local industries.

Another important dimension is technology and knowledge transfer, which is essential for long-term development. In

today's world, no country develops in isolation. Nigeria can use its foreign policy to build partnerships with technologically advanced countries and global institutions in order to access modern innovations and expertise. These partnerships can support key sectors such as renewable energy, healthcare, agriculture, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital finance. Taylor et al. (2025) reported that awareness and adoption of artificial intelligence tools improved the job performance of educators in Rivers State, which shows that the value of any technology partnership depends on how well the receiving institutions are prepared to use the tools they acquire.

For instance, collaboration with countries that have advanced agricultural systems could help Nigerian farmers improve productivity through better irrigation systems, improved seeds, and modern farming techniques. Similarly, partnerships in the energy sector could support Nigeria's transition toward cleaner and more reliable electricity systems. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) stressed that without strong technological capacity, international cooperation will not translate into meaningful or sustainable development.

Nigeria's foreign policy can also play a major role in human-capital development, which is one of the most important foundations of national progress. This can be achieved through scholarships, student exchange programmes, professional training opportunities, and international research collaborations. When Nigerian students and professionals study or train abroad, they gain new skills, ideas, and experiences that can be brought back home to improve institutions and industries. Longjohn and Amadi (2025) found that access to student loan facilities supported the academic performance of students in Rivers State, and this indicates that funding arrangements at home remain necessary if international training opportunities are to reach a wider number of young Nigerians.

Equally important is the Nigerian diaspora, which represents millions of skilled professionals living across the world. Instead of seeing brain drain as a loss, Nigeria can strategically engage its diaspora as a development asset. These individuals can invest in local businesses, mentor young professionals, transfer knowledge, and connect Nigeria to global networks. In many countries, diaspora communities play a major role in national development, and Nigeria has the potential to do the same on a much larger scale.

However, all these opportunities depend heavily on one critical factor: strong domestic institutions and good governance. Foreign policy can only be effective if it is supported by stability, accountability, and consistency at home. If corruption, insecurity, weak infrastructure, and policy inconsistency continue, even the best international agreements will fail to produce meaningful results.

Nigeria must therefore ensure that its foreign policy is closely aligned with its national development plans. Diplomatic actions should not be isolated from domestic priorities but should instead support them directly. Edet and Etim (2025) observed that weak institutions and leadership challenges often prevent Nigeria from fully benefiting from its international relationships.

Leveraging Nigeria's foreign policy for sustainable national development requires a shift in mindset. Foreign policy should no longer be seen as something distant or purely political. Instead, it should be treated as a practical tool for improving lives, creating opportunities, and building a stronger economy. When properly managed, Nigeria's global relationships can become powerful engines of growth turning international influence into real and visible development at home.

Challenges of Using Foreign Policy for Sustainable National Development

1. Policy inconsistency

In Nigeria, foreign policy often changes whenever a new government comes into power. This lack of continuity makes long-term planning difficult. Foreign partners and investors prefer stable and predictable policies, and when policies keep changing, it weakens trust and reduces Nigeria's international credibility. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) explained weak institutions and shifting policies limit Nigeria's ability to turn international relations into real development gains.

2. Weak governance and political instability

Although Nigeria is a democracy, problems such as corruption, poor accountability, insecurity, and weak institutions still affect governance. These issues make it difficult to implement international agreements effectively. Foreign policy can only succeed when domestic institutions are strong enough to turn diplomatic opportunities into real national benefits. Leadership decisions also need to focus on long-term national interest rather than short-term political gains.

3. Overdependence on crude oil

Nigeria's economy has relied heavily on oil for decades. This dependence makes the country vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. It also limits efforts to build a diversified foreign policy that promotes sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and technology. Saleh (2023) pointed out that Nigeria has not fully converted its international economic relations into strong industrial growth.

4. Insecurity and poor international image

Issues such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts create fear among foreign investors. At the same time, perceptions of corruption

and weak governance reduce Nigeria's global reputation. A country struggling with insecurity finds it harder to attract investment or build strong international partnerships.

Prospects for Using Foreign Policy for Sustainable National Development

1. Large market size and strategic position

Nigeria's large population, growing economy, and influence in West Africa give it a strong advantage. If properly managed, these strengths can attract foreign investment and increase trade, positioning Nigeria as a key economic hub in Africa.

2. Opportunities under AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) opens up a huge market for Nigerian goods and services. With effective diplomacy, Nigeria can expand non-oil exports, support local industries, and create jobs. This can also reduce dependence on oil, although improvements in infrastructure and production capacity are necessary.

3. Technology and innovation partnerships

Nigeria can benefit greatly from cooperation in areas like artificial intelligence, renewable energy, cybersecurity, digital finance, and agricultural technology. Such partnerships can help the country move from being a consumer of technology to becoming an innovator. Mbaegbu et al. (2024) stressed that technological development is key to improving Nigeria's global competitiveness.

4. Diaspora engagement

Nigerians abroad represent a valuable resource. They contribute skills, capital, and global networks that can support national development. By strengthening diaspora policies, Nigeria can encourage investment, knowledge sharing, and entrepreneurship beyond just remittances.

Measures to Strengthen Foreign Policy for Development

1. Develop a consistent long-term foreign policy

Nigeria needs a stable foreign policy framework that is not affected by changes in government. This policy should clearly support national goals such as job creation, industrial growth, security, and poverty reduction.

2. Strengthen economic diplomacy

Embassies and consulates should actively promote trade, attract investment, and support Nigerian businesses abroad. Diplomats should also be trained in

global trade, investment, and economic relations to make them more effective.

3. Improve governance and institutions

Fighting corruption, improving transparency, and strengthening the rule of law are essential. Strong institutions ensure that international agreements are properly implemented and increase Nigeria's credibility globally.

4. Diversify the economy and boost exports

Foreign policy should support the growth of non-oil sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, digital services, and entertainment. This will reduce dependence on oil and make the economy more stable.

5. Invest in human capital and regional cooperation

Nigeria should focus on education, technology, infrastructure, and skills development. It should also strengthen its role in ECOWAS and AfCFTA to expand regional influence. Cooperation between government, private sector, academia, and civil society will make foreign policy more effective and people-focused.

Conclusion

Foreign policy can play a powerful role in Nigeria's development if properly managed. However, challenges such as policy inconsistency, weak governance, insecurity, and oil dependence continue to limit its impact. Despite these issues, Nigeria has strong advantages, including its large population, strategic location, and regional influence. To fully benefit, the country must adopt a stable, development-focused foreign policy that prioritizes economic growth, technology, trade, and human capital development. Ultimately, foreign policy becomes meaningful only when it improves the lives of citizens through jobs, investment, security, and better living standards.

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