

## NIGERIA AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the role of Nigeria in socio-economic and political development of Africa. It began with a premise that post-independent Nigeria has always sees itself as an important player in African affairs. This was evident in the country's pursuit of Africa as its centerpiece in its foreign policy principles and objectives. In this regard, the country has over time considered Africa as its priority in its engagements both within the continent and at the global level. With the aid of qualitative instruments, the paper revealed that Nigeria played and has been playing a key role in conflict resolutions in countries such as Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Libya, Somalia, and Mali. The country is also at the forefront in championing African agenda at the United Nations, the formation of Organization of African Unity (OAU) and now African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) that has helped in regional integration and economic development of the continent. Nigeria is a strategic player in the restoration of democratic governance in countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia and recently in the Gambia. These and many more point to the place of Nigeria in strengthening Africa's economic and political development.*

**Keywords:** *Nigeria's foreign policy, regional development, integration, leadership, peace keeping and peace building, democratization*

### 1.0 Introduction

It is no longer a subject of debate that Africa in the last six decades has been faced with development challenges. Some of these challenges were the product of struggle for decolonization, formation of post independent states, the emergence of military /authoritarian regimes, the crisis of democracy and of course, in recent times the emergence of domestic conflicts and insurgencies. These undesirable and devastating crises have done more harm than good and have raised a

number of questions with regards to the capacity of African continent to deal with its own problems. It is unfortunate that the continent is still in state of disrepair in comparison with significant progress concurrently been made in other continents. Considering the magnitude of the development crisis in Africa, some scholars have levelled the continent as a dark continent and that the current decade could best be described as a lost decade for Africa. Efforts

have also been intensified to provide solutions to the multi-dimensional nature of African development crisis. Regrettably, the continent has defied all models that could be used to explain or overcome development predicaments of the region. Perhaps, this explains why Ogundiya, (2010:25) contends that Africa has remained “a violent-ridden continent in the psycho-political map of the world for a number of decades.” He further argues that poverty, diseases, civil disturbances, revolt, insurgency, guerilla warfare, domestic rebellion and in recent time terrorism are the core features that characterized African development challenges.

Given the nature of the African development crisis, series of efforts are still been made at national, regional and global levels to deal with the problems. Internally, Nigeria is one of those countries that has been active in dealing with African development challenges. The country since independence has packaged different foreign policy principles, models and objectives in order to bring about desired regional development on the continent. Series of initiatives and regional integration efforts were facilitated by the Nigeria government to bring an end to development crisis rocking the continent. In fact, the country at continental and global levels used its economic potentials to promote African unity and development. Against this background this study seeks to examine the role of Nigeria in socio-economic and political development of Africa. The study investigates how Nigeria’s participation at regional and sub-regional levels (AU and ECOWAS) contribute to African development. It also highlights the major challenges that Nigeria encountered in its effort towards African development. The essence of this study is to contribute to the growing debate on whether or not Nigeria’s effort towards African development is worth sustaining. Scholars and statesmen alike have consistently argued that

Nigeria should have a rethink over its efforts towards African development due to lack of reciprocity from other African countries. In achieving this objective, the paper is divided into seven sections beginning with this introduction. The second section presents the theoretical framework, the third section examines the role of Nigeria in the formation of regional and sub-regional organizations, fourth discuss Nigeria’s role in ensuring security and stability of Africa, the fifth investigates the role of Nigeria in the political development of Africa, the sixth discuss Nigeria’s role in economic development and the last section concludes the paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Regional development is increasingly becoming an important subject in development discourse. The rising increase of regional organizations and cooperation for the development of independent countries is a clear indication of the importance of regional integration strategy. Regional integration is adopted by countries to establish regional institutions for actualization of their respective domestic and foreign policy objectives. Most of these policy objectives are geared towards national and regional development. This study adopts regional integration theory to examine the role Nigeria played towards African development. The theory was developed by scholars such as Immanuel Kant, Haas, Lindberg and Emery Reves among others. It is important to note that regional integration is a multi-dimensional approach with separate perspectives that try to explain how economic, political and security interest of nations brings them together under regional and/or global umbrella such as the U.N, EU, AU, ECOWAS for the purposes of achieving national and regional development.

Regional integration thus is a mechanism that countries use to guard themselves against external shocks and deploy it as a mechanism

to deal with domestic problems particularly those with spill-over effect such as insurgencies or migration problems. But common to all integration perspectives is that development challenges are becoming regional or global in nature, and that individual countries are becoming less effective in dealing with the challenges and are gradually been replaced by regional initiatives such as the joint military operation between Nigeria, Chad, Benin and Niger to deal with the Boko Haram insurgency, NATO military operation in the middle east and ECOWAS efforts in dealing with political conflicts in West African sub-region. Impliedly, regional integration allows countries to delegate their political sovereignty to international or regional institutions for their collective development (Kant, 1917). Regional integration theory also maintained that development issues are multidimensional and interrelated (economy, politics and security) and thus are best actualize through regional cooperation. In fact, countries wishing to actualize their domestic and foreign policy objectives are increasingly using regional or international organizations as instruments for proper and better regional, sub-regional and global development.

Against the foregoing, this study sets out to examine the role of Nigeria in the development of Africa. The underlying question is why and in what ways has Nigeria participated in the development of Africa as a continent. What is the benefits of doing so to Nigeria in the continent and the world at large? These questions could be investigated within the context of Nigeria's participation in global and regional institutions and initiatives such as the U.N. African Union (AU), ECOWAS and New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

### **Nigeria and the formation of Regional and Sub-regional Organizations in Africa**

Nigeria is an important player and a major actor in African affairs. This was evident in the country's believed in the spirit of solidarity and collective effort in dealing with African problems. As argued by Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016) that one would not escape the influence of Nigeria in any attempt to discuss African development. Following political independence, Nigeria has been active in the struggle for the political independence of other African nations. This was aptly stated in a speech by the first Nigeria's Prime Minister:

We African states should come together to assist the Congolese to solve their problems. I must say that I do not rule out the possibility of eventual union. But being human, we are naturally concerned first, with what affect our immediate neighborhood (Balewa, 1960).

It is unequivocal from the above citation that Nigeria since independence has considered African unity and of course stability as its priority. In fact, the country's foreign policy focused principally on Africa and it was clearly demonstrated by the efforts of the country in the formation of the Organization of Africa Union (OAU) now African Union (AU) in 1963. Nigeria played a decisive role in the Monrovia Group, and championed the moderates' position on the burning issues in Africa which later led to OAU (Ibeanu, 2010). According to Olawoore and Egbinola, (2003) Nigeria was one of the architects of the charter of the Organization of Africa Unity now AU. They stated that late Dr. Teslim Elias drew up the Charter that contained about 90 percent of all the provisions of the moderate Monrovia group of which Nigeria was a leading member. According to Ibeanu (2010:24), "Nigeria helped to create the context for bargaining and compromise that created the OAU in 1963". The Organization of African Union

(OAU) aimed at promoting unity and solidarity among African states, coordinating political, economic, cultural, medical, and scientific as well as defense policies, defending the independence and territorial integrity of member states; and eliminating colonialism from Africa (Olawoore and Egbinola, 2003). This organization to a reasonable extent has been engaged in the propagation of Africa togetherness and development.

Furthermore, due to the longstanding missing gaps in the OAU regarding its Charter and implementation; the global trend and changes in the power configuration occasioned by the disintegration of USSR in 1989; a velvet revolution in Europe and the formation of European Union (EU), the desire for the transformation of the union became necessary. To this end, the formation of African Union in Sirte (Libya) in 1999 and, the adoption of the Constitutive Act in Durban in July 2002 were important milestones for the creation of political unity and African economic community (Bujira, 2002). Central to AU principles are: respect for democratic principles, human right and good governance, promotion of social justice and gender equality. In this exercise, Nigeria's role has been very central. Due to the series of resolutions between 1968 and 1980 by the OAU in which Nigeria strongly participated, it could be argued that there is a profound connection between economic integration and the attainment of the organization's goals (Parker and Rukare, 2002:365 cited in Ibeanu; 2010:29). This signifies the inevitability of economic development content to the African Union (AU) as well as the central role Nigeria played in its emergence. Ibeanu further argued that:

Although the pursuit of economic development has been at the heart of Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomacy since independence in 1960, it was in the 1980s that it became the central, if not

the singular focus of its foreign policy. Its role in the transformation of the OAU into the AU was set within this context (Ibeanu; 2010:29).

Also, the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) in 1985 is another remarkable framework adopted by Nigeria to entrench development of the continent. The Plan provided a framework and strategies for implementing development programmes. According to Bujira, (2002) the LPA gave primacy to the development of agriculture, industrialization, mining industries, human resources, and science and technology. Nigeria more than any other country across the continent provided both financial and political support towards the implementation of the LPA which if properly implemented would have engendered development of the continent.

At sub-regional level, the contributions of Nigeria to the establishment, funding as well as the realization of objectives of Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) are enormous. In pursuance of its cardinal foreign policy objectives of regional unity, integration and development, Nigeria championed the formation of ECOWAS on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1975 in Lagos. Historically, Balewa government spearheaded the formation of Economic Community in West Africa in 1964. Nigeria actively participated in the series of conferences sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) between 1966 and 1968 aimed at economic cooperation in Africa (Olawoore and Egbinola, 2003). In what could be described as 'realistic' approach towards the formation of ECOWAS, Nigeria and Togo signed a treaty in 1972 establishing what President Eyadema of Togo called "embryo of West Africa Economic Community". Also, the country committed itself to projects that were sponsored jointly by more than one state and signed bilateral trade pact with many West African states.

These, among other unofficial tactics according to Olawoore and Egbinola, (2003) were responsible for closer economic cooperation among West African states that led to the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. In fact, to understand the socio-economic and political context within which ECOWAS was formed and Nigeria's role in its formation is to acknowledge and appreciate the strategic position of Nigeria in West Africa. The country has about 52.48 percent of the population of the sub-region and ample material endowments at its disposal. Indeed, the ECOWAS report of 2008 dispassionately observed that:

A careful examination of the economies and population of the ECOWAS member states shows that ECOWAS is a good model of regional economic integration in which the strong and weak co-exist to foster socio-economic development on a large scale. Nigeria is the dominant economy in the region accounting for 62% of the regional GDP in 2007. Given the size of the Nigerian economy in relation to its neighbours, it is expected that Nigeria will continue to play its leadership role within the framework of solidarity, in fostering sustainable regional economic development (ECOWAS Commission, 2009: 24 cited in Bobboyi, 2010: 127).

Perhaps, the dramatic rise in oil prices in the first half of the 1970s in which Nigeria was a major beneficiary coupled with its confident outlook, coming out of the civil war experience, were some of the factors that made Nigeria had the financial wherewithal to pursue the realization of its foreign policy particularly, the promotion of ECOWAS integration and development programmes. Indeed, it is significant to note that Nigeria, under the leadership of President Obasanjo facilitated the implementation of many abandoned protocols such as the creation of a

'borderless ECOWAS' (Bobboyi, 2010). The objectives behind this include: granting ECOWAS citizens the maximum ninety day period of stay at entry points and abolishing the resident permit requirements for each other's citizens. Equally too, due to the strategic interest of Nigeria in the formation of ECOWAS, coupled with the size of its economy, it became the principal source of funds for ECOWAS activities both before and after the introduction of the community levy. Bobboyi argued that:

Based on article 2 of the protocol relating to the contributions by member states to the budget of the Economic Community of West African States, Nigeria's assessed contribution amounted to approximately 35 percent of the community budget. After Nigeria strongly objected, it was granted a modest reduction. It was on account of this substantial financial contribution that Nigeria was able to justify the relocation of ECOWAS headquarter from Togo to Lagos (Bobboyi, 2010:139).

In view of the foregoing, it could be argued that Nigeria through regional and sub-regional organizations such as AU and ECOWAS has been able to deploy its economic resources to improve the life of others across the continent. Aside the Nigeria's role at regional and sub-regional levels, the country was at the forefront in the struggle for the reform of the United Nations which later led to the appointment of Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali and Kofi Annan as the U.N Secretary General respectively. It has also been active in the quest for African membership in the Security Council and other influential organs of the United Nations. This effort transformed Africa into a powerful force to reckon with in global politics and at the same time restore African respect and dignity. It is therefore correct to argue that Nigeria's role in global, regional and

sub-regional political and economic organizations has helped to strengthened solidarity, enhance good neighbourliness, brought unity and engendered security, progress and development of Africa.

### **Nigeria and African Security and Stability**

Meaningful development could not be achieved where security and stability are absent. This suggests that security which is the basis for peace is central to development. To this end, Nigeria has remained resolute in its efforts towards ensuring security, peace and stability in Africa. Over the years, the country under the platforms of UN, AU and ECOWAS has been involved and supportive in series of security initiatives to resolving conflicts and guard against its spill-over effects across the region. In this regard, the country's military has been involved in peace keeping, peace building, peace enforcement, and peace-support operations across the continent (Jega, 2010:231). In view of the foregoing, Nigeria participated in the United Nations Peace Keeping mission in Congo and ever since has been participating in conflict resolution across the continent of Africa and beyond. This is understandable since its troops were deployed to Congo during the political crisis in 1960. This suggests that Nigeria's peacekeeping and peacemaking role in Africa has a long history. According to Okolie, (2010) Nigeria has deployed peacekeepers to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Lebanon, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, in achieving this end, Nigeria adopted different mechanisms to support ECOWAS, the OAU (now AU), the Non Aligned Movement and other organizations in bringing peace to the region and across the world. In fact, it was in defense of regional security and safety that Nigeria broke-up diplomatic relations with France in 1961 over its nuclear test in the Sahara desert. In addition, Nigeria participated in peacekeeping operation in Chad in 1979

with approximately 800 soldiers. The intervention was motivated by the desire to prevent the influx of refugees into the country through its Northeast border with Chad (Okolie, 2010). The operation cost Nigeria about \$82m (Kuna, 2000).

Furthermore, Nigeria's initial peacekeeping intervention in Chad was largely unilateral. However, its interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone (2005) through the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) were multilateral because Nigeria collaborated with other member states of ECOWAS and formed a collective response to the security and humanitarian challenges. As a result Nigeria played a dominant role in the mediation of the crises between Liberia and Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Mali and Togo and Ghana. In fact, as at 2009 Nigeria has more than 6,500 peace keeping force outside its borders in places such as Bosnia, Congo, Chad, Liberia, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda and other countries within and outside the continent (Jarus, 2009). Essentially, the biggest effort for ensuring peace and stability in the continent could be seen when Nigeria handed over Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. Thus:

The peaceful implementation of the ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Bakassi case between Nigeria and Cameroon. The management of the exercise, so far through the mixed commission between both countries represents a model for the management of border disputes not only in African countries but in the world at large (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007).

From the foregoing, it could be inferred that Nigeria peacekeeping and peace building role in Africa have made it a force to reckon with by the dominant powers and international organizations. In addition, by December 2000, Nigeria had 3404 troops serving under the

United Nations (UN), making it the second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping mission in the world after Bangladesh with a total contribution of 6040 (Kuna, 2006). Kuna further argued that over 100,000 Nigerian troops have served in UN peacekeeping missions around the world since its first participation in 1960 and four of these missions have been commanded by Nigerian senior military officers (Congo, Angola and Beirut). Recently, the country has also spearhead the formation of joint military cooperation with Chad, Benin and Niger republic to fight and bring an end to Boko Haram insurgency. Empirical evidence suggest that since the establishment of this joint military cooperation, there has been gradual decline of Boko Haram attacks, bombardment and kidnappings not only in Nigeria but in other affected neighboring countries.

#### **Nigeria and Political Development of Africa**

The crisis of governance and democratization were among the major challenges that affected the quality and the speed for Africa's development. Evidently, there is no African country that has not been engulfed with one form of governance crisis or another leading to some cases of political conflicts with grave consequences. Nigeria as a major actor in African governance has been supporting governance reforms and democratization process on the continent. Specifically, the country's role in African democratization project could not be underestimated given the enormous resources the country has expended in this regard. Although, some argued that Nigeria itself is suffering from democratic reversal yet it plays a significant role in ensuring democratic therapy in Africa. From independence through the 1990s, Nigeria played remarkable role in the liberation struggle of South Africa against Apartheid regimes characterized by racial discrimination and malicious marginalization

of the majority of the citizens. To overcome racial discrimination, Nigeria provided huge financial support and spearheaded a radical movement among the frontline states to harmonize responses to apartheid South Africa and liberation struggle in the country. According to Ibeanu (2010:28), Nigeria's membership in the frontline states was not in recognition of its longstanding role in African liberation but a reflection of growing confidence in its external relations with other countries of Africa and beyond. It is indeed remarkable to note that other international actors outside Africa relate and consider Nigeria as an important pillar towards the liberation of South Africa.

With the demise of apartheid rule and racial discrimination in Africa, Nigeria focused its attention to democratization of the continent. The country played an appreciable role in the restoration of democracy in Togo, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Liberia and Equatorial Guinea. In 2005 Togo experienced serious political crisis following the death of seating President, Gnassingbe Eyadema. With concerted pressure, Kangaroo election was conducted which produced Faure as the winner of the election. The declaration led to a new crisis which was only resolved through power-sharing negotiations between Faure and the opposition group by Nigeria and ECOWAS (Osaghae, 2010:53). From the forgoing roles therefore, it is not an overstatement that the intervention of Nigeria in arresting these challenges suggests that Nigeria is a promoter and defender of peaceful co-existence, democracy, free and fair elections and conflict resolution. Similarly, Nigeria was at the forefront in resolving political crises in Guinea Bissau, Conakry, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Burundi, Sao Tome and Principe and Sudan, among others. In fact, it has been largely responsible for easing tension in the potentially dangerous land re-allocation and re-distribution crisis in Zimbabwe. The

crisis in the country was identified as a potential flashpoint for conflict, which would have engulfed most of Southern Africa and its ramifications reaching far beyond the African continent. Also, worthy to mention was the 15 years political crisis in Liberia that was brought to an end through Nigeria's adroit diplomacy. In fact, the initial military battalions sent by Nigeria to restore normalcy in Liberia paved the way for the deployment of ECOWAS Mission in the country. Nigeria ensured the permanent resolution of the crisis by offering asylum to Mr. Charles Taylor. His departure from Liberia facilitated the implementation of the Accra Agreement. Consequently, Liberia was able to conduct Presidential election in 2005 that ushered-in Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to be the first lady President of Liberia. Recently too, Nigeria was able to provide financial and military support under the ECOWAS which led to the resolution of potential political conflict in Gambia.

### **Nigeria's Role in Economic Development of Africa**

In line with its foreign policy objectives, Nigeria is not only committed to political development of Africa but also plays central role in socio-economic recovery of the continent through various bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The country has provided monetary and technical assistance to several African states, in most cases through African Development Bank (ADB). Indeed, it has been rightly observed that "through bilateral and multilateral relations, Nigeria has demonstrated the capacity for being its 'brother's keeper', contributing in various ways to economic development in many African nations" (Jega, 2010:232).

Echoing this above assertion, Mailafia (2010) contends that since Nigeria attained political independence, it has been a major contributor to multilateral institutions. Within the African context, the country has been a

major contributor and/or dominant shareholder of such institutions as the African Development Bank, Group Shelter Afrigue, Afrexim Bank and the ECOWAS Fund for compensation and development, which was transformed into the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. It must be added that the strength of this scheme has been people-oriented and people-centered assistance programmes that fill crucially important gaps in the human capital needs of its partner countries. Similarly, Nigeria has been working towards harnessing and managing common water resources for the agricultural and socio-economic development of member states. This is aimed at expanding the scope of sub-regional economic integration. According to Jega, (2010), through its participation in the African Development Bank (ADB), Nigeria has spread its petrodollars and extended financial assistance to needy African countries to finance their development programmes.

Nigeria has also strives to facilitate African development through the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). It is a framework that seeks to promote and maintain peace and stability in the African continent through collective effort in dealing with socio-economic and political challenges across the continent. Indeed, it is an essential precondition for the promotion of rapid economic development of the continent. NEPAD is an expression of group ideology and an action plan spearheaded by the Obasanjo's Administration in 2001. It is a tool and a home grown African response to the challenges of poverty, disease, human deprivation and marginalization of the continent in a globalized world (FGN, 2007). Nigeria as one of the leading countries in the promotion of NEPAD initiative played a considerable role in coming up with a comprehensive NEPAD development plan, the country has also advocated for Africa Peer Review Mechanism

(APRM) which was later adopted as an instrument for measuring and raising the quality of governance across the continent. APRM is employed to assess governments and leadership level of compliance and adherence with the principles of rule of law and accountability in governance, commitment to fighting corruption, and overall consolidation of democracy.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Nigerian Trust Fund (NTF) in 1976 by Nigerian government in collaboration with African Development Bank Group (ADBG) was a demonstration of its leadership role in the economic development of the continent. The collaboration was designed to assist development effort of the ADBG's and low-income regional member countries whose economic and social conditions require financial assistance. In the same vein, the Nigeria Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF) was established in 2004 to complement the resources of the NTF (Mailafia, 2010). According to Mailafia, the objectives of NTCF are to pool the human capital of recipient countries from the Africa Diaspora to assist in the rebuilding of war-turned countries and provide technical assistance grants for the identification and preparation of bankable projects. The outcome of the NTF has been, at best, a mixed blessing. In fact, about 80 percent of the funding of NTCF comes from Nigeria while the remaining 20 percent comes from other African regional member countries (Mailafia, 2010).

Similarly, to justify Nigeria's position in Africa regarding bilateral and multilateral assistance is to appreciate the assertion of the former O.A.U. Secretary General, Salim Ahmed Salim that, *"without Nigeria's help at crucial turning points, the secretariat in Addis Abba would have been grounded to a halt"* (Mailafi, 2010:195). He also affirmed that in most African regional institutions such as (AU and ECOWAS) in which Nigeria has been involved,

it contributed over 40 percent to the operational costs of these institutions. In fact, there was a period when Nigeria virtually shouldered the responsibilities of the entire operational budget of the OAU/African Union at the time when most member countries were not forthcoming. By implication, Nigeria has played a significant role in financing political and economic development of the continent.

## Conclusion

This paper interrogated Nigeria's role in socio-economic and political development of Africa. The study indicated that Nigeria has to a certain extent contributed towards promoting peace and security, decolonization and liberation struggles, regional integration and the consolidation of democracy in Africa. This suggests that Nigeria's foreign policy, particularly regarding Africa, has been active and indeed consistent. That is to say, whatever indices are used to define actors' contributions to peace, democratization and development in the international politics, Nigeria is worthy of being acknowledged. Similarly, it can be concluded that regional development in Africa require active players like Nigeria in order to positively address economic, political and security challenges confronting the continent. However, there are constraining factors that affected the role of Nigeria in regional development of Africa. These factors are both internal and external and include the overbearing influence of Africa's former colonial masters on their colonies, especially France, negative attitudes of some African countries towards Nigeria, the rising domestic conflicts of *Boko Haram*, separatist movements such as IPOB in the South East, militant groups in the Niger Delta and of course the Nigeria's crisis of governance among others. These are some of the diversionary factors that affected the effectiveness of Nigeria towards regional

development in Africa. To overcome the overbearing influence of these challenges and strengthened Nigeria's effort towards regional development, efforts have to be intensified to strengthen democratic project in the country, institutionalize good governance, and revive the domestic economy as well as a holistic

review of Nigeria's foreign policy principles. This will no doubt raise Nigeria's credentials at regional and international levels and in a way contribute meaningfully towards African development. It is obvious that Nigeria is and would continue to be an important actor in global and African development efforts.

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