# Transnational migration in Africa: Experiences of Nigerian migrants in South Africa

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## Abstract

*Globally, migration plays a significant role in the transformation of human society. Over the last two decades of the twentieth century, as well as the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has been a remarkable renaissance among scholars' and policymakers' interest regarding the implications of migration and development in origin or "here" societies. Several scholars have argued that since transnational migration has contributed positively in no small measure to the development of the African continent, it has, however, affected the relationship between the host and origin countries, especially with the rising cases of xenophobic attacks in Africa. Thus, this research seeks to interrogate the impact of transnational out-migration of Nigerian citizens in South African. The historical analytical and empirical method is adopted in this research. Documentary and record data collection is based on semi-structured interviews, popular culture, newspaper commentaries and opinions, articles, books, and other relevant secondary literature gathered through a multidisciplinary approach. Findings from the study and recommendations are expected to contribute to the global knowledge on migratory historiography, particularly its impact on transnational citizens' out-migration to the origin and home countries.*

**Keywords:** Citizenship, transnational migration, Nigeria, South Africa

## Introduction
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**Early Beginnings of Bilateral Relations Between Nigeria and South Africa.**

To understand the migration trend between Nigeria and South Africa, it is opposite to give a historical background of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Nigeria and South Africa bilateral relations date back to 1960, shortly after Nigeria gained independence from the British colonialists. However, the two countries only formally established diplomatic relations in February 1994, two months before Nelson Mandela was sworn in as the first democratically elected President of South Africa.

In 1960, 69 anti-apartheid agitators were shot dead by South African police in Sharpeville, leading to international outrage and setting the regime in Pretoria on the road to international isolation and increasingly ruthless and oppressive rule[1]. This event leads to the voluntary withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth of nations. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria played a significant role in the emancipation of black South African citizens from the yoke of the apartheid regime introduced by white minorities. The country's leaders also played a fundamental role in the creation of the UN Special Committee

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[1]Dawn Nagar and Mark Paterson. "The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations". Centre for Conflict Resolution (2012). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05152.6 (Accessed: 20th February 2020).

Against Apartheid in 1963, and, for decades, chaired the committee which oversaw the enactment of international sanctions against the apartheid regime, including sports and cultural embargoes; the provision of support to the victims of apartheid; and the campaign to publicise apartheid's inhumanity and seek the release of political prisoners[2]. Shortly after the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa, many black South Africans were displaced, creating many refugees and forced migratory crises.It was against this background that the Nigerian High Commission in Botswana issued hundreds of Nigerian passports to South Africans who had fled the country; and Nigerian civil servants contributed portions of their salaries to the South African Relief Fund, which supported the antiapartheid movement and was popularly known as the "Mandela Tax".[3] In addition, hundreds of South Africans studied in Nigeria - many of whom went on to occupy key positions in government, the private sector, and academia in post-apartheid South Africa.[4]

The relationship between the two countries continued to blossom. However, the turn of the twenty-first century witnessed massive immigration of Nigerian citizens into South Africa. This was a result of the political instabilities and economic challenges confronting the Nigerian government. It should also be noted that during this period, because of political stability and economic boom in South Africa, most African citizens, especially Nigerians, saw the country as the haven greener pasture with the continent.  Thus, most Nigerian migrants in South Africa went there mainly for greener pasture, educational pursuits, business opportunities, and asylum-seeking. And within a space of a decade, so many Nigerians had emigrated to South Africa.

## Reasons for Nigerian migrants moving to South Africa

*Wars and asylum*

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[2] Ibid

[3]Olayiwola Abegunrin, "Nigeria and the Struggle for the Liberation of South Africa", in *Africa in Global Politics in the Twenty-First Century:* A *Pan-African Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See Also, Dawn Nagar and Mark Paterson. "The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations"(2012).

[4]Dawn Nagar and Mark Paterson. "The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations".

Security issues have prompted many migrants to leave their homeland for safety somewhere else. Illegal migration might be motivated by the craving to escape civil war, restraint, massacre, and religious abuse, among others in the nation of origin for instance, Rohingya in Myanmar, 1994 Rwanda genocide, and very importantly, the uprising in Northeast Nigeria by the terrorist group Boko Haram have displaced so many people from their original abode. Different causes incorporate the absence of employment, educational chances, absence of social security nets, poor administration, corruption, lack of social equity, value, and airplay, among others. Citizens of Nigeria had hadto move to South Africa; as a result, to seek asylum as a result of the terrorist-related conflict.[5]

*Poor Economy and Poverty*

While financial models do take a gander at relative wealth and income among home and destination nations, they do not infer that measures of the home country constantly impoverish unlawful immigrants. The least fortunate classes in a developing nation may not have the assets needed to mount an endeavor to cross illegally or the connections with companions or family as of now in the destination nation. Nigeria is the sixth biggest oil producer globally; it is the eighth biggest exporter and has the tenth most significant demonstrated reserves. Despite the nation's immense oil riches, most Nigerians are poor, with 71% of the populace living in poor conditions. This condition has made most Nigerians migrate to other places, which include South Africa.[6]

*Overpopulation*

A certain level of the human populace can cause problems, for example, contamination, water conflict, and poverty. Virginia

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[5] Tamunopubo Big-Alabo."Migration and Nigeria - South Africa Relations". *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* |Volume III, Issue VIII, August 2019|ISSN 2454-6186
[6] Ibid. See also, L. Chouliaraki ."Between Pity and Irony - Paradigms of Refugee Representation in Humanitarian Discourse," in *Migrations and the Media*, ed. Moore, K., Gross, B., and Thread gold, T. (New York: Peter Lang. Cisneros, J. D. D.2008). M. Downey, "Syria Crisis: A Brush with the Brutal World of Child Refugees," BBC News Online, Retrieved 29th June 2019 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-32193943.

Abernethy notes that migration is a road that gives a "relief valve" to overpopulation that prevents a population from addressing the outcomes of its overpopulation and exports this overpopulation to another area or nation. The population growth rate of Nigeria is 2.61%, one in each five Africans is a Nigerian, and it contributes 2.64% of the total populace (total populace). In light of the above records, one might want to state that Nigeria is overpopulated. It is likely, bit by bit, moving toward overpopulation as a reason for migration, which has made most of them move to South Africa.[7]

**Impact of Transnational Migration between Nigeria and South Africa**

Migration has been part of the historical developments and bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa[8]. And, by the turn of the 20th century, two significant factors shaped the migration policy between the two countries. In South Africa, the main channel for receiving migrants was through the legal means of welcoming people who met the regulations of the apartheid regime. In contrast, the other standards were utilized to accelerate a free flow of cheap labour temporarily.[9]The post-apartheid period changed this trend. Indeed, there arose a class between tussle for jobs between native-born South Africans and migrants from outside the countries, especially migrants of African origin.

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[7]L. Chouliaraki ."Between Pity and Irony - Paradigms of Refugee Representation in Humanitarian Discourse,"

[8]Sapphire K. Peterside, JideIbietan, and Oluwatimilehin Deinde-Adedeji, "Xenophobia and Migrants' Irritants in Nigeria-South Africa Relations: A Discourse," *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 8(4), Oct.-Dec. (2020):48.

[9]OECD/ILO. *How Immigrants Contribute to South Africa's Economy,*(Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018). http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264085398-en. (accessed May 2, 2021)See also, A. P. Adebisi. "Xenophobia: Healing a Festering Sore InNigerian-South African Relations*."Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy,*5, (2017): 83-92*.* L.Arango. "Explaining Migration: A Critical Review,"*International Social Science Journal*52(2000):165*.*Oliver Bakewell. "In search of the Diasporas Within Africa,"*African diaspora*, 1, (2008): 5-27

The first part of this research demonstrates the contribution of immigrant workers, especially Nigerians, to South Africa's economy and focuses on three dimensions of this contribution: labour markets, economic growth, public finance, and above all, the fundamental issue of xenophobia. It also examines the economic contributions of the South African government towards the development of the Nigerian economy.

**Labour market impact on native-born workers**

Nigerian immigrants are well-integrated into the labour market in terms of employment and unemployment rates, and in general, do not seem to displace native-born workers. Immigrant workers are more likely to be employed than native-born South Africans, which is consistent with the country's shallow employment rate. Immigration seems to be, at least in part, demand-driven, and immigrant workers are frequently found in occupations with high growth rates[10]. Levels of education are more polarised at the lower and higher ends of the educational spectrum for immigrant workers than for native-born South Africans, and the high share of immigrant workers with tertiary education seemed to be in line with the growth of high skill jobs. However, this advantage has become less pronounced over time, as the education and skill levels of the native-born population have increased. The labour market impact analysis demonstrates no significant effects of the presence of immigrant workers on native-born employment at the national level. However, at the sub-national level, the presence of immigrant workers has both negative effects (lower employment rates) and positive effects (higher incomes) for the native-born population. In addition, the presence of new immigrants, who have been in South Africa for less than ten years, appears to increase both the employment rate and the incomes of South African-born workers.

**Economic growth**

The impact of immigration on the gross domestic product (GDP)

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[10] Ibid. See;O. Agbu, E. Okereke, S. Wapmuk, and B. Adeniyi. "The Foreign Policy Environment in Nigeria and Implications for Nigeria-South Africa Relations: Baseline Study". (SAFPI Policy Brief 54) (Johannesburg: South Africa Institute of International Affairs). http://www.safpi.org/sites/default/files/publications/SAFPI_Policy_Brief_54.pdf. (Accessed July 21, 2021)

per capita is positive, and the estimates from an econometric model show that immigrant workers may raise the South African income per capita by up to 5%. This outcome is not shocking given the limited or even positive impact of immigration on native-born employment rates and the relatively high employment rate of immigrant workers. This could be due to the higher average educational attainment of foreign-born workers, the higher share of foreign-born individuals in the working-age population as well as the possible increase in total factor productivity through efficiency gains as a result of, for example, increased specialisation of the labour force[11].

**Public finance**

Immigrants also have a positive net impact on the government's fiscal balance. This is because they tend to pay more in taxes, especially in income and value-added taxes. In 2011, the per-capita net fiscal contribution of immigrants ranged between 17% under the average cost scenario and 27% under the marginal cost scenario. Native-born individuals, on the other hand, contributed -8% under both scenarios.

Nigeria, over the years, has created a conducive market space for South African investments and multinational corporations. Available records indicate that in 2001, the Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN), a South African network provider entered the Nigerian market. In the same vein, 45 other South African companies followed, including Standard Bank (which trades as Stanbic in Nigeria); Rand Merchant Bank, which is involved in equity funding deals; and retirement fund administrator Alexander Forbes[12]. MTN spent $340 million launching its mobile telephone network in Nigeria in August 2001 and later invested over $1.4 billion within a space of ten years- 2001 to 2010. It is

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[11]OECD/ILO, How Immigrants Contribute to South Africa's Economy, OECD Publishing, Paris. (2018).
http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264085398-en (acccessed July 21, 2021). See also;I. Moses, "The Impact of Xenophobic Attacks on Nigeria-South Africa Relations". *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, 4(6), (2018): 93-110.
Ibid
[12]Dawn Nagar and Mark Paterson. "The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations". Centre for Conflict Resolution (2012).

also significant to mention that between 2001 and 2003, MTN was making more profit in Nigeria than in South Africa. Also, between 2003 and 2004, MTN Nigeria's post-tax profit stood at 2.36 billion Rand, which surpassed MTN South Africa's profit of 2.24 billion Rand.[13] Alexander Forbes, in 2008, bought a 40 percent stake in Nigeria's pension sector, comprising a probable eight million state employees. The records also show that South Africa's Protea group was running four (4) hotels in Lagos by the end of the same year, with another eight (8) under construction.[14] Fast-food chains Chicken Licken and Debonairs Pizza established franchises in Nigeria[15]. SABMiller is operating a brewery and building another[16].

South African media house Johncom opened Nu Metro cinemas and multimedia stores in Abuja and Lagos, as well as DVD and CD manufacturing plants. Satellite television provider, Multichoice, boasted 700,000 Nigerian customers in 2012 and has spent $100 million on developing local content. Retailer, Shoprite Checkers, opened an outlet in Lagos in 2005 that became profitable within a year.[17]

**Xenophobia on Nigerian/South African Relations**

The impact of xenophobia on the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa can be classified into diplomatic, political, socio-cultural, and psychological and discussed below. Since the violence against foreigners in 2008, the two countries have been continuously working to establish diplomatic relations. Nigeria and South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2013 to strengthen diplomatic relations and end xenophobia

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[13] Ibid

[14] Nomfundo Ngwenya, "Giants of Africa Limp Along - South Africa and Nigeria", *The Sunday Independent,* 10 October
(2010).http://www.saiia.org.za/sa-foreign-policy-african-drivers-opinion/giants-of-africa-limp-along-south-africa-and-nigeria.html).(accessed 20 January 2020).

[15] Ibid. See also, Dawn Nagar and Mark Paterson. "The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations". Centre for Conflict Resolution (2012).

[16] Ibid

[17] Nomfundo Ngwenya, "Giants of Africa Limp Along - South Africa and Nigeria".

in the future[18]. Unfortunately, these xenophobic attacks on Africans continue, and innocent lives have been taken. In 2015, there was a massive xenophobic attack against Africans, especially Nigerians. This incident even attracted foreign condemnation from bodies outside the continent, particularly the UN Security Council which also condemned the 2015 attack. After a series of condemnations and criticisms of these actions, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi followed suit[19]. In September 2019, when xenophobia reappeared, some media reported that the South African government and police supported locals in targeting non-nationals (especially Nigerians), and diplomatic interaction between the two countries was cut off again[20]. This situation led Nigeria to withdraw its ambassador to South Africa that same year[21]. There are also calls for the Nigerian government to sanction South Africa politically and economically. In 2019, the head of the All Progressive Congress (APC), one of Nigeria's main political parties, recommended that the federal government nationalize all South African investments in the country[22]. In addition to the diplomatic dispute, there is also a legal aspect to the problem, as Nigeria is considering filing a lawsuit against the people and

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[18]A. Babalola, "Xenophobia Attacks of Nigerians in South Africa," *Vanguard News*. 2017. (accessed July 15, 2021) from https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/03/xenophobia-attacks-nigerians-southafrica/

[19] C. Claassen, *What Explains South African Xenophobia? A Test of Eight Theories*. (Glasgow: School of Social and Political Sciences University of Glasgow, 2015). http://www.chrisclaassen.com/Xenophobia_SA.pdf (Accessed July 2, 2021).

[20]Sapphire K. Peterside, JideIbietan, and Oluwatimilehin Deinde-Adedeji, "Xenophobia and Migrants' Irritants in Nigeria-South Africa Relations: A Discourse," *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 8(4), Oct.-Dec. (2020):48.

[21] N. Onke, "South Africa Police Make More Arrests as Riots Spread". https://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-violence/south-african-police-make-morearresrts-as-riots-spread-idUSKCN1VO1ZW. (accessed July 19, 2021)

[22] M. Neil, "South African Businesses in Nigeria Face Retaliatory Attacks". https://www.ft.com/content/9c67d848-cf2a-11e9-99a4-b5ded7a7fe3f . (accessed July 19, 2021)

government of South Africa at the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha, Tanzania[23]

Another aspect of this problem is the possibility of undermining African unity. The prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa runs counter to African culture and creates irony for African projects. Xenophobia has a significant impact on the unity and pan-Africanism of African countries[24]. As stated in the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people can move to any part of the world to obtain a more adequate and stable standard of living[25]. However, this freedom may be restricted by strict visa policies. Xenophobic attacks may cause African countries to follow strict visa policies, thereby undermining the new Pan-African passport and African integration initiatives. According to the Nigerian and South African Chamber of Commerce (NSACC), the African economy is fragile and if foreign companies continue to be attacked, the African economy will continue to stagnate[26]. Industry in Nigeria and South Africa may lose human capital, which may cause victims of attacks to join terrorist organizations, leading to security problems in both countries[27]. On February 23, 2017, the MTN headquarters in Abuja was ransacked by protesters who damaged its office equipment[28]. There are several South African institutions operating in Nigeria's entertainment, construction, banking, telecommunications, hotels, aviation, manufacturing, and oil and gas sectors. If these crises are not properly managed,

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[23] C. John, "Xenophobia: Nigeria vs S/Africa application a Test Case-Africa Court". https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/xenophobia-nigeria-vs-s-africa-application-atest-case-african-court.html (accessed July 19, 2021)

[24] O. Ebenezer, and K. Samuel, *The Context of Xenophobia in Africa: Nigeria and South Africa in Comparison*. (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

[25] I. Moses, "The Impact of Xenophobic Attacks on Nigeria-South Africa Relations". *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, 4(6), (2018): 93-110.

[26] Sapphire K. Peterside, JideIbietan, and Oluwatimilehin Deinde-Adedeji, "Xenophobia and Migrants' Irritants in Nigeria-South Africa Relations: A Discourse,"...

[27] Ibid

[28] Ibid

South African companies such as South African Airways, Stanbic / IBTC Bank, South African Brewery (SAB miller), MultiChoice Africa (operating DSTV and GOtv), Power Giant, MTN, Eskom Nigeria, Umgeni Water and Shoprite, might be the target of anti-foreign issues in Nigeria[29]. Furthermore, in September 2019, Nigerians retaliated because some South African investments such as MTN and Shoprite were touched and looted. Some media reports claimed that the value of the stolen goods exceeded 500 million naira. This resulted in temporary unemployment and displacement, as Nigerians working in these institutions were sent home and these businesses were urgently closed.[30]

According to Oyelana[31], for many years, most international investors have not invested in South Africa because they have lost confidence in South Africa's courts and police and do not feel protected. Some African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Zimbabwe have carried out xenophobic attacks in the form of deportation of foreigners in the past. These actions have since negatively affected their economies[32]. This means that xenophobia has a negative impact on the economy of the countries hosting it. As far as Nigeria's relations with South Africa are concerned, the economic impact of xenophobia can be felt in many areas. Indeed, this resulted in property losses worth millions of rand and naira.

An example of this is the Nigerian car dealership where a fire broke out on September 1, 2019[33]. The same is true for South African companies in Nigeria. Due to xenophobia, the percentage of income that the South African government usually receives

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[29] Ibid
[30] P. P. Umezinwa, "The Impact of Xenophobic Attack on Nigerians". https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/10/18/the-impact-of-xenophobic-attack-on-nigerians/ (Accessed July 20, 2021).
[31] A. A. Oyelana, "Crime Phobia"s Effects on Immigrant Entrepreneurs in South Africa". *Journal of Social Science*, 44(2, 3) (2015);131-136.
[32] S. Mbamalu, "Nigerians strongly react to Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa". https://thisisafrica.me/nigerians-strongly-react-xenophobic-attacks-southafrica. (accessed July 20, 2021).
[33] S. David, "Nigeria-South Africa Relations: Xenophobia as New Apartheid". https://www.punchng.com/nigeria-safrica-relations-xenophobia-as-new-apartheid/ (Accessed July 20, 2021).

from Nigerians who obtain visas has fallen sharply[34]. Adeleke and Ademola[35] argue that African immigrants in South Africa no longer associate freely with locals, and that living victims of xenophobic violence have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). No wonder foreigners and locals no longer meet to share values, history, norms, and ideologies for fear of being attacked or killed. The xenophobic attacks on Nigerians have multiple socio-cultural impacts. These attacks generated hatred in the affected Nigerians' hearts and only left a negative impression on the South Africans. In response to the Johannesburg riots, several Nigerian musicians boycotted their concerts and South Africa tour[36]. Similarly, on September 4, 2019, the Nigerian government announced its boycott of the African World Economic Forum in Cape Town and condemned the violence[37].

## Conclusion

On a general note, Nigeria and South Africa, despite the various loopholes in their bilateral relations, have developed excellent diplomatic relations. Nigerian immigrants contribute considerably to South Africa's economy and vice visa. In contrast to common discernment, immigration is not always associated with a decrease in the employment rate of the native-born population in South Africa, and some groups of immigrants are likely to increase employment opportunities for the native-born. This is because, no matter how insignificant it might be, the various businesses created by Nigerians in South Africa add to the general creation of job opportunities in the country. In part, due to the high employment rate of the immigrant population

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[34] Sapphire K. Peterside, JideIbietan, and Oluwatimilehin Deinde-Adedeji, "Xenophobia and Migrants' Irritants in Nigeria-South Africa Relations: A Discourse,"…

[35] O. Adeleke and A. Ademola, "The Impact of Xenophobia Attacks on Nigeria-South Africa Relations. African", *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanitarian Research,* 2(2), (2019):1-18.

[36] N. Milton, "Stars Boycott South Africa over Xenophobic Attacks". https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.bbc.com/news/amp/world-africa-49576397 (accessed July 21, 2021).

[37] J. Ameh, "Xenophobia: Nigeria recalls High Commissioner to South Africa, shuns WES". 2019. https://punchng.com/breaking-xenophobia-nigeriarecalls-ambassador- to-south-africa-shuns-wes. (accessed July 21, 2021).

itself, immigrants also raise the income per capita in South Africa. In addition, immigrants have a positive impact on the government's fiscal balance, mainly because they tend to pay more in taxes. Policies focused on immigrant integration and fighting discrimination would further enhance the economic contribution of immigrants in South Africa.[38]

Although social tensions cannot be eliminated in any country, the South African government and its citizens should still respect treaties, declarations, regulations, protocols, and global and regional conventions rather than resort to barbaric laws. The actions of people angered the consciences of Nigerians and Africans. In fact, South Africa must resolve the unhealthy politicization of immigration under the pretext of immigration through the diplomatic channel. Immigration issues and factors including rising unemployment, poverty, and greed should be the main reason for restructuring the new Nigeria-South Africa relationship. The two countries must promote and maintain mechanisms to protect human rights and a decent working environment for migrant workers and their families, whether documented migrants or undocumented migrants.

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[38] For further reading see, O. Agbu, "Nigeria and South Africa: The Future of a Strategic Partnership". In O. Eze (Ed.); *Beyond Fifty Years of Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).