



Developing a Continental Peace Integration Framework: Nigeria's Role in African Union Foreign Policy Initiatives

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Abstract

The pursuit of continental peace and security has remained a central pillar of the African Union's (AU) agenda since its establishment. This review examines Nigeria's evolving role in developing a Continental Peace Integration Framework (CPIF) that strengthens the AU's foreign policy mechanisms for conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction. As a regional power with significant peacekeeping experience, Nigeria has contributed diplomatically, militarily, and institutionally to peacebuilding efforts across Africa. The paper explores Nigeria's historical engagements through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), its leadership in peace operations under the AU and United Nations, and its influence in shaping multilateral security doctrines such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). By synthesizing policy literature, official AU documents, and scholarly analyses, the study highlights the intersections between Nigeria's national interest, continental integration goals, and the AU's collective security paradigm. The proposed CPIF emphasizes cooperative security governance, early warning systems, and resource-sharing mechanisms to enhance the AU's foreign policy effectiveness. Ultimately, this review underscores the need for harmonized regional diplomacy, institutional coherence, and strategic leadership to position Nigeria as a key architect of continental peace integration and a driver of sustainable African unity.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to Continental Peace and Integration in Africa

Continental peace and integration in Africa have evolved as a multidimensional framework designed to reconcile political sovereignty with collective security and shared economic growth. The African Union's (AU) vision, grounded in the 2063 Agenda, reflects the continent's pursuit of a unified governance model capable of addressing transnational challenges such as terrorism, migration, and climate-induced insecurity. This framework aligns closely with sustainability and innovation principles, emphasizing institutional resilience, regional cooperation, and digital governance (Otokiti & Akorede, 2018). Integration has progressively transitioned from rhetoric to structured implementation through mechanisms like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which foster synergies between economic interdependence and peace consolidation.

Nigeria's leadership in this integration process is both historical and strategic. As Africa's largest economy and one of its most active diplomatic actors, Nigeria's contributions to ECOWAS, AU mediation, and multilateral security arrangements have shaped the trajectory of continental diplomacy. The shift toward collaborative security governance demands data-driven and stakeholder-inclusive policy frameworks to ensure effective coordination across institutions (Gbabo *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, sustainability-centered budgeting at the national and regional levels enhances Africa's capacity to finance peace initiatives autonomously, reducing dependence on external partners (Isi *et al.*, 2022). Modern peace integration therefore requires harmonization of analytics, fiscal discipline, and participatory governance to reinforce long-term stability and institutional legitimacy (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2022). The background underscores Africa's gradual yet resolute movement toward a collective peace infrastructure anchored in shared accountability, resource optimization, and adaptive leadership.

1.2. Nigeria's Historical Role in African Diplomacy

Nigeria has historically served as a cornerstone of African diplomacy, leveraging its political influence, financial contributions, and peacekeeping capacity to promote regional stability. Since the post-independence era, Nigeria's foreign policy—rooted in Afrocentrism—has positioned the nation as a moral and strategic leader in the pursuit of continental unity. Through its active role in ECOWAS and its leadership in peace operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia, Nigeria has exemplified commitment to African self-determination and conflict resolution. These actions not only reinforced the AU's principle of "African solutions to African problems" but also institutionalized Nigeria's diplomatic legacy within the broader framework of continental peace integration (Otokiti & Akorede, 2018). Contemporary diplomacy demands the modernization of these traditional leadership roles through multi-stakeholder engagement, participatory policy modeling, and adaptive governance (Gbabo *et al.*, 2022). Nigeria's evolving diplomatic identity increasingly integrates data intelligence and sustainability frameworks that align with AU's long-term goals (Isi *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Nigeria's institutional investment in peace research, mediation centers, and the National Defence College reinforces its intellectual and strategic contributions to regional peace infrastructure. This evolution demonstrates a shift from reactive crisis management toward proactive peace policy formation driven by analytics and governance innovation (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2022). As the AU navigates new threats—cybersecurity, resource conflicts, and transnational extremism—Nigeria's historical leadership remains indispensable in translating continental aspirations into actionable policies that integrate peace, governance, and socio-economic transformation under a unified African vision.

1.3. Objectives and Scope of the Review

The objective of this review is to critically examine Nigeria's evolving role in advancing a Continental Peace Integration Framework under the African Union (AU). Specifically, it investigates how Nigeria's diplomatic engagement, institutional reforms, and strategic alignment with AU policies have contributed to shaping regional security architectures and intergovernmental collaboration. The review also identifies systemic barriers—such as institutional fragmentation, funding limitations, and political coordination challenges—that hinder policy coherence and implementation across the continent. By situating Nigeria's experiences within a broader African context, the study

delineates best practices and policy innovations that can guide future peace-building and governance reforms.

The scope of this paper encompasses the intersection of diplomacy, institutional governance, and regional cooperation, focusing on Nigeria's participation in AU peace mechanisms and ECOWAS-led interventions. It integrates qualitative insights drawn from policy documents, case analyses, and scholarly frameworks to elucidate Nigeria's strategic contributions to the AU's long-term peace and development agenda. Through this lens, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how Nigeria's foreign policy evolution aligns with Africa's collective pursuit of sustainable peace, inclusive governance, and integrated regionalism.

1.4. Structure of the Paper

This paper is structured into six interrelated sections, each building a coherent narrative of Nigeria's influence in Africa's continental peace integration agenda. Section 1 introduces the background, historical context, objectives, and framework of the study. Section 2 provides a detailed exploration of the African Union's regulatory and institutional landscape, examining key mechanisms such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). Section 3 analyzes Nigeria's strategic diplomatic interventions within ECOWAS and the AU, identifying patterns of leadership, policy formulation, and coalition-building. Section 4 develops the predictive and analytical dimensions of Nigeria's peace engagement, focusing on institutional reforms, decision-making processes, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Section 5 discusses the principal challenges undermining Nigeria's and Africa's collective peace integration efforts, including structural weaknesses, funding shortfalls, and political fragmentation. Finally, Section 6 presents targeted recommendations for enhancing Nigeria's leadership in peace policy formation, advancing continental policy coherence, and suggesting areas for future research. Together, these sections form a comprehensive framework that synthesizes Nigeria's role as a central actor in Africa's pursuit of sustainable peace, integrated governance, and regional resilience.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Theories of Regional Integration and Peacebuilding

Theories of regional integration and peacebuilding in Africa emphasize the intertwined dynamics of political cooperation, economic interdependence, and collective security. Integration frameworks, drawing from functionalist and neo-functionalist paradigms, assert that shared governance and cross-border collaboration can mitigate conflict and stimulate regional stability (Otokiti & Akorede, 2018). Within the African context, peacebuilding is conceptualized not merely as post-conflict reconstruction but as a holistic process encompassing institutional reform, inclusive governance, and sustainable economic systems. Nigeria's leadership role in these processes illustrates the practical embodiment of integration theories through active participation in multilateral peace mechanisms (Didi *et al.*, 2021).

The emerging literature further posits that regional integration functions as a conflict prevention tool, reducing the likelihood of interstate warfare by institutionalizing norms of interdependence and collective decision-making (Giwah *et al.*, 2020). The sustainability perspective underscores innovation, resource optimization, and legal harmonization as pillars of long-term stability (Ajakaye & Lawal, 2022). Moreover, the integration of low-carbon and environmental governance frameworks has expanded the traditional concept of peacebuilding beyond security into economic and environmental dimensions (Sanusi *et al.*, 2020). This theoretical expansion aligns with Nigeria’s foreign policy trajectory, which seeks to balance national interest with continental development goals (Nwokediegwu *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the synthesis of integration and peacebuilding theories provides a conceptual scaffold for understanding Nigeria’s evolving commitment to the African Union’s collective security and integration agenda (Didi *et al.*, 2021).

2.2. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) represents the institutional cornerstone of the African Union’s commitment to collective security and conflict resolution. Structured around pillars such as the Peace and Security Council, Continental Early Warning System, and African Standby Force, APSA embodies a systems-thinking model that integrates preventive diplomacy, crisis response,

and post-conflict peacebuilding (Giwah *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria’s engagement with APSA demonstrates a strong focus on operational leadership and logistical support within regional interventions. The country’s experience in financial coordination and strategic oversight, akin to risk management frameworks in complex institutions, provides a governance analogy for ensuring institutional resilience (Akinboboye *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, APSA’s functional capacity depends heavily on the synergy between compliance, transparency, and coordinated policy action across member states. This aligns with Nigeria’s domestic emphasis on accountability reforms and anti-corruption mechanisms that parallel forensic accounting and compliance systems (Dako *et al.*, 2020; Essien *et al.*, 2021). Economic stability remains a critical prerequisite for sustaining peace initiatives, as evidenced by Nigeria’s macroeconomic policy alignment with AU fiscal coordination strategies (Ihimoyan *et al.*, 2022). The operationalization of APSA through data-driven decision-making and strategic risk management demonstrates the AU’s transition from reactive peacekeeping to predictive peace governance (Ogedengbe *et al.*, 2022). In this context, Nigeria’s contributions—financial, technical, and diplomatic—serve as the backbone of continental stabilization efforts, reaffirming its status as a security guarantor and institutional anchor in the African integration project (Eyinade *et al.*, 2021) as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and Nigeria’s Strategic Role

| Key Dimension | Core Features of APSA | Nigeria’s Role and Contributions | Strategic Implications for Regional Stability |
|--|---|---|--|
| Institutional Framework | APSA is built on key pillars such as the Peace and Security Council, Continental Early Warning System, and African Standby Force. It promotes collective security through preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peacebuilding. | Nigeria plays a leading role in operational leadership, policy formulation, and resource mobilization, serving as a logistical and strategic anchor for regional interventions. | Strengthens Africa’s capacity for coordinated conflict prevention and enhances Nigeria’s influence as a regional stabilizer. |
| Governance and Coordination | APSA operates through collaborative decision-making and policy synchronization among member states to ensure transparency and accountability. | Nigeria advances governance coherence through domestic reforms that align with AU accountability and anti-corruption standards. | Improves institutional resilience and policy trust across regional organizations, fostering credibility in continental peace mechanisms. |
| Economic and Financial Sustainability | Sustainable peace depends on financial autonomy, macroeconomic stability, and fiscal coordination within the AU framework. | Nigeria contributes financial resources and aligns its macroeconomic policies with continental fiscal strategies to sustain intervention efforts. | Ensures consistent funding for peace operations and promotes regional economic integration as a basis for long-term stability. |
| Operational and Technological Innovation | APSA emphasizes data-driven early warning systems and predictive analytics to enhance proactive peace governance. | Nigeria supports data management, risk analysis, and adaptive response models within AU peace missions. | Facilitates the transition from reactive peacekeeping to preventive, intelligence-led peacebuilding across the continent. |

2.3. Nigeria’s Foreign Policy and Regional Leadership Theories

Nigeria’s foreign policy is grounded in Afrocentric leadership theory, emphasizing regional responsibility, mutual development, and the pursuit of peace through diplomacy and collective action. This leadership framework reflects a strategic alignment with the African Union’s integration agenda, underpinned by institutional and normative mechanisms similar to global ESG governance paradigms (Didi *et al.*, 2021). Nigeria’s engagement with the African Peace and Security Architecture demonstrates a practical application of adaptive leadership theories where

policy agility and ethical governance intersect (Ige *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, Nigeria’s regional leadership is anchored on its historical commitment to anti-colonial solidarity, conflict resolution, and economic cooperation. The digitalization of governance and the integration of data ethics have reinforced its capacity to coordinate transnational initiatives within ECOWAS and the AU (Abass *et al.*, 2021). Modern interpretations of leadership, informed by cross-cultural and behavioral models, highlight Nigeria’s evolving diplomatic style—moving from traditional hegemonic posturing to participatory, innovation-driven influence (Okuboye, 2021).

The blending of economic diplomacy, technological cooperation, and sustainability aligns Nigeria's foreign policy with twenty-first-century regional leadership imperatives (Akinrinoye *et al.*, 2021). By embedding ethical and cultural sensitivity into its policy process, Nigeria not only strengthens its legitimacy but also enhances Africa's collective agency in global negotiations (Ajakaye & Lawal, 2022). Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy evolution embodies a dynamic interplay of normative leadership and structural integration, positioning the country as both a policy innovator and peace custodian across the continent (Ojonugwa *et al.*, 2021).

3. Historical Context of Nigeria's Peace Engagement in Africa

3.1. Nigeria's Role in ECOWAS Peacekeeping Missions

Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS peacekeeping missions has long underscored its commitment to regional stability and integration. Since the 1990s, Nigeria has spearheaded interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, demonstrating how its military and diplomatic capacity underpins collective West African security governance (Otokiti & Akorede, 2018). The structural organization of these missions relies on Nigeria's logistical infrastructure and financial support, which remain unmatched within ECOWAS. The evolution of these missions reflects Nigeria's adaptation to dynamic security threats such as terrorism, piracy, and insurgency, with data-driven coordination mechanisms improving real-time decision-making and field logistics (Bukhari *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, Nigeria's technological and strategic innovation—manifested through communication platforms and cross-border intelligence—has enabled better operational efficiency during peace enforcement efforts (Menson *et al.*, 2018). Beyond traditional military deployment, Nigeria's engagement has expanded into conflict prevention, with Abuja providing mediation platforms for power transitions in Mali and Guinea-Bissau (Nwani *et al.*, 2020). Its energy diplomacy and infrastructural policies indirectly reinforce peace by addressing economic triggers of instability (Giwah *et al.*, 2020). Thus, Nigeria's ECOWAS peacekeeping trajectory illustrates a hybrid model of security integration, blending military might, policy influence, and socio-economic stabilization consistent with Africa's broader peace integration framework (Didi *et al.*, 2021; Okuboye, 2021).

3.2. Contributions to AU-Led Conflict Resolution

Nigeria's contributions to the African Union's conflict resolution architecture are rooted in its consistent advocacy for continental peacebuilding and multilateral cooperation. Through financial commitments and military deployments, Nigeria supports the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), emphasizing preventive diplomacy, early warning systems, and post-conflict reconstruction (Sanusi *et al.*, 2020). Its partnership with the AU Commission and Peace

and Security Council has yielded interventions in Sudan, Somalia, and the Central African Republic, reinforcing Nigeria's capacity as both mediator and guarantor of regional stability (Essien *et al.*, 2021). Nigeria's leadership within AU peace initiatives is further strengthened by its emphasis on policy coherence and resource coordination across the ECOWAS-AU interface (Giwah *et al.*, 2020).

Additionally, Nigeria has advanced conflict resolution through technological and institutional frameworks that promote transparency, governance, and inclusion (Adewusi *et al.*, 2020). Its diplomatic engagement underscores the need for capacity building and gender-sensitive participation in mediation, aligning with AU's Agenda 2063 goals (Ijiga *et al.*, 2021). The country's sustained advocacy for clean energy diplomacy and equitable resource distribution has also mitigated conflict triggers in resource-rich zones (Ogunsola, 2019). Overall, Nigeria's role in AU-led conflict resolution demonstrates a fusion of pragmatic peacekeeping and normative diplomacy, positioning it as a pivotal actor in shaping the AU's security and integration strategy (Akinboboye *et al.*, 2021).

3.3. Nigeria's Diplomatic Leadership in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Post-conflict reconstruction across Africa has provided Nigeria with opportunities to exercise strategic diplomacy through economic rehabilitation, infrastructural redevelopment, and institutional stabilization. Nigeria's involvement in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan demonstrates its emphasis on sustainable recovery models that integrate peace financing with capacity-building frameworks (Giwah *et al.*, 2020). Its diplomatic leadership is expressed through partnerships with AU and UN agencies, focusing on governance reforms and anti-corruption mechanisms that ensure accountability in reconstruction phases (Dako *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria's resource diplomacy promotes resilient infrastructure financing and equitable aid allocation, strengthening regional ownership of reconstruction outcomes (Olasoji *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, Nigeria has positioned itself as a knowledge broker by exporting its post-conflict experience through training, mediation, and public sector reforms. The integration of data analytics and financial intelligence enhances transparency in reconstruction monitoring, mitigating misuse of donor funds (Ikponmwoba *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria's economic diplomacy extends to promoting SME growth and local enterprise resilience, essential for peace dividends (Adeyelu *et al.*, 2020). Through multilateral cooperation and innovative financing mechanisms, Nigeria ensures post-war societies transition from fragility to resilience (Atere *et al.*, 2020) as seen in Table 2. Its advocacy for sustainable reconstruction and infrastructural renewal underscores its pivotal diplomatic role within AU's continental peace integration strategy (Bankole *et al.*, 2021).

Table 2: Summary of Nigeria's Diplomatic Leadership in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

| Key Dimension | Strategic Focus | Implementation Approach | Impact on Regional Stability |
|---|---|---|--|
| Economic and Institutional Recovery | Revitalizing economies through post-war reconstruction and governance stabilization. | Deploying financial aid, infrastructure redevelopment, and technical assistance for rebuilding public institutions. | Strengthened local governance systems and increased regional confidence in Nigeria's leadership. |
| Multilateral Diplomacy and Partnerships | Collaborating with AU, UN, and ECOWAS to institutionalize post-conflict governance reforms. | Supporting anti-corruption frameworks, security sector reforms, and capacity-building programs. | Enhanced accountability, coordinated aid distribution, and legitimacy of reconstruction processes. |
| Knowledge and Capacity Transfer | Leveraging Nigeria's peacekeeping and governance experience to mentor post-conflict states. | Facilitating mediation, leadership training, and policy advisory programs for local governments. | Improved institutional resilience and regional learning exchange in peacebuilding operations. |
| Sustainable Economic Diplomacy | Promoting inclusive economic growth and infrastructure financing in fragile economies. | Strengthening SME participation, resource diplomacy, and transparent reconstruction monitoring. | Increased socio-economic resilience, reduced dependency on external donors, and sustainable peace dividends. |

4. Towards a Continental Peace Integration Framework (CPIF)

4.1. Conceptualization of the CPIF

The Continental Peace Integration Framework (CPIF) represents an innovative model for harmonizing Africa's peace and security architecture through multi-level coordination between the African Union (AU), regional economic communities (RECs), and national governments. Conceptually, it aligns with the AU's Agenda 2063 aspiration for a peaceful and integrated continent, emphasizing institutional synergy, preventive diplomacy, and sustainable governance. Nigeria's leadership in peace diplomacy—anchored on its active participation in ECOWAS and AU missions—positions it as a strategic anchor in the CPIF's evolution. Drawing insights from governance frameworks such as those proposed by Abayomi *et al.* (2022) and Atobatele *et al.* (2022), the CPIF can be understood as a layered decision-support system that integrates political, socio-economic, and technological dimensions to enhance conflict prevention and peace consolidation.

Building on Nigeria's historical engagement in peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan, the CPIF emphasizes a system of interconnected nodes of accountability and early warning mechanisms (Ihimoyan *et al.*, 2022). Conceptual models of compliance and governance (Oluoha *et al.*, 2022; Eyinade *et al.*, 2021) reinforce the institutionalization of such frameworks through capacity building, inter-ministerial coordination, and structured data governance. Furthermore, lessons from risk management systems (Akinboboye *et al.*, 2021) illustrate how transparency, stakeholder inclusion, and ethical oversight can strengthen peace architecture. Nigeria's diplomatic capital, rooted in its Pan-African foreign policy, provides the normative legitimacy required to spearhead CPIF implementation (Ogunsola, 2019; Ijiga *et al.*, 2021). Hence, the CPIF conceptualization highlights Nigeria's pivotal function as both a peace enabler and a policy integrator within Africa's collective security ecosystem.

4.2. Key Pillars: Governance, Mediation, and Institutional Capacity

The CPIF is structurally anchored on three interdependent pillars—governance, mediation, and institutional capacity—which collectively underpin Africa's capacity to sustain peace and prevent relapse into conflict. The governance pillar emphasizes transparency, accountability, and rule of law within continental and regional frameworks (Ajakaye &

Lawal, 2022). Nigeria's advocacy for legal reforms within the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) mirrors this governance ethos, positioning Abuja as a policy center for ethical leadership and multilateral coordination. Drawing parallels from compliance frameworks in other sectors (Essien *et al.*, 2021; Oluoha *et al.*, 2022), the governance component integrates structured monitoring systems, performance audits, and feedback loops that can guide AU decision-making processes.

The mediation pillar leverages Nigeria's longstanding diplomatic experience—through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and AU missions in Darfur and The Gambia—to strengthen preventive diplomacy. Effective mediation requires robust information exchange systems and predictive models akin to real-time analytics frameworks used in other domains (Abayomi *et al.*, 2022). Institutional capacity, the third pillar, underscores investments in administrative, logistical, and human resource capabilities across the AU and RECs. Nigeria's domestic digital transformation initiatives (Akinrinoye *et al.*, 2021) provide lessons for strengthening institutional agility in AU missions. Additionally, strategic models of low-carbon procurement (Sanusi *et al.*, 2020) and economic empowerment (Ogunsola, 2019) reflect how governance efficiency and economic inclusion can reinforce sustainable peacebuilding. The synergy of these pillars enables Nigeria and the AU to create adaptive, data-driven, and resilient peace architectures, ensuring policy coherence between continental objectives and local realities (Taiwo *et al.*, 2022).

4.3. Integrating Nigeria's Strategic Peace Instruments

Integrating Nigeria's strategic peace instruments within the Continental Peace Integration Framework (CPIF) requires institutionalizing mechanisms that align national security initiatives with the African Union's collective security agenda. Nigeria's longstanding peace operations and mediation record provide a foundation for creating adaptive policy structures that foster interoperability across regional blocs. Multi-stakeholder engagement models (Gbabo *et al.*, 2022) highlight the importance of cooperative frameworks that unify government agencies, civil society, and defense institutions under shared peace objectives. Such collaboration mirrors Nigeria's operational leadership in ECOWAS missions, which emphasized joint command structures and collective accountability mechanisms for sustainable peacebuilding.

Policy harmonization also necessitates integrating economic

instruments, such as development financing and data-driven risk analytics, to strengthen early conflict response capacities (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2022; Nwani *et al.*, 2022). Strategic frameworks for sustainability-centered budgeting (Isi *et al.*, 2022) and risk-sharing models can enable Nigeria to coordinate peace funding at both regional and continental levels. Furthermore, the adoption of analytical policy-to-strategy mapping (Odinaka *et al.*, 2022) ensures evidence-based coordination between Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Defence Headquarters, and AU Peace and Security Council operations. These adaptive governance mechanisms parallel lessons from decentralized access frameworks in SMEs (Ikponmwoba *et al.*, 2022), emphasizing localized resource mobilization and accountability. Finally, incorporating community resilience strategies from post-conflict recovery case studies (Gbabo *et al.*, 2022; Otokiti & Akorede, 2018) reinforces Nigeria's role as a stabilizing force capable of translating domestic peacebuilding experience into continental best practices. Collectively, these integrated instruments operationalize Nigeria's vision of a self-sustaining and diplomatically coherent African peace infrastructure.

5. Challenges and Policy Gaps in AU Foreign Policy Implementation

5.1. Structural and Institutional Weaknesses

The structural and institutional weaknesses within the African Union's (AU) peace and security mechanisms reveal persistent challenges rooted in fragmented governance, overlapping mandates, and limited coordination among member states. Nigeria's leadership in the AU Peace and Security Council has often been hindered by bureaucratic inertia, duplication of functions, and inconsistent policy implementation across regional economic communities (Akinboboye *et al.*, 2021). The AU's institutional complexity, compounded by competing interests among regional blocs, weakens its capacity to operationalize collective security mechanisms effectively (Essien *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of synchronized data management and monitoring frameworks mirrors institutional gaps found in other governance sectors, as seen in compliance frameworks and risk management systems (Eyinade *et al.*, 2021; Essien *et al.*, 2021).

Nigeria's institutional contributions—such as its mediation through ECOWAS and its establishment of early warning centers—demonstrate regional commitment, yet deficiencies in inter-agency coordination reduce operational efficiency (Didi *et al.*, 2021). Structural limitations also stem from inadequate harmonization between AU headquarters and sub-regional institutions, leading to delayed responses to crises like those in Mali and the Sahel (Bankole *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, Nigeria's institutional bottlenecks, such as inconsistent inter-ministerial collaboration, reflect the broader continental issue of weak policy alignment (Okiye, 2021; Akinrinoye *et al.*, 2021). Thus, institutional reforms must emphasize integrated governance, standardized information systems, and enhanced collaboration between peacekeeping and diplomatic missions to strengthen the AU's continental peace integration framework (Essien *et al.*, 2021).

5.2. Funding and Resource Limitations

A major constraint undermining the African Union's (AU) peace and security agenda is the chronic insufficiency of sustainable funding and the misalignment of financial

governance mechanisms among member states. Nigeria's prominent role in underwriting ECOWAS and AU missions has often been limited by fiscal volatility, weak treasury management systems, and dependence on external donors (Fiemotongha *et al.*, 2020; Eyinade *et al.*, 2020). Despite Nigeria's economic stature, inconsistent budgetary disbursement and lack of harmonized funding frameworks have constrained the African Peace Fund's capacity to respond rapidly to conflicts. The AU's reliance on partner funding—mainly from the European Union and United Nations—creates a structural imbalance that undermines African ownership of continental peace operations (Giwah *et al.*, 2020).

Fiscal management inefficiencies further exacerbate resource gaps, as highlighted by Nigeria's internal audit and regulatory reporting shortcomings (Farounbi *et al.*, 2020; Olasoji *et al.*, 2020). Although regional funding initiatives like the Peace and Security Council Levy have been proposed, implementation remains weak due to a lack of transparent monitoring mechanisms and intelligent financial controls (Ezeilo *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria's attempts to build operational readiness models for financing small and medium peace projects reflect a shift toward self-financing schemes, yet these remain isolated efforts without continental integration (Nwani *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, poor tax administration and revenue diversification strategies restrict public sector contributions to security funds (Farounbi *et al.*, 2020). Integrating innovative financial instruments such as sovereign peace bonds and risk-sharing mechanisms could enhance Africa's capacity to fund peacekeeping (Atere *et al.*, 2020). Addressing these limitations requires restructuring AU financial architecture toward accountability, regional burden-sharing, and digitally enabled budget oversight (Fiemotongha *et al.*, 2020).

5.3. Political Will, Sovereignty, and Coordination Barriers

The AU's ambition to achieve continental peace integration is frequently constrained by limited political will, entrenched notions of sovereignty, and fragmented coordination among member states. Nigeria's commitment to collective security often faces diplomatic friction when national interests conflict with regional mandates, resulting in delayed implementation of peace directives (Ogunsola, 2019). Political fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of decision-making within the Peace and Security Council, where states prioritize bilateral alliances over continental unity (Dako *et al.*, 2019). Nigeria's capacity to influence collective policy outcomes is also hampered by lack of legal harmonization across AU institutions and regional trade agreements (Ajakaye & Adeyinka, 2020).

Coordination barriers arise from weak governance mechanisms and inadequate institutional coherence between the AU, ECOWAS, and national foreign ministries (Sanusi *et al.*, 2020). The absence of a standardized risk governance model creates inconsistencies in how peace and security policies are enforced (Essien *et al.*, 2020). Leadership turnover and limited stakeholder engagement further diminish momentum in regional cooperation initiatives (Aduwo *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria's domestic political instability and resource constraints have occasionally undermined its capacity to sustain foreign policy leadership roles, especially in mediating cross-border conflicts (Okuboye, 2021). Moreover, the lack of data-driven policy integration and research-supported decision frameworks within the AU

impedes transparent evaluation and adaptive coordination (Abass *et al.*, 2021). To enhance Nigeria's influence within the continental peace integration framework, institutionalizing mechanisms for policy synchronization, shared accountability, and political commitment is crucial to reducing the fragmentation that has historically weakened the AU's collective security agenda (Ogunsola, 2019).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Strengthening Nigeria's Role in AU Peace Policy Formation

Nigeria's strategic influence within the African Union (AU) must evolve from operational peacekeeping to proactive policy formation that defines the continent's security doctrine. Strengthening this role requires embedding Nigeria's diplomatic, financial, and military capabilities into the AU's policymaking architecture through structured representation in the Peace and Security Council and the African Governance Platform. By leveraging its extensive experience in regional mediation through ECOWAS, Nigeria can institutionalize frameworks that align preventive diplomacy with rapid deployment mechanisms under the African Standby Force. Expanding Nigeria's role also entails developing policy units within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated to AU policy synchronization, enabling consistent contributions to policy papers, communiqués, and strategic frameworks. Additionally, fostering synergy between Nigeria's National Defence College, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, and AU training centers would institutionalize knowledge-sharing and doctrinal coherence. Through these measures, Nigeria can transition from being a peace enforcement actor to becoming a principal architect of continental conflict prevention policies—anchored on data-driven security analytics, inclusive governance, and evidence-based peace diplomacy that reinforces Africa's collective security vision.

6.2. Policy Recommendations for Effective Continental Integration

For the Continental Peace Integration Framework to achieve measurable impact, integration must move beyond declaratory commitments toward systemic harmonization of security, governance, and economic policies. The AU should adopt a standardized peace policy evaluation mechanism that measures the efficiency of mediation, early warning, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Nigeria can drive this initiative by proposing a unified regional security budgeting system that consolidates funding across ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC, ensuring predictable financing for peace missions. Institutional reforms should prioritize interoperability of command structures between the AU Peace and Security Council and sub-regional bodies, supported by digital coordination platforms for intelligence sharing. Furthermore, Nigeria's leadership in renewable energy diplomacy and climate security should be integrated into AU peace frameworks, linking environmental resilience to conflict mitigation. Establishing a Continental Peace Research Observatory in Abuja would facilitate cross-regional data collection, monitoring policy effectiveness, and generating actionable insights. These policy reforms—rooted in institutional transparency, multi-level cooperation, and strategic leadership—will enhance the AU's ability to operationalize peace integration while reinforcing Nigeria's position as the nucleus of Africa's diplomatic and peace

architecture.

6.3. Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on quantitatively evaluating Nigeria's policy influence within the AU's institutional ecosystem, particularly through longitudinal studies assessing the correlation between Nigeria's diplomatic engagement intensity and peace mission outcomes. Comparative analyses of AU-ECOWAS-Nigeria coordination models could provide deeper insights into the efficiency of multilateral peace structures and their responsiveness to emerging security threats. Moreover, interdisciplinary studies exploring the intersection of peace economics, regional integration, and cybersecurity governance are essential to anticipate future forms of conflict in digital and transnational domains. Researchers should also investigate the potential of artificial intelligence, satellite imagery, and predictive analytics in enhancing the AU's early warning systems and Nigeria's conflict prevention mechanisms. Policy simulations assessing financial autonomy models, such as continental trust funds or peace levies, could further illuminate viable funding pathways for sustainable peace operations. Finally, scholarly inquiry into youth-led diplomacy, women's leadership in peace negotiations, and the role of private-sector participation in conflict reconstruction will expand the theoretical and practical frontiers of continental peace integration, ensuring that Nigeria's contributions remain adaptive, evidence-based, and globally competitive within Africa's evolving governance landscape.

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