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NIGERIA–POLAND RELATIONS: TRADE EXPANSION AND DEFENSE COOPERATION IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Zekeri Momoh¹, Zhizhi Meshach Rizama²

¹Regional Research Associate (RRA), Indo Pacific Studies Center Australia. adres, city, ORCID 0000-0001-7938-8738
e-mail: momohzekeri@gmail.com

²Department of Political Science, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Ayingba, Kogi State, Nigeria. ORCID 0000-0001-6175-7865
e-mail: meshach.z@ksu.edu.ng

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of Nigeria–Poland relations with a particular focus on trade expansion and defense cooperation in the post-Cold War era. It explores how both nations have leveraged diplomatic engagements, economic agreements, and security partnerships to strengthen bilateral ties since the early 1990s. The study is anchored on the soft power theory with data collected from secondary sources and content analysis employed for analyzing the data collected data. The study highlights the structural transformation of trade relations, noting Poland’s increasing interest in Nigeria’s energy and agricultural sectors, as well as Nigeria’s importation of Polish machinery, fertilizers, and defense equipment. It also assesses the significance of defense cooperation through military training exchanges, peacekeeping collaboration, and maritime security initiatives. The analysis situates Nigeria–Poland relations within the broader framework of South–North cooperation and soft power diplomacy, emphasizing how mutual economic and strategic interests have fostered resilience and adaptability in their partnership. The study concludes that sustained dialogue, institutional linkages, and diversification of trade and defense relations are essential for deepening Nigeria–Poland cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world.

Key words

Nigeria–Poland relations, trade expansion, defense cooperation, post-Cold War era, soft power diplomacy.

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1. Introduction

Nigeria–Poland relations trace their origins to the early period after Nigeria gained independence and have evolved through diplomatic, economic, cultural, and educational cooperation. Both countries, although geographically distant, share mutual interests rooted in international solidarity, trade, and multilateral diplomacy. The relationship reflects Poland’s effort to strengthen its presence in Africa

and Nigeria’s desire to expand its diplomatic partnerships beyond traditional Western allies. Over the decades, their ties have been shaped by the changing dynamics of global politics, economic reforms, and regional developments (Oluwole, 2019).

Formal diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Poland were established in 1961, shortly after Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 (Embassy of Poland in Abuja, 2020). The

establishment of diplomatic missions marked the beginning of official cooperation between both nations. Poland, as part of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, saw Nigeria as a vital partner in its efforts to engage with the developing world, particularly Africa, as part of its non-aligned and anti-colonial outreach.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Poland supported Nigeria's post-colonial development through technical assistance, training programs, and educational exchanges. Many Nigerian students benefited from Polish scholarships in engineering, medicine, and science, which contributed to Nigeria's human capital development (Adebayo, 2018). Similarly, trade relations between the two countries began to take shape, with Poland exporting industrial goods, machinery, and chemical products, while Nigeria supplied agricultural commodities and, later, crude oil.

The economic dimension of Nigeria–Poland relations became more pronounced in the 1980s and 1990s, as both nations sought to diversify their trade partnerships. Trade between the two countries, however, remained modest due to structural challenges, including fluctuating oil prices, inconsistent trade policies, and limited private sector linkages (Okonkwo & Kaczmarek, 2017).

Poland imported Nigerian crude oil and agricultural products, while exporting machinery, processed food, fertilizers, and pharmaceuticals. Both countries explored possibilities for cooperation in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing, but the absence of a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement hindered consistent trade growth (UNCTAD, 2019).

In the early 2000s, Poland renewed its interest in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, as part of its broader strategy to expand economic influence outside the European Union. The Nigerian–Polish Business Forum, organized in 2013, aimed to strengthen business networks and encourage mutual investments in energy, infrastructure, and information technology (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Nigeria and Poland have maintained strong political ties grounded in mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference. Over the years, both countries have cooperated in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and African–EU partnerships (Eze, 2020).

Moreover, high-level visits have served to consolidate bilateral relations. Notably, the visit of Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski to Nigeria in 2013 marked a turning point in the revitalization of Nigeria–Poland relations. The two nations signed agreements on economic cooperation and education

during the visit (Embassy of Nigeria in Warsaw, 2015). Similarly, Nigerian officials have engaged with their Polish counterparts to explore cooperation in defense, renewable energy, and science and technology.

However, cultural and educational exchanges have remained vital components of Nigeria–Poland relations. Poland's higher education institutions have attracted Nigerian students since the 1970s, particularly in medicine, engineering, and natural sciences (Jankowski, 2016). In recent years, the number of Nigerian students in Poland has increased due to the country's affordable tuition fees and high educational standards (European Migration Network, 2021). Cultural diplomacy has also been promoted through exhibitions, language programs, and artistic collaborations that celebrate Nigerian and Polish heritage. Such initiatives foster mutual understanding and people-to-people connections, strengthening the social fabric of bilateral relations (Akindele, 2021).

In the 21st century, Nigeria–Poland relations have gained new relevance due to shared interests in energy security, technology transfer, and global security. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, offers vast market opportunities for Polish investors, while Poland provides technical expertise and industrial support. The opening of the Polish Embassy in Abuja and the Nigerian Embassy in Warsaw has improved diplomatic communication and facilitated bilateral agreements (Polish MFA, 2020).

Moreover, both countries have collaborated in tackling transnational challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and irregular migration (Adesina, 2022).

Nevertheless, during the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Nigeria and Poland also engaged diplomatically to ensure the safety of Nigerian students in Eastern Europe, reflecting a shared humanitarian concern (BBC News, 2022). This incident demonstrated Poland's responsiveness to African diplomatic engagements and Nigeria's role as a defender of its citizens abroad. The history of Nigeria–Poland relations demonstrates a steady and resilient partnership anchored on mutual respect, shared values, and growing economic and cultural ties.

Overall, although challenges such as limited trade volume and bureaucratic barriers persist, the potential for cooperation remains vast. Both nations continue to explore new frontiers in energy, education, defense, and digital innovation. As global dynamics shift, Nigeria and Poland are well-positioned to leverage their relationship to foster sustainable development and strengthen South–East European–African relations.

2. Literature Review on Nigeria–Poland Relations

Nigeria–Poland relations represent a relatively underexplored aspect of both African and European foreign policy studies. While Nigeria’s diplomatic relations with major Western powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France have received considerable scholarly attention, its engagement with Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, has only recently attracted interest (Oluwole, 2019). The growing global relevance of South–North cooperation and the diversification of Africa–Europe relations have renewed attention toward understanding the historical foundations, economic linkages, political dynamics, and cultural exchanges shaping Nigeria–Poland relations.

Diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Poland were formally established in 1961, shortly after Nigeria’s independence, signaling both countries’ desire to expand their international partnerships beyond their immediate regional spheres (Embassy of Poland in Abuja, 2020). Early interactions were primarily framed within the Cold War context, as Poland, a member of the Eastern Bloc, sought to strengthen its global presence by engaging newly independent African states. Scholars note (e.g. Oluwole, 2019) that Poland’s engagement with Nigeria reflected broader socialist foreign policy goals of fostering solidarity with the Global South, although these ties remained modest compared to Nigeria’s relations with the West.

Educational and technical cooperation characterized much of the early relations between the two countries. Poland provided scholarships for Nigerian students in fields such as engineering, medicine, and agriculture, contributing to Nigeria’s post-independence human capital development (Adebayo, 2018). However, the literature on the historical trajectory of Nigeria–Poland relations remains descriptive, with limited analysis of the geopolitical motivations behind these engagements. There is little comparative research examining how Nigeria’s relations with Poland differed from those with other Eastern European states or how ideological factors influenced bilateral diplomacy. This represents an important gap in the historiography of Nigeria’s foreign policy during the Cold War era.

Economic cooperation remains a central dimension of Nigeria–Poland relations. According to Okonkwo and Kaczmarek (2017), bilateral trade between the two countries has historically been modest, constrained by weak institutional frameworks, infrastructural limitations, and

insufficient private sector engagement. Poland’s exports to Nigeria largely include industrial machinery, processed foods, and chemicals, while Nigeria primarily exports crude oil and agricultural products to Poland (UNCTAD, 2019).

In recent years, economic engagement has deepened, driven by Poland’s quest to diversify its global markets beyond the European Union and Nigeria’s search for new development partners. The 2013 Nigeria–Poland Business Forum, organized in Warsaw, marked a turning point in bilateral economic diplomacy, paving the way for increased cooperation in sectors such as energy, manufacturing, and agriculture (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Adesina (2022) argues that Poland’s renewed interest in Africa aligns with its broader strategy to strengthen economic diplomacy and reduce dependence on traditional European markets.

Nevertheless, the literature on Nigeria–Poland trade relations remains thin, with limited empirical data on trade volumes, investment flows, and institutional partnerships. Few studies examine the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in expanding bilateral trade or the potential of Poland’s development aid framework in supporting Nigerian industries. This represents a significant gap in understanding the economic dimensions of Nigeria–Poland relations, especially in the context of Africa–EU economic integration.

Politically, Nigeria and Poland have maintained cordial relations, grounded in mutual respect and multilateral cooperation. Eze (2020) observes that both nations collaborate within international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, often supporting similar positions on global issues such as peacebuilding, climate change, and international trade justice. High-level diplomatic visits have also contributed to strengthening bilateral ties. Notably, the visit of Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski to Nigeria in 2013 reaffirmed Poland’s interest in deepening collaboration in energy, education, and security (Embassy of Nigeria in Warsaw, 2015).

Despite these developments, scholarly engagement with the strategic depth of Nigeria–Poland political relations remains limited. Few studies have examined how Poland’s membership in the European Union influences its foreign policy toward Nigeria or how Nigeria perceives its partnerships with Central and Eastern European states within its broader foreign policy framework. Furthermore, issues such as migration, energy security, and defense cooperation remain underexplored in the context of Nigeria–Poland relations. Addressing these gaps would provide a

more nuanced understanding of the political and strategic dimensions of this partnership.

Cultural and educational exchanges have served as enduring linkages between Nigeria and Poland. Studies have shown that since the 1970s, Polish universities have trained a significant number of Nigerian professionals, particularly in technical and scientific disciplines (Jankowski, 2016; Akindele, 2021). These educational ties have not only enhanced Nigeria's human capital development but have also strengthened people-to-people connections that foster cultural diplomacy. In recent years, the number of Nigerian students studying in Poland has increased due to relatively affordable tuition fees and the global reputation of Polish institutions (European Migration Network, 2021).

However, most literature focuses on statistical data rather than qualitative assessments of the social and cultural experiences of Nigerian students in Poland. The role of educational exchange between Nigeria and Poland in enhancing bilateral understanding and promoting soft power remains underexplored. Furthermore, other dimensions of cultural diplomacy such as arts, music, and sports have not been systematically studied within the context of Nigeria–Poland relations. This gap limits a holistic appreciation of how cultural and educational exchanges contribute to broader diplomatic engagement between Nigeria and Poland.

In the contemporary times, Nigeria–Poland relations have gained renewed relevance within a shifting global order. Adesina (2022) explains that Poland's renewed engagement with Africa, particularly in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, reflects its interest in diversifying energy partnerships and enhancing food security. Nigeria, on the other hand, perceives Poland as a credible partner for technological transfer, renewable energy collaboration, and academic exchange (Polish MFA, 2020). Moreover, the shared commitment to sustainable development, peacebuilding, and multilateralism has created new areas of cooperation.

Nonetheless, emerging issues such as security cooperation, climate diplomacy, and migration governance remain insufficiently researched. For instance, the evacuation of Nigerian and other African students from Ukraine through Poland in 2022 revealed both the importance and challenges of migration management between Africa and Eastern Europe (BBC News, 2022). The limited academic attention given to these emerging dimensions underscores the need for fresh empirical and theoretical approaches to understanding Nigeria–Poland relations in the 21st century.

Overall, the literature on Nigeria–Poland relations remains fragmented and underdeveloped, with most existing studies providing descriptive overviews rather than in-depth analyses. Thus, major research gaps on Nigeria and Poland relations persist in the areas of the ideological underpinnings of Cold War-era relations, the absence of detailed empirical data on trade and investment patterns, limited assessment of the strategic dimensions of political cooperation, inadequate exploration of cultural diplomacy, and a lack of contemporary research on energy, migration, and security cooperation. Thus, bridging these gaps in the literature will not only expand academic understanding of Nigeria–Poland relations but also contribute to broader debates on Africa–Europe engagement, global diplomacy and South–North cooperation in the evolving global system.

3. Theoretical Framework for the Study of Nigeria–Poland Relations

The study of Nigeria–Poland relations can be analyzed through various theoretical lenses within International Relations, including Realism, Liberalism, and Soft Power Theory. Each of these theories provides distinct perspectives on the motivations, dynamics, and outcomes of interactions between the two countries. Realism, as a dominant theory in international relations, is associated with scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (1948), Kenneth Waltz (1979), and John Mearsheimer (2001). The theory posits that states exist in an anarchic international system where survival and power are the main goals. States act rationally to maximize their national interest, often through competition, alliances, and military capability. From a realist perspective, Nigeria–Poland relations can be viewed as a strategic partnership driven by national interests. Poland, as part of the European Union, seeks access to Africa's emerging markets and natural resources, while Nigeria aims to diversify its international partnerships beyond traditional Western powers. Cooperation in areas such as defense, migration control, and energy can thus be seen as mutual efforts to strengthen state security and influence in a competitive global environment (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Liberalism, advanced by thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1795), Woodrow Wilson (1918), and later Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977), emphasizes cooperation, interdependence, and the role of international institutions in fostering peace and mutual benefits. The theory assumes that states can achieve prosperity through collaboration, trade, and shared norms rather than conflict.

Liberalism explains Nigeria–Poland relations through the lens of economic interdependence and institutional cooperation. Both countries have benefited from trade agreements, cultural exchanges, and educational partnerships under frameworks such as the European Union–African Union cooperation. The establishment of diplomatic missions, student exchange programs, and joint economic summits reflects the liberal belief that international cooperation can promote stability and shared prosperity (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

The Soft Power Theory, developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr. (1990, 2004), explains how countries influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. Soft power derives from a state's culture, political values, and foreign policies that are perceived as legitimate or morally authoritative. The Soft Power Theory is particularly relevant to Nigeria–Poland relations because the partnership extends beyond material interests to include cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, and shared values of democracy and human rights. Poland's growing engagement with Nigeria through scholarships, technical assistance, and cultural promotion showcases the use of soft power tools to build positive perceptions and influence Africa's largest democracy.

Similarly, Nigeria's cultural and creative industries, such as Nollywood and Afrobeats, have enhanced its image and visibility in Europe, fostering mutual respect and societal connections (Nye, 2004). This non-coercive influence strengthens diplomatic ties, promotes tourism, and encourages cross-cultural collaboration. Hence, the Soft Power Theory aptly captures the evolving nature of Nigeria–Poland relations as grounded in mutual attraction, cultural dialogue, and policy alignment rather than geopolitical rivalry or economic dominance.

4. The Ideological Underpinnings of Nigeria–Poland Relations during the Cold War Era

The Cold War era (circa 1947–1991) shaped international relations around competing ideologies of capitalism and socialism, dividing much of the world into Western and Eastern blocs. However, many newly independent African states, including Nigeria, sought to avoid direct alignment with either camp. Poland, on the other hand, was part of the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc but also developed a distinctive approach to relations with postcolonial countries, emphasizing solidarity and developmental cooperation. The relationship between Nigeria and Poland during this period was thus molded by ideological forces such as non-alignment, socialist

internationalism, and anti-imperialism.

With independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a foreign policy framework grounded in the principle of non-alignment, seeking to maintain independence in international relations by avoiding permanent alliances with any of the major Cold War powers. This stance reflected Nigeria's desire to pursue a pragmatic and Afrocentric foreign policy that prioritized sovereignty, neutrality, and peaceful coexistence (Ajayi, 1985). According to Ifidon (2011), Nigeria's non-alignment meant that it could accept technical and economic assistance from both Western and Eastern countries without compromising its autonomy.

In the context of Nigeria–Poland relations, non-alignment provided a foundation for engagement with a socialist state like Poland without ideological subservience. Nigeria viewed Poland as a partner in development rather than a representative of Soviet geopolitical ambitions. This pragmatic neutrality allowed for cooperation in trade, education, and technology transfer, reflecting Nigeria's belief that development aid could be pursued from any ideological source as long as it served national interests (Amiara, 1998).

While Poland was firmly within the Soviet sphere as a member of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), it developed a foreign policy approach toward Africa that emphasized postcolonial solidarity and the moral duty to support emerging nations (COMECONAID, n.d.). Polish policy during the Cold War often framed cooperation with African countries like Nigeria as a means of advancing socialist ideals of equality, anti-imperialism, and mutual assistance.

Research from the COMECONAID project (*The Second World in the Third*) demonstrates that Polish aid to Nigeria and other African countries went beyond material assistance. It was also a projection of ideological identity (COMECONAID, n.d.). Poland's socialist leadership viewed engagement with African states as part of a broader effort to build an alternative world order grounded in equality and cooperation rather than colonial exploitation. Similarly, Nowicki (n.d.) notes that Polish media of the 1960s and 1970s portrayed Africa as a region of revolutionary potential and emphasized the moral responsibility of socialist nations to assist in its development.

Several instances illustrate how ideology shaped Nigeria–Poland relations during the Cold War period. First, medical and technical cooperation became a major pillar of bilateral engagement. Under the COMECON framework, Poland sent medical professionals and equipment to Nigeria, helped train Nigerian health personnel, and offered scholarships

for Nigerian students in Polish universities (COMECONAID, n.d.). These initiatives were presented as acts of socialist solidarity, symbolizing cooperation between two nations fighting different forms of domination, namely the colonial and the capitalist one. Second, during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), Poland supported Nigeria’s federal government, endorsing its efforts to maintain national unity. The Polish government participated in the International Observation Group in Nigeria, aligning its position with the principle of sovereignty and non-secession (Gov.pl, n.d.). This support reflected an ideological opposition to fragmentation and a belief in the integrity of postcolonial states which is an idea consistent with socialist notions of collective stability. Third, economic and trade cooperation had ideological overtones. Poland exported machinery, medical supplies, and technical expertise to Nigeria through joint ventures such as Daltrade, Polfa, Nigpol, and Polconsult Associates in the 1970s (Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World, n.d.). These ventures were portrayed as alternatives to exploitative capitalist models, emphasizing equality and mutual development. Fourth, cultural and educational exchanges reinforced ideological links. Nigerian students studied in Polish universities, while Polish cultural institutions hosted exhibitions celebrating African independence and cultural identity (Nowicki, n.d.). These exchanges helped portray the socialist bloc as a moral and intellectual ally of postcolonial nations, contrasting with the West’s history of imperialism.

Despite ideological affinities, the relationship was not without tension. Nigeria’s non-alignment was more rhetorical than absolute; the country’s economy remained closely tied to Western markets and investment, creating practical limitations on its engagement with socialist states (Ifidon, 2011). Similarly, while Poland championed solidarity with developing nations, its foreign policy was ultimately constrained by Soviet influence, limiting its autonomy in shaping its African policy (Amiara, 1998). Moreover, ideological rhetoric often outpaced material reality. Poland’s economic capacity to provide large-scale aid was limited, and Nigeria’s engagements with the Eastern Bloc did not translate into sustained industrial partnerships. As a result, while the ideological dimension provided moral legitimacy and diplomatic goodwill, the practical outcomes of cooperation were modest compared to Nigeria’s relations with Western countries.

The Nigeria–Poland case demonstrates that the Cold War in Africa was not simply a binary contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead, smaller states like Poland and non-aligned nations like Nigeria developed their own ideological

narratives and diplomatic strategies. Their relations reveal a third dimension of the Cold War: the “Second World–Third World solidarity”, where socialist states sought to influence decolonizing nations through technical aid and moral partnership rather than direct intervention (COMECONAID, n.d.).

This ideological underpinning had enduring implications. It fostered the exchange of ideas about self-reliance, social equality, and development planning in which concepts that continue to inform contemporary African diplomacy. It also illustrates how ideology can function as a bridge between states with different political systems, providing legitimacy and moral direction even in asymmetric relationships. The ideological underpinnings of Nigeria–Poland relations during the Cold War reflected a convergence of two worldviews: Nigeria’s pragmatic non-alignment and Poland’s socialist solidarity. While Nigeria sought balanced cooperation without dependence, Poland pursued ideological legitimacy through assistance to postcolonial nations. Through medical aid, cultural exchanges, and political support during the civil war, both countries demonstrated how ideology could shape state behavior beyond mere strategic calculation. However, the limits imposed by economic constraints and global power dynamics highlight that ideology alone could not sustain deep or lasting partnerships. Nonetheless, the Nigeria–Poland experience remains a valuable case in understanding how Cold War ideologies intersected with Africa’s pursuit of postcolonial development and independence.

5. Nigeria-Poland relations trade and investment patterns

Nigeria and Poland share a bilateral relationship that has evolved over decades, underpinned by trade, investment, and diplomatic cooperation. While political and cultural ties have remained cordial since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1961, the economic dimension, particularly trade and investment, has increasingly become central to both nations’ engagement (Government of Poland, n.d.)

Over the years, trade between Nigeria and Poland has witnessed a steady upward trend, especially since 2020. According to data from Trading Economics (2025), Nigeria exported approximately US\$321.73 million worth of goods to Poland in 2024, while Polish exports to Nigeria amounted to US\$294.49 million, bringing the total bilateral trade to an estimated US\$616 million. This represents a notable increase from 2022, when the total trade volume between the two countries was about

US\$291 million (Vanguard, 2022). The expansion in trade volume signifies a growing mutual recognition of economic potential and reflects Nigeria's increasing importance as Poland's major African trade partner in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Nigeria's trade surplus in 2024, with exports exceeding imports, is largely driven by its dominance in petroleum and energy-related products, which accounted for US\$306.26 million of exports to Poland (Trading Economics, 2025). Other Nigerian exports include raw agricultural materials such as oilseeds, rubber, and cocoa. Conversely, Poland's exports to Nigeria are more diversified and industrially intensive, comprising cereals (US\$221.98 million), machinery and boilers, dairy products, food preparations, and chemical goods (Trading Economics, 2025). This trade asymmetry reflects the broader global North–South economic structure, where developing nations export primary commodities while industrialized countries supply manufactured goods.

The structure of Nigeria–Poland trade demonstrates the persistence of commodity dependence and value asymmetry. Nigeria's oil-driven export profile exposes it to market volatility and fluctuating international prices, while Poland's exports to Nigeria are more stable and diversified, anchored in manufacturing and agro-processing (OEC, 2025). This imbalance is not merely economic but structural that underscores the limited diversification of Nigeria's export economy and the challenge of moving up the global value chain.

However, recent developments indicate gradual diversification efforts. For instance, Nigeria's non-oil exports to Poland have expanded modestly in agricultural produce and solid minerals, reflecting the country's policy shift toward export diversification under the National Export Promotion Council (NEPC) (NEPC, 2023). Additionally, the convening of the Polish–Nigerian Economic Forum in 2025 provided a platform to deepen cooperation in energy, infrastructure, and agro-industrial sectors (ThisDayLive, 2025). The establishment of such platforms marks a strategic evolution in bilateral trade relations from pure commodity exchange toward sustainable economic cooperation. While trade between Nigeria and Poland has steadily expanded, foreign direct investment (FDI) flows remain relatively modest. There are limited large-scale Polish investments in Nigeria, but signs of growing interest are evident. In 2025, Nigeria and Poland signed new bilateral agreements on gas and agriculture, aimed at enhancing energy exports and agricultural technology transfer (Orient Energy Review, 2025). These agreements highlight the growing role of energy cooperation, especially as

Poland diversifies its energy sources in response to the European energy crisis precipitated by the Russia–Ukraine war.

In addition to energy and agriculture, Poland has shown interest in technical education and vocational training initiatives in partnership with Nigerian states such as Nasarawa, where capacity-building projects for scientists and engineers have been launched (Voice of Nigeria, 2025). Such cooperative engagements, though not large in capital value, demonstrate Poland's emphasis on knowledge-based investment and human capacity development rather than traditional extractive investment models.

Nonetheless, Nigeria's regulatory environment, inconsistent infrastructure, and bureaucratic barriers continue to limit foreign investment inflows from Poland and other European countries. Strengthening institutional frameworks and ensuring investment security would be vital in transforming emerging Polish interest into tangible FDI inflows. As the Polish Ambassador to Nigeria recently stated, "Nigeria holds significant potential for Polish investors, especially in renewable energy and agriculture, but predictable regulations and infrastructure are essential for investment confidence" (ThisDayLive, 2025).

Statistical data from the World Bank (2024) and Trading Economics (2025) confirm that trade between the two nations has grown by over 100 percent since 2020, with Nigeria's exports rising from approximately US\$150 million to US\$321 million in four years. This rapid growth demonstrates expanding economic interdependence. However, the quality of trade remains skewed: over 90 percent of Nigeria's exports to Poland are hydrocarbons, while over 80 percent of Poland's exports are manufactured and semi-processed goods (OEC, 2025).

The implication of this imbalance is twofold. First, Nigeria's trade surplus does not translate into industrial or technological advantage, as the country remains an exporter of raw materials. Second, Poland's export structure enables it to capture higher value in the trade relationship, reinforcing its industrial and technological edge. For Nigeria, achieving a more balanced trade partnership would require strategic policies promoting non-oil export growth, value addition, and industrial processing of raw materials.

In conclusion, the trade and investment relations between Nigeria and Poland reveal both growth and asymmetry. Trade volumes have substantially increased, but investment levels remain low and sectorally concentrated. The relationship is still dominated by traditional patterns of North–South trade in which Nigeria is exporting raw materials and

Poland exporting industrial products. Nevertheless, recent developments in bilateral economic forums, energy cooperation, and technical partnerships signal a shift toward a more diversified and mutually beneficial economic engagement. For Nigeria to consolidate these gains, it must strengthen its export diversification strategies, improve investment governance, and create enabling environments for foreign investment. For Poland, continued engagement with Nigeria offers not only market access but also strategic energy and agricultural cooperation within Africa's largest economy.

6. The Strategic Dimensions of Political Cooperation between Nigeria and Poland

The strategic dimensions of political cooperation between Nigeria and Poland have evolved from the Cold War context of ideological diplomacy to the contemporary framework of economic and security-driven engagement. While relations between both states date back to the early 1960s, their political cooperation has gained renewed attention in recent decades due to shifts in global politics, the need for diversified partnerships, and the mutual pursuit of regional stability and economic advancement (Nwokedi, 2019).

Historically, Nigeria–Poland relations were shaped by differing ideological leanings during the Cold War. Poland, being part of the Eastern Bloc under Soviet influence, approached Nigeria with a socialist-leaning diplomatic stance, while Nigeria pursued a non-aligned policy within the context of the Third World movement (Olagunju, 2018). Despite these ideological differences, diplomatic relations were officially established in 1961, signaling a commitment to cooperation in areas such as education, trade, and political consultation. The Polish embassy in Lagos (later relocated to Abuja) and the Nigerian embassy in Warsaw became focal points for strengthening bilateral political dialogue (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

In the post-Cold War period, the strategic orientation of Nigeria–Poland political cooperation shifted toward mutual support in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the European Union–African Union partnership frameworks. Poland, as a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), has leveraged its geopolitical position to promote closer EU–Africa relations, often using Nigeria as a critical entry point into West Africa (Wiśniewski, 2020). Nigeria, on its part, has benefited from Poland's technological and agricultural expertise, while supporting Polish initiatives for global peacekeeping and

counterterrorism operations through joint participation in UN-led missions (Eze, 2021).

A key aspect of their political cooperation lies in development diplomacy. Poland's official development assistance (ODA) to Nigeria has grown steadily since the early 2000s. According to the Polish Development Cooperation Report (2023), Poland allocated over €5.2 million between 2015 and 2022 to support democratic governance, vocational training, and renewable energy projects in Nigeria. These efforts complement Nigeria's own strategic development plans, such as Vision 2030 and the National Development Plan (2021–2025), creating avenues for bilateral policy synchronization (Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2021).

Furthermore, the security dimension of Nigeria–Poland relations has become increasingly important. The rise of global terrorism, migration pressures and energy insecurity have pushed both states to strengthen their political and security dialogues. In 2022, Poland and Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation focusing on cybersecurity, maritime security, and intelligence sharing (Polish MFA, 2022). This development was complemented by Poland's advocacy for Nigeria's inclusion in EU strategic security dialogues on counterterrorism and migration management (Adesina, 2023).

At the strategic economic–political interface, Poland has sought to deepen diplomatic ties through investment diplomacy. The Poland–Africa Economic Forum of 2021 identified Nigeria as one of Poland's top five African partners in trade and political dialogue, accounting for nearly 22% of Poland's total trade volume with Africa, valued at approximately \$580 million (Polish Investment and Trade Agency, 2022). These economic relations reinforce political cooperation, providing a practical platform for high-level visits and the negotiation of bilateral investment agreements.

In terms of soft power diplomacy, Poland has strengthened educational and cultural exchanges with Nigeria. Over 1,200 Nigerian students were studying in Polish universities as of 2023, particularly in science, technology, and medicine (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). These educational linkages contribute to long-term political cooperation by fostering people-to-people ties and mutual understanding between the two societies.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain. Political cooperation has occasionally been hampered by limited institutional follow-up after high-level meetings, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate communication between foreign ministries. Furthermore, Poland's engagement with Nigeria remains overshadowed by larger EU actors

such as France and Germany, which tend to dominate Africa–Europe policy frameworks (Okonkwo, 2021). Addressing these gaps requires a more structured bilateral commission and periodic policy reviews to sustain mutual strategic interests.

In conclusion, Nigeria–Poland relations have transitioned from symbolic Cold War diplomacy to pragmatic political cooperation rooted in economic, security, and development interests. Their partnership reflects the broader reconfiguration of Africa–Europe relations, emphasizing mutual benefit, shared responsibility, and the need for diversified alliances in an evolving international order. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and ensuring consistent political dialogue will be key to deepening this relationship in the coming decade.

7. Nigeria-Poland relations cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy constitutes one of the most subtle yet impactful dimensions of Nigeria–Poland relations. It serves as a bridge between societies, fostering mutual understanding, people-to-people exchanges, and long-term partnerships beyond formal state-to-state diplomacy. While economic and political engagements often dominate the discourse, cultural diplomacy has played a quiet but significant role in deepening bilateral ties between Nigeria and Poland. This essay examines the historical evolution, strategic initiatives, and challenges of cultural diplomacy between both countries, highlighting its contribution to mutual understanding and cooperation.

The origins of cultural diplomacy between Nigeria and Poland can be traced to the early post-independence period in the 1960s, when Nigeria established diplomatic relations with Poland in 1961. During this period, cultural engagement was seen as a tool for projecting national identity and building soft power (Olagunju, 2018). Poland, emerging from a socialist bloc background, promoted educational and cultural exchanges as part of its solidarity with newly independent African nations. Nigerian students were among the early beneficiaries of scholarships to Polish universities under government-to-government educational cooperation programs. These exchanges aimed to cultivate elites who could serve as intermediaries between the two nations, facilitating long-term diplomatic and cultural linkages (Eze, 2021).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cultural diplomacy was reinforced through art, education, and sports. Nigeria's embassies in Eastern Europe, including Warsaw, frequently hosted cultural exhibitions showcasing Nigerian art, music, and

dance, aimed at dispelling stereotypes about Africa and presenting the country as a culturally vibrant and dynamic society (Nwokedi, 2019). Similarly, Poland's artistic exchanges, particularly through film festivals and academic collaborations, introduced Polish literature, theater, and cinema to Nigerian audiences. The establishment of the Polish Cultural Institute as part of broader European outreach in Africa further enhanced opportunities for cross-cultural cooperation (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

A central element of Nigeria–Poland cultural diplomacy lies in educational exchange and academic cooperation. According to UNESCO (2023), over 1,200 Nigerian students are currently enrolled in Polish institutions, particularly in medicine, engineering, and the social sciences. This educational flow is not only economically significant but also symbolically important as it reinforces Poland's growing reputation as an educational hub in Central Europe and provides Nigeria with access to affordable, high-quality higher education. In return, the presence of Nigerian students and professionals in Poland has enriched Polish multiculturalism and contributed to a more inclusive understanding of Africa in European academic spaces (Adesina, 2023).

Beyond education, language and artistic collaboration have become growing aspects of bilateral cultural diplomacy. The growing popularity of Nigerian Afrobeats music and Nollywood films in Poland has created new avenues of cultural connection, facilitated by digital media platforms such as YouTube and Netflix. Polish film festivals have also featured Nigerian productions, while Polish artists and filmmakers have participated in Nigerian cultural festivals and art residencies in Lagos and Abuja (Polish Investment and Trade Agency, 2022). This exchange of artistic expression fosters mutual recognition and provides a foundation for dialogue that transcends political or economic interests.

Cultural diplomacy also intersects with religious and humanitarian cooperation. The Catholic Church, a dominant institution in Poland, has maintained humanitarian and missionary relations with Nigeria, where it supports educational and health initiatives through religious networks (Wiśniewski, 2020). Polish missionaries and NGOs, such as Caritas Polska, operate in various Nigerian states, contributing to social development and reinforcing Poland's image as a compassionate global actor. In turn, Nigeria's diverse religious traditions and interfaith dialogue platforms have provided useful models for Polish policymakers navigating issues of multiculturalism and integration (Okonkwo, 2021).

One of the more recent manifestations of Nigeria–Poland cultural diplomacy is the Poland–

Africa Cultural Exchange Initiative (PACEI), launched in 2021 to promote intercultural dialogue and creative industries partnerships. The initiative supports student mobility, joint film productions, and exhibitions of African art in Polish museums. Nigerian artists, in particular, have been featured in cultural events in Warsaw and Krakow, while Polish cultural delegations have participated in African creative economy forums hosted in Abuja and Lagos (Polish Development Cooperation Report, 2023). These engagements not only expand mutual awareness but also create platforms for investment in the creative sector.

Despite these positive developments, Nigeria–Poland cultural diplomacy faces structural and logistical challenges. Limited funding for cultural programs, bureaucratic hurdles in visa processing, and inadequate institutional coordination between cultural ministries have constrained the scale and continuity of engagement. Moreover, cultural diplomacy has often been overshadowed by trade and security interests in bilateral dialogue, reducing its potential as a long-term strategic tool of influence (Eze, 2021). To address these issues, scholars suggest the need for a Nigeria–Poland Cultural Cooperation Agreement that formalizes exchange mechanisms, establishes joint cultural funds, and promotes the mobility of artists and students (Nwokedi, 2019).

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy remains a vital component of Nigeria–Poland relations, contributing to soft power accumulation, intercultural empathy, and societal development. As both countries continue to navigate the complexities of globalization, cultural diplomacy offers a means to humanize their partnership by grounding it in shared values of creativity, education, and solidarity. Strengthening institutional support for cultural initiatives, investing in public diplomacy, and expanding academic and media collaboration will be essential to sustain and deepen this vital dimension of their bilateral relations.

8. Nigeria-Poland relations on energy, migration and security cooperation

The strategic dimensions of political cooperation between Nigeria and Poland have evolved from the Cold War context of ideological diplomacy to the contemporary framework of economic and security-driven engagement. While relations between both states date back to the early 1960s, their political cooperation has gained renewed attention in recent decades due to shifts in global politics, the need for diversified partnerships, and the mutual pursuit of

regional stability and economic advancement (Nwokedi, 2019).

Historically, Nigeria–Poland relations were shaped by differing ideological leanings during the Cold War. Poland, being part of the Eastern Bloc under Soviet influence, approached Nigeria with a socialist-leaning diplomatic stance, while Nigeria pursued a non-aligned policy within the context of the Third World movement (Olagunju, 2018). Despite these ideological differences, diplomatic relations were officially established in 1961, signaling a commitment to cooperation in areas such as education, trade, and political consultation. The Polish embassy in Lagos (later relocated to Abuja) and the Nigerian embassy in Warsaw became focal points for strengthening bilateral political dialogue (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

In the post-Cold War period, the strategic orientation of Nigeria–Poland political cooperation shifted toward mutual support in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the European Union–African Union partnership frameworks. Poland, as a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), has leveraged its geopolitical position to promote closer EU–Africa relations, often using Nigeria as a critical entry point into West Africa (Wiśniewski, 2020). Nigeria, on its part, has benefited from Poland’s technological and agricultural expertise, while supporting Polish initiatives for global peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations through joint participation in UN-led missions (Eze, 2021).

A key aspect of their political cooperation lies in development diplomacy. Poland’s official development assistance (ODA) to Nigeria has grown steadily since the early 2000s. According to the Polish Development Cooperation Report (2023), Poland allocated over €5.2 million between 2015 and 2022 to support democratic governance, vocational training, and renewable energy projects in Nigeria. These efforts complement Nigeria’s own strategic development plans such as Vision 2030 and the National Development Plan (2021–2025), creating avenues for bilateral policy synchronization (Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2021).

Furthermore, the security dimension of Nigeria–Poland relations has become increasingly important. The rise of global terrorism, migration pressures and energy insecurity has pushed both states to strengthen their political and security dialogues. In 2022, Poland and Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation focusing on cybersecurity, maritime security, and intelligence sharing (Polish MFA, 2022). This development was complemented by Poland’s advocacy for Nigeria’s

inclusion in EU strategic security dialogues on counterterrorism and migration management (Adesina, 2023).

At the strategic economic–political interface, Poland has sought to deepen diplomatic ties through investment diplomacy. The Poland–Africa Economic Forum of 2021 identified Nigeria as one of Poland’s top five African partners in trade and political dialogue, accounting for nearly 22% of Poland’s total trade volume with Africa, valued at approximately \$580 million (Polish Investment and Trade Agency, 2022). These economic relations reinforce political cooperation, providing a practical platform for high-level visits and the negotiation of bilateral investment agreements. In terms of soft power diplomacy, Poland has strengthened educational and cultural exchanges with Nigeria. Over 1,200 Nigerian students were studying in Polish universities as of 2023, particularly in science, technology, and medicine (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). These educational linkages contribute to long-term political cooperation by fostering people-to-people ties and mutual understanding between the two societies.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain. Political cooperation has occasionally been hampered by limited institutional follow-up after high-level meetings, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate communication between foreign ministries. Furthermore, Poland’s engagement with Nigeria remains overshadowed by larger EU actors such as France and Germany, which tend to dominate Africa–Europe policy frameworks (Okonkwo, 2021). Addressing these gaps requires a more structured bilateral commission and periodic policy reviews to sustain mutual strategic interests.

In conclusion, Nigeria–Poland relations have transitioned from symbolic Cold War diplomacy to pragmatic political cooperation rooted in economic, security, and development interests. Their partnership reflects the broader reconfiguration of Africa–Europe relations, emphasizing mutual benefit, shared responsibility, and the need for diversified alliances in an evolving international order. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and ensuring consistent political dialogue will be key to deepening this relationship in the coming decade.

The relationship between Nigeria and Poland has evolved considerably over the past six decades, expanding from initial diplomatic exchanges in the 1960s to broader cooperation across multiple strategic sectors. Among these, energy, migration, and security cooperation have become central pillars of bilateral relations, reflecting the growing convergence of interests between Africa’s most

populous country and one of Central Europe’s most dynamic economies. These sectors have gained prominence due to global energy transitions, increased migration flows, and rising concerns over transnational security threats. This essay examines the evolution, dynamics, and implications of Nigeria–Poland cooperation in energy, migration, and security, drawing on recent data and policy trends.

Energy constitutes one of the most significant components of Nigeria–Poland relations. As a country with vast hydrocarbon reserves, Nigeria offers a reliable source of natural gas and crude oil, which aligns with Poland’s energy diversification strategy. Poland has historically depended heavily on Russian energy supplies, but the geopolitical crisis following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accelerated Warsaw’s efforts to seek alternative energy partners (Polish Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2023). Nigeria, on the other hand, seeks to expand its energy export markets and attract foreign investment to modernize its energy infrastructure.

In 2022, Poland imported approximately 60% of its natural gas from Russia, but following the Russian gas embargo, it began sourcing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from countries such as Qatar, the United States, and increasingly from African states, including Nigeria (International Energy Agency, 2023). Nigeria, as Africa’s largest LNG producer, has explored partnerships with European countries through the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) and the Nigerian LNG (NLNG) consortium. In 2023, the Nigerian government held exploratory talks with Polish energy companies regarding LNG exports to Poland’s Świnoujście LNG terminal, with the aim of strengthening Europe–Africa energy connectivity (Nwokedi, 2023).

Furthermore, renewable energy has emerged as a potential area of cooperation. Poland’s growing renewable energy sector particularly in solar and wind power offers opportunities for technology transfer to Nigeria, which is working to expand access to clean and sustainable energy in rural areas. The Nigeria–Poland Energy Forum, organized in Warsaw in 2022, highlighted investment prospects in solar technology and natural gas infrastructure, reflecting a shift from traditional extractive energy relations to collaborative clean energy partnerships (Polish Investment and Trade Agency, 2022).

Migration represents another significant area of Nigeria–Poland relations, marked by growing academic, labor, and humanitarian dimensions. In recent years, the number of Nigerian migrants in Poland has increased substantially due to educational and professional opportunities. According to the UN

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2022), over 6,000 Nigerians reside in Poland, with a majority being students or skilled workers. The steady influx of Nigerian students into Polish universities particularly in medical and engineering disciplines has strengthened educational ties and fostered cross-cultural understanding.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine had a direct impact on migration dynamics between Nigeria and Poland. Thousands of Nigerian students who were studying in Ukrainian universities were evacuated to neighboring Poland during the crisis. The Polish government, in cooperation with Nigerian authorities and humanitarian agencies, facilitated temporary shelter, visas, and educational transitions for displaced Nigerian students (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). This humanitarian gesture not only highlighted Poland's commitment to international solidarity but also strengthened bilateral trust and cooperation on migration governance.

At the institutional level, both countries have expressed interest in formalizing migration partnerships to promote legal and safe migration pathways, prevent human trafficking, and enhance labor mobility. The Nigerian Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) and Poland's Ministry of Family and Social Policy have discussed frameworks for recognizing Nigerian professional qualifications in Poland and supporting remittance-driven development projects in Nigeria (Eze, 2023). Despite these advances, migration remains a sensitive issue, with challenges related to visa restrictions, labor market integration, and xenophobia requiring continuous diplomatic engagement.

Security cooperation between Nigeria and Poland has also gained increasing relevance in the context of global terrorism, maritime insecurity, and cyber threats. Both countries share mutual interests in maintaining international peace and stability. Poland, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), brings institutional experience and technological expertise to global counterterrorism efforts, while Nigeria, as a key regional power in Africa, plays a central role in peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations across the continent.

Poland's security cooperation with Nigeria has primarily focused on defense training, arms supply, and intelligence sharing. In 2018, the Polish government signed a defense cooperation agreement with Nigeria to support the modernization of the Nigerian Armed Forces through capacity-building programs and the provision of light military equipment (Polish Defence Industry Report,

2019). Polish defense contractors, such as WB Group, have supplied Nigeria with communication and surveillance systems to enhance border security and counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad Basin (Adebayo, 2021).

Maritime security is another domain of collaboration, particularly given Nigeria's strategic importance in the Gulf of Guinea, one of the world's most piracy-prone regions. Poland, which has a strong maritime industry, has partnered with Nigeria in naval training programs and in the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, aimed at combating piracy and illegal fishing (International Maritime Bureau, 2022). These initiatives reflect Poland's growing role as an EU representative in supporting Africa's maritime security frameworks.

Cybersecurity and counterterrorism have also emerged as recent priorities in bilateral discussions. The increasing digitization of state infrastructure and economic systems in both countries has necessitated cooperation on cyber defense. In 2023, Nigeria and Poland participated in a joint cybersecurity workshop under the EU–Africa Digital Security Partnership, aimed at improving early warning systems, cyber incident management, and protection of critical national infrastructure (European Commission, 2023).

The intersection of energy, migration, and security cooperation underscores the multidimensional nature of Nigeria–Poland relations. While economic interests continue to drive engagement, soft power and security considerations increasingly shape policy outcomes. Energy cooperation holds immense potential for diversifying Poland's energy supply and boosting Nigeria's export revenues. Migration provides a human-centered dimension that strengthens societal links, while security cooperation contributes to global peace and capacity-building.

However, several challenges persist. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak institutional frameworks, and fluctuating policy priorities in both countries have often hindered sustained cooperation. Additionally, asymmetries in technological capabilities and economic power create dependency patterns that may limit Nigeria's leverage in bilateral engagements. To overcome these, both nations need to institutionalize their partnerships through formal bilateral commissions, encourage private sector participation, and promote people-to-people exchanges to complement state-led initiatives.

In conclusion, Nigeria–Poland relations in the domains of energy, migration, and security reflect an evolving partnership shaped by shared interests and

mutual challenges. The diversification of Poland's global partnerships and Nigeria's search for credible development allies provide a conducive environment for expanding collaboration. By deepening cooperation in these strategic sectors, both countries can not only enhance their bilateral relations but also contribute to broader international goals of sustainable development, human security, and global stability.

9. Conclusions

Nigeria–Poland relations represent a multidimensional partnership anchored on shared interests in trade, energy, education, migration management, and security cooperation. Over the years, both countries have deepened bilateral engagement through diplomatic missions, economic forums, and strategic agreements that reflect the evolving global order. Trade and investment patterns show a gradual expansion in agricultural exports, manufactured goods, and technological exchange, while political cooperation underscores mutual support for peace, democracy, and regional stability. Culturally, initiatives in education and cultural diplomacy have enhanced people-to-people connections and strengthened mutual understanding, while cooperation in energy, migration, and security has underscored the strategic nature of the relationship. Despite the progress recorded, challenges such as limited private sector participation, bureaucratic hurdles, and weak

institutional linkages persist. Overall, Nigeria–Poland relations have transitioned from symbolic diplomatic ties to a more pragmatic and diversified partnership. Sustained dialogue, policy reforms, and investment-driven cooperation will remain essential for realizing the full potential of this bilateral relationship in promoting economic growth, technological innovation, and global security collaboration in the coming decades.

10. Recommendations

- a. Nigeria and Poland should strengthen trade diplomacy by establishing a bilateral economic commission to expand investment opportunities and remove trade barriers.
- b. Both countries should deepen energy cooperation through joint ventures in renewable energy, oil, and gas exploration to ensure sustainable energy security.
- c. Educational and cultural exchange programs should be expanded to promote mutual understanding, academic collaboration, and cultural diplomacy.
- d. Nigeria and Poland should enhance security cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism, border management, and cybersecurity, through information sharing and joint training.
- e. Both governments should prioritize migration management agreements that facilitate legal migration, protect migrant rights, and curb irregular migration flows.

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