



**A THESIS**

**ON**

**"The Impact of Multi-Ethnicity on Aid Effectiveness: A Case Study of An Infrastructure Project in Nigeria"**

**PRESENTED TO**

**CERIS-ULB DIPLOMATIC SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS**

**BY**

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF**

**EXECUTIVE MASTER'S IN GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES**

**2024/2025**

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**"The Impact of Multi-Ethnicity on Aid Effectiveness:  
A Case Study of An Infrastructure Project in  
Nigeria"**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the intersection of Nigeria's multi-ethnic landscape and the implementation of foreign aid, using the Kaduna–Abuja railway project as a focal case. The railway has notably enhanced regional mobility by providing a safer and more efficient alternative to the heavily trafficked Abuja–Kaduna highway, which had gained notoriety for kidnappings and armed violence (Alqali, 2018). Through this lens, the research explores how ethnic diversity and regional dynamics shape both the planning and public perception of aid-supported infrastructure initiatives.

Drawing on policy document reviews and qualitative interviews with government officials, community leaders, and development practitioners, the findings reveal that while foreign aid is formally presented as a neutral instrument for national progress, its execution often reflects ethno-political interests. Respondents across multiple regions highlighted concerns that infrastructure siting and implementation tend to favour territories aligned with the ruling elite—particularly in the North—thus perpetuating perceptions of exclusion and marginalization among Southern communities.

The study also reveals that political transitions, weak institutional safeguards, and ambiguous policy frameworks significantly hinder the continuity and inclusiveness of aid-funded projects. The temporary suspension of the Kaduna–Abuja railway following the 2015 general elections underscores the vulnerability of infrastructural development to political turnover. Many Nigerians express scepticism about the neutrality of foreign aid, believing it to be complicit in reinforcing existing regional inequalities. This research contributes to the broader aid effectiveness discourse by showing how ethnic fragmentation, when coupled with financial mismanagement and limited stakeholder engagement, can erode the developmental impact of foreign assistance. It concludes with a call for institutional reforms that prioritize equity, transparency, and national cohesion in the deployment of aid-funded infrastructure.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Corruption, inadequate implementation processes, and lack of goodwill among leaders have been enumerated as possible explanations for why aid effectiveness in Nigeria has not been upheld (e.g., Nwosu, 2018; Eze & Madichie, 2020; Ofoma, 2023). These same factors have been used in studies that have supported aid effectiveness (e.g., Fasanya & Onakoya, 2012; Olanrele and Ibrahim, 2015; Bankole, 2024; Ugwuoke, 2024). However, a factor that has often been overlooked and underemphasized and that holds the key to explaining the impact of aid in Nigeria is multi-ethnicity. Even though it has been

mentioned in Obire & Chiemeké (2025) and Adetiba & Rahim (2012), it has been eclipsed by social factors such as social affiliations, religious persuasion, gender-based issues, issues on population distribution, and ongoing cultural structure.

Nigeria's development trajectory has long been shaped by deep-seated regional disparities, with transport infrastructure serving as both a reflection and a driver of these imbalances. From the colonial period through post-independence planning, infrastructure investments have disproportionately favored certain regions, particularly the South-West and urban centers like Lagos and Abuja, while vast areas of the North and South-East remain under-connected. This uneven distribution of roads, railways, and ports has created a geography of exclusion, where access to markets, services, and economic opportunities is largely determined by location. As Doran (2022) observes, infrastructure in Nigeria has historically mirrored the political economy of power, reinforcing spatial inequalities rather than correcting them. Lagos and its satellite towns have received a fair share of road infrastructure because it is the commercial nerve centre of the country, and the South-South too has received adequate attention in terms of road infrastructure because of oil exploration activities taking place.

The consequences of this imbalance are far-reaching. Regions with robust transport networks, such as the South-South and the South-West, have attracted more investment, experienced faster urbanization, and enjoyed greater access to public services. In contrast, underserved areas face limited mobility, higher trade costs, and restricted access to healthcare, education, and employment. These disparities have not only deepened economic inequality but also fueled perceptions of marginalization and political discontent. Oyeleye and Adeniji (2014) argue that such regional imbalances are rooted in both natural endowments and institutional biases, including lopsided policy implementation and uneven federal investment. While recent efforts, such as the expansion of the national rail network, aim to bridge these gaps, they often fall short due to inconsistent planning, politicized project siting, and weak oversight. Transport infrastructure thus remains a powerful lens through which Nigeria's uneven development can be understood and addressed.

The author seeks to explore the specific dynamics of multi-ethnicity that have impacted aid-driven development programs in Nigeria. According to a report published by Doris Dokua Sasu on Statista (Dec 12, 2022), as of 2018, the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Fulani, and over 250 dialects are spoken across the country. This multi-ethnic state comes with a handful of differences in socio-political ideologies and affiliations that have undermined ethnic diversity and national integration and impacted developmental efforts (Adetiba, 2019). There have been a lot of studies on different aspects of this situation and suggestions on the way forward (Duru et al., 2020; Sennuga, 2021; Akame & Mavrotas, 2024; Ugwuoke, 2024; Muhammad, 2025). However, they have focused more on ethnic tension (division) and neglected other salient aspects.

Although multi-ethnicity has been mentioned in discussions and research on aid ineffectiveness, it has been eclipsed by ethnic tension that arises as a result of social factors such as social affiliations, religious persuasion, gender-based issues, issues on population distribution, and ongoing cultural structure. This study investigates the complex relationship between Nigeria's multi-ethnic configuration and the effectiveness of foreign aid in facilitating equitable and sustainable development. Using the Kaduna–Abuja railway project as a case study, the research explores how ethnic diversity intersects with governance structures, regional favouritism, and policy implementation to either enhance or hinder the impact of foreign-funded infrastructure programs. With over 250 ethnic groups spread unevenly across six geopolitical zones, Nigeria presents a compelling context in which to assess whether and how ethnic plurality shapes the allocation, continuity, and public reception of aid-supported initiatives.

This study, therefore, has analyzed existing aid policies and their inclusivity towards different ethnic groups in Nigeria and found out the extent of their impact. It contributes to the broader discourse on development aid by showing that ethnic fragmentation, when compounded by institutional weakness and politicized governance, can severely constrain the transformative potential of foreign assistance. It calls for a rethinking of aid frameworks and national development policy in ethnically diverse states. Key recommendations include establishing legally binding infrastructure equity frameworks, codifying project continuity mechanisms, mandating stakeholder participation, and enhancing financial oversight. Ultimately, the study argues that aid effectiveness in Nigeria will depend not only on external resources but also on internal reforms that prioritize national cohesion over ethnic patronage and political expediency. This research could provide useful insights into designing more inclusive and effective aid strategies that consider the diverse ethnic landscape of Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

The research attempted to answer the question, "How has multi-ethnicity impacted developmental programs in Nigeria?". It allowed us to take a look at the intersection of ethnicity and aid effectiveness and how a disregard for multi-ethnic dynamics might have influenced the outcomes of development programs. The following research questions were articulated as the guide for this study;

- a. How inclusive are current aid policies towards different ethnic groups in Nigeria?
- b. What are the impacts of these policies on the success of development programs?

The Abuja-Kaduna Railway Project serves as a case study for exploring the relationship between multi-ethnicity and aid effectiveness in Nigeria's development programs. As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the railway was financed through a \$500 million concessional loan from China Exim Bank. Located in what is geographically considered Northern Nigeria, and carved out of from parts of Niger, Kogi and Nasarawa states in 1976, all of which are in Northern Nigeria, the project provides a platform

to examine whether its benefits are equitably distributed across ethnic groups or if patterns of favouritism or exclusion exist. Additionally, it offers insights into how foreign aid interacts with local ethnic considerations, particularly in budget allocations, land acquisition, and employment opportunities. Abuja is considered to be a neutral territory with no ethnic group dominating, but its geographical location makes it an interesting area for this study. By analyzing this project, the study aims to uncover how ethnic affiliations influence decision-making, especially as various ethnic groups agitate for cessation, and also to assess broader implications for infrastructure development and aid effectiveness in Nigeria.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In diverse societies such as Nigeria and Canada, ethnic dynamics influence policy implementation, resource management, politics, and communal engagement. Academics have argued that embracing cultural plurality fosters social cohesion and innovation that enhances program outcomes. However, challenges such as ethnic tension, unequal access to opportunities, and difficulties establishing common ground can hinder progress, even when these policies are well-articulated. This literature review, through a synthesis of insights from various case studies and theoretical and empirical findings, examines the existing research on the intersection of multiethnicity and aid-sponsored developmental programs in Nigeria, analyzing the impact of multiethnic dynamics. The inclusion criteria were that the papers emphasized the importance of ethnophobia and ethnic politics in National development.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To understand Nigeria's ethnic dynamics and their impact on aid-sponsored development programs, we shall utilise three theories: Ethnic Identity theory, Acculturation theory, and Activity System Theory (AST).

The three theories collectively offer an integrated perspective on how identity, cultural adaptation, and systemic interactions shape human behaviour and development. Ethnic identity focuses on how individuals connect with their ethnic groups, shaping both personal and collective identities. According to Epstein and Cohen (2015), it provides a theoretical basis for understanding the role of ethnic identity in shaping social and economic outcomes. Acculturation Theory examines the processes through which groups or individuals adapt to new cultural environments, steering paths such as assimilation, integration, or separation. It examines acculturation processes, emphasizing the interaction between migrants and dominant norms (Klakla, 2024). Activity System Theory stresses the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environment, paying attention to how tools, rules, and community influence actions and growth.

These theories emphasize the complex interplay between individual identity, cultural transition, and systemic influences. In summary, Ethnic Identity Theory lays the foundation of belonging, Acculturation Theory explores how that identity evolves in diverse contexts, and Activity System Theory situates this evolution within broader systemic structures. This synthesis defines the mutual influence of personal identity, cultural adaptation, and systemic framework in shaping development.

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of aid-driven programs in fostering the economic development of various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. While many have touched on the role of multiethnicity, only a limited number have delved into this aspect in depth, leaving it inadequately explored.

Research has shown that multiethnic dynamics significantly influence the outcomes of aid-sponsored development programs in multiethnic states such as Nigeria, within the context of its complex political environment, where an interplay exists between ethnic diversity, political representation, and resource allocation. This literature review, by analyzing patterns of resource allocation, governance structures, and local responses to aid interventions, aims to provide insight into the extent to which ethnic dynamics facilitate or hinder development efforts, contributing to broader discussions on equitable policy implementation and sustainable development.

### Aid for Nigeria

Many countries in the Global South, including Nigeria, have relied on foreign aid as a means of fostering economic growth, often measured by increases in GDP. Beyond economic expansion, foreign aid serves as a critical financial resource for broader development initiatives, including poverty reduction, social advancement, and improved living standards. Ezeibe (2021) describes development as a continuous transition from poverty, underdevelopment, and insecurity to a state of stability, prosperity, and overall well-being. Meanwhile, ethnicity refers to an individual's connection to a group based on shared history, cultural beliefs, language, religion, or geographic location. In Nigeria, disparities in resource allocation and inclusivity have remained significant challenges. Studies such as Ikubor (2020) and Oyadeyi (2023) have explored the complex relationship between economic growth and broader development, while research on the impact of foreign aid, such as Nwosu (2018), has yielded mixed and inconclusive findings, highlighting the complexities surrounding aid effectiveness in the Nigerian context.

Duru et al. (2020) analyzed the relationship between foreign aid and economic growth in Nigeria from 1984 to 2017, using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Bound method for cointegration. Their study revealed that the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting economic growth is heavily dependent on the

stability of the macroeconomic policy environment. They observed that Nigeria's macroeconomic policy remains unstable, leading to the conclusion that foreign aid does not significantly contribute to economic growth in the long run. The authors attributed this instability to ethnic conflicts, which drive political instability and hinder economic progress, ultimately obstructing development. They further noted that even an improvement in governance quality would not significantly enhance economic growth in such an unstable environment.

#### Economic Effects of Aid in General

Akame and Mavrotas (2024) analyzed the impact of different types of donor aid on economic growth across a panel of 39 sub-Saharan African nations between 2002 and 2020. Using a mixed research method, their findings indicate that while total aid generally supports economic growth in the region, its effectiveness varies depending on the aid modality and the sectors where it is directed. Project aid and technical assistance contribute positively to growth, whereas budget support and humanitarian aid tend to have a counterproductive effect. Furthermore, aid allocated to social infrastructure and environmental protection consistently fosters economic development, while economic infrastructure aid exhibits a more unpredictable and inconsistent influence. Orji et al. (2024) caution that the uneven impact of aid on economic growth stems from the manipulation of ethnicity for political advantage, where dominant ethnic groups marginalize minorities through policies favoring majority interests. As a result, reliance on foreign aid to bridge the saving-investment gap necessary for sustainable growth and development remains ineffective.

Using an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model spanning 1981 to 2022, Ugwuoke (2024) investigated the impact of foreign direct investments (FDI), viewed as an agent of foreign aid, along with other critical and political variables, on Nigeria's economic development. The findings revealed that FDI has a positive and significant influence on economic growth, and greater openness to international markets enhances the developmental benefits derived from foreign aid. However, the study also highlighted that governance deficiencies and macroeconomic instability resulting from the detrimental role of political instability, attributed to ethnic, political, and religious affiliations, obstruct efforts to fully leverage the advantages of foreign aid and foster economic stability.

Falana (2017) utilized the Autoregressive Distributed Lag model to examine the effects of foreign aid on economic growth and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The findings, consistent with those of Duru et al. (2020), revealed that while foreign aid can stimulate economic growth in the short term by financing infrastructure, social programs, and investments, its long-term effects are less positive. Over time, reliance on external aid fosters dependency, weakens domestic institutions, reduces incentives for local economic development, and introduces structural vulnerabilities, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of aid. In Nigeria, corruption, rooted in ethnic favouritism and exclusion, remains a

significant barrier to maximizing the benefits of foreign aid. Falana emphasized that the quality of governance and institutions plays a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of economic policies and development efforts. The study also recommended that the government prioritize strengthening anticorruption measures, among other interventions, to improve the impact of foreign aid and promote sustainable development.

Sennuga et al. (2021) employed Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis to examine the relationship between foreign aid and economic growth in Nigeria. They developed three hypotheses to explore why Nigeria's growth and development index remains low despite receiving significant amounts of aid, leading to a reliance on external assistance. Their findings highlighted that failed government institutions and widespread corruption have prevented foreign aid from translating into proportional economic development.

### Ethnic Discrimination and Politics

Ethnic discrimination and political divisions have been deeply rooted in Nigeria, dating back to pre-independence times. Coleman (1958) highlighted the persistent divide between the Southern provinces and the Muslim populations of the North, who remained isolated due to a policy of controlled acculturation. This historical pattern continues to shape identity formation, where ethnic affiliation often overshadows national identity (Tuki, 2024). Research suggests that Igbo individuals tend to prioritize their ethnic identity, whereas Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani groups identify more strongly with national identity. Additionally, Nigerians who have experienced ethnic discrimination are less inclined to embrace national identity, further reinforcing ethnic affiliation as their dominant identity.

This ethnic divide extends into Nigeria's political system, where regionalism and favoritism have shaped governance since independence. Collier (2009, p. 52) noted that political leaders, focused on regional loyalties, prioritized the interests of their supporters over the broader national needs, neglecting the principle that nation-building must precede state-building. Furthermore, Diamond (1988, cited by Tuki, 2024) observed that dominant political parties punished opposition supporters by withholding infrastructure and essential services, using resource distribution as a political tool. These practices have reinforced ethnic divisions in Nigeria's governance, affecting aid effectiveness and equitable development across regions.

Robinson (2016) examined the relationship between ethnic diversity at both the national and local levels and the extent to which coethnics are trusted more than non-coethnics in African countries. Using public opinion data from 16 African nations, the study found that, in line with conflict theory, countries with high ethnic diversity generally exhibit lower levels of interethnic trust. However, within individual countries, a seemingly contradictory pattern emerges: local ethnic diversity and integration are associated with higher interethnic trust. When both national and district-level diversity are analyzed

together in a multi-level model, the findings suggest that district-level diversity moderates the impact of national ethnic diversity on ethnocentric trust, shaping how trust dynamics unfold across different regions.

This trend indicates that the negative effects of national ethnic diversity on group-based trust are primarily driven by individuals living in ethnically homogeneous districts. As a result, a country's diversity only undermines trust when ethnic groups are segregated into distinct, homogeneous regions. Robinson (2016) proposed that this pattern may stem from the interaction between national politics and local realities. In Africa, national-level political competition often incentivizes elites to exploit ethnic divisions, fostering prejudices and weakening interethnic trust. As ethnic diversity increases, more groups compete for political and economic resources, intensifying ethnic-based appeals and reinforcing conflict theory's predictions. The extent to which citizens are influenced by the politicization of ethnic differences depends on their personal experiences with interethnic interactions; those who frequently engage with individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds may be less susceptible to ethnic-based political narratives, while those with limited exposure may be more vulnerable to such influences.

Berlin et al. (2022) examined how aid-receiving governments strategically allocate aid resources to advance political interests, particularly when they hold significant geopolitical importance to major donors. The study focused on countries serving as non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where government leaders tend to distribute aid-funded projects within subnational regions in ways that maximize political gain rather than national welfare. The researchers utilized geo-coded data on World Bank aid project placements to assess subnational aid allocation, given its role as the largest multilateral agency. The findings revealed that recipient governments receive increased World Bank aid during their tenure as non-permanent UNSC members, with a disproportionate share of resources directed toward regions dominated by the leader's ethnic group during those periods.

Hodler and Knight (2011) examined data from 114 countries between 1962 to 2001, to test the hypothesis that foreign aid tends to enhance economic growth in ethnically homogenous countries, but its effectiveness diminishes as ethnic diversity increases. The authors examine the impact of foreign aid on economic growth alongside its interaction with ethnic fractionalization, which they describe as an indicator of the number of competing groups within a society. Findings revealed that in at least half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, high levels of ethnic fractionalization hinder the positive effects of foreign aid on economic growth. This occurs because greater ethnic diversity often leads to rent-seeking competition for aid inflows, which undermines economic progress by encouraging ineffective policies, weakening institutions, and promoting poor governance. Moreover, foreign aid tends to be more effective in ethnically homogenous countries, but its ability to drive economic growth declines as ethnic fractionalization increases. The researchers assert that in highly fractionalized countries, unrestricted aid

flows without strict conditions and oversight can be more detrimental than beneficial. Therefore, policy considerations should prioritize the extent to which different groups within a country are integrated.

Hodler and Raschky (2010) explored whether foreign aid fosters favoritism across personal, regional, and ethnic lines by analyzing nighttime light data from 22,850 regions across 91 aid-recipient countries. Their research revealed that foreign aid promotes favoritism in countries with weak political institutions, particularly in regions linked to political leaders, where aid is often used for consumption rather than infrastructure investment. The phenomenon is more pronounced in ethnically fragmented nations, authoritarian regimes, and former communist states, while robust political institutions appear less effective in curbing such biases in diverse countries. Ultimately, the authors highlight the pivotal role of political leaders in determining foreign aid allocation over regional characteristics.

Burgess et al. (2009) examined whether African leaders exhibit ethnic favoritism in public investment by analyzing road construction in Kenya between 1961 and 1992, an area where the World Bank spends almost a quarter of its resources. Using detailed district-level GIS datasets from historical maps, the study explored how political changes influence road placement. The findings showed that Kenyan presidents allocate more paved roads to co-ethnic districts, aligning with the political patronage literature, and also favor their home regions and reward non co-ethnic allies. The study concluded that political economy factors significantly explain the distribution of paved roads in Kenya.

Tawiah and Karungi (2020) investigated the role of political orientation in shaping foreign aid effectiveness in Africa, using data from 16 countries over 21 years. Their study revealed that political leaders often redirect aid to projects aligned with their ideological commitments, whether socialist or capitalist, regardless of aid conditionalities. Through regression analysis, they found that foreign aid positively influences economic growth and development across most African nations, irrespective of the ruling government's political ideology. However, the utilization of aid varies under different regimes, with political parties prioritizing projects that align with their agendas. Despite its benefits, the substantial flow of aid to Africa has yet to reach its full potential, underscoring the importance of political orientation in debates on aid effectiveness.

#### Unravelling Nigeria's Complex Realities

Similarly, Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014) argued that government institutions have been dominated by ethnic politics, undermining socio-economic and political integration in Nigeria. Policies such as the federal character, quota system, catchment areas, and the designation of educationally disadvantaged states, originally designed to unify the nation and promote development, have failed to resolve the majority-minority dichotomy in political appointments. Instead, as Uroh (2003, cited by Adeoti & Olaniyan, 2014) observed, these measures have encouraged mediocrity by prioritizing political or ethnic affiliations and favoritism over professional competence in various fields.

Yakubu (2017) explained that the Federal Character system was introduced by political leaders as a constitutional mechanism to promote national development. Its primary objective was to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources, political positions, wealth, and other national assets across ethnic groups, driven by the aspiration for inclusive development. This framework suggests a probable cause-and-effect relationship among these key variables. However, the Federal Character Principle (FCP) has also revealed the sectional biases and favoritism of the ruling elite in appointing individuals to key positions, while perpetuating a recurring cycle of reappointing politicians, ex-military personnel, and elder statesmen. This pattern has not only hindered developmental progress but has also resulted in aid-sponsored initiatives being disproportionately directed toward specific regions. Although military regimes, often characterized by authoritarian governance and policies misaligned with public preferences, bear responsibility for this trend, democratic administrations have done little to challenge or reform the entrenched system. Recognizing the perspectives of Wilfred and Ukpere (2012), Okolo (2014), and Olagunju (1987), Yakubu argues that ethnic affiliation remains a significant factor influencing the allocation of national resources by political leaders.

The federal character principle in Nigeria is a constitutional mandate aimed at ensuring equitable representation of the country's diverse ethnic, regional, and religious groups in public institutions and governance. Introduced formally in the 1979 Constitution and reaffirmed in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, it seeks to prevent dominance by any single group and promote national unity. The principle guides appointments, recruitment, and resource distribution across federal agencies, aiming to foster inclusion and a sense of belonging among all citizens. However, critics argue it sometimes compromises meritocracy and efficiency in public service delivery (Doran, 2022; Oyeleye & Adeniji, 2014). According to section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution, it automatically extends to all foreign aid programs in areas of staffing, project siting, and resource allocation.

Obire and Chiemeké (2025), using a historical framework based on primordialism and instrumentalism theories, identified Nigeria's ethnic complexities as significant barriers to economic and developmental progress. While their study does not directly address foreign aid, they argue that ethnic politics prioritizes ethnic affiliation over national interests, ultimately obstructing development. They advocate for a shift away from ethnic-driven policies toward genuine federalism, which they see as essential for sustainable national progress. Similarly, Adetiba and Rahim (2012) examined the relationship between ethnicity, nationality, and development, noting that ethnic exclusivism can hinder socio-political and economic advancement in multi-ethnic states. Although their study does not focus on foreign aid, they emphasize that national development depends on fostering harmonious relations among ethnic groups, minimizing conflicts over resource distribution, and promoting political stability and economic productivity. They further contend that recognizing all ethnic groups as integral to a unified nationality can mitigate the divisive effects of ethnic divisions. Building on this perspective, Adetiba (2019) employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the consequences of ethnic politics

in Nigeria's development. Using indices of ethnic schism, the study highlights how regional politics, driven by ethnophobia, have negatively affected Nigeria's socio-economic and political landscape. The author stresses that dismissing the impact of ethnicity on Nigeria's political and economic development would be misleading, as ethnic politics has contributed to national fragmentation, positioning the Hausa and Fulanis, Yorubas, and Igbos as the dominant groups, significantly shaping the nature and intensity of ethnic conflicts in the country.

In conclusion, this review highlights the critical influence of multiethnicity on the effectiveness of aid-sponsored development programs, showing how ethnic affiliations shape political dynamics and resource allocation in aid-recipient nations. Empirical evidence reveals that ethnic favoritism, driven by leaders leveraging ethnic ties to consolidate power, often leads to the misallocation of aid resources, undermining equitable development goals. Aid programs are particularly vulnerable to these biases, as resources intended for national welfare are diverted to regions associated with the ruling elite's ethnicity. In Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria, the challenges facing aid programs are compounded by corruption, weak government structures, and compromises in the implementation stages. However, the underexplored impact of multiethnic dynamics driving political biases emerges as a significant factor that hampers national integration, demanding greater attention and policy intervention.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Case Study Analysis**

#### Abuja-Kaduna Railway Project

The Abuja Rail Mass Transit project was financed through a loan from the Chinese government and executed by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC). Originally conceived during General Sani Abacha's military regime, the project gained political traction under President Olusegun Obasanjo in the early 2000s and was formally approved in 2006 as part of a China–Nigeria cooperation framework (Durosinmi, 2024). Construction began in 2011 during President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, with CCECC contracted under an Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) model, funded jointly by Chinese loans and Nigerian government contributions (CCECC Nigeria Ltd., 2022; Doran, 2022). CCECC Nigeria Ltd., established in 1996 and headquartered in Abuja, led implementation with a localization strategy that reportedly maintained a 10:1 Nigerian-to-Chinese workforce ratio, creating thousands of jobs and bolstering domestic capacity (Oyeleye & Adeniji, 2014). Though Nigerian subcontractors were not publicly identified, CCECC partnered with local suppliers and service providers, and established training centers and scholarship programs to develop local railway expertise (Doran, 2022). Completed in 2014, the project officially commenced commercial operations in July 2016, inaugurated by President Muhammadu Buhari, highlighting the influence of political transitions on infrastructure continuity. Despite its national importance, the Abuja–

Kaduna railway lacked a dedicated watchdog body to monitor technical progress, social impact, or equity outcomes. Media outlets such as *Railway Technology* and *Signal NG* offered only periodic coverage, while public agencies like the Ministry of Transportation and the Nigerian Railway Corporation operated as implementers rather than independent overseers (Railway Technology, 2020; Signal NG, 2016; Abubakar, Khoo, & Rogers, 2024). This oversight gap reflects systemic governance challenges in Nigeria's infrastructure development, where transparency and accountability remain reactive and weakly institutionalized.

During President Goodluck Jonathan's tenure, the Abuja–Kaduna railway project was financed through a \$500 million Preferential Buyer's Credit loan from the Export-Import Bank of China, representing 60% of the total \$824 million project cost. The remaining 40% was covered by the Nigerian government through counterpart funding. According to AidData's (2020) official database, the loan agreement, signed in December 2010 under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), featured favorable terms: a 2.5% interest rate, a seven-year grace period, and a 20-year maturity, with railway-generated revenue secured in an escrow account as partial collateral. By December 2020, the loan had been fully disbursed, and Nigeria had repaid over \$195 million in interest and principal, reflecting both the depth of bilateral engagement and Nigeria's long-term financial commitments to the project. On the part of the Federal government, while public institutions are constitutionally expected to uphold the Federal Character Principle in staffing and resource allocation, there is no evidence that this principle or any conditions for inclusivity of all ethnic groups were formally embedded in the contractual or oversight mechanisms of this specific infrastructure project. The project was primarily governed by the terms of the Preferential Buyer's Credit loan from China Eximbank. The first phase of the railway consists of six segments spanning 45 kilometres across two lines, the yellow and blue, with 12 stations in total. Notably, the yellow line links Abuja's Central Business District to Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport and Kubwa Satellite Town, serving as a strategic connector for both commuters and air travelers.

Despite reaching an advanced stage of completion, the project was stalled for eight years following the conclusion of President Jonathan's administration. Analysts suggest that its eventual completion and operational success underscore the growing significance of Nigeria's and Africa's economic and infrastructural collaboration with China.

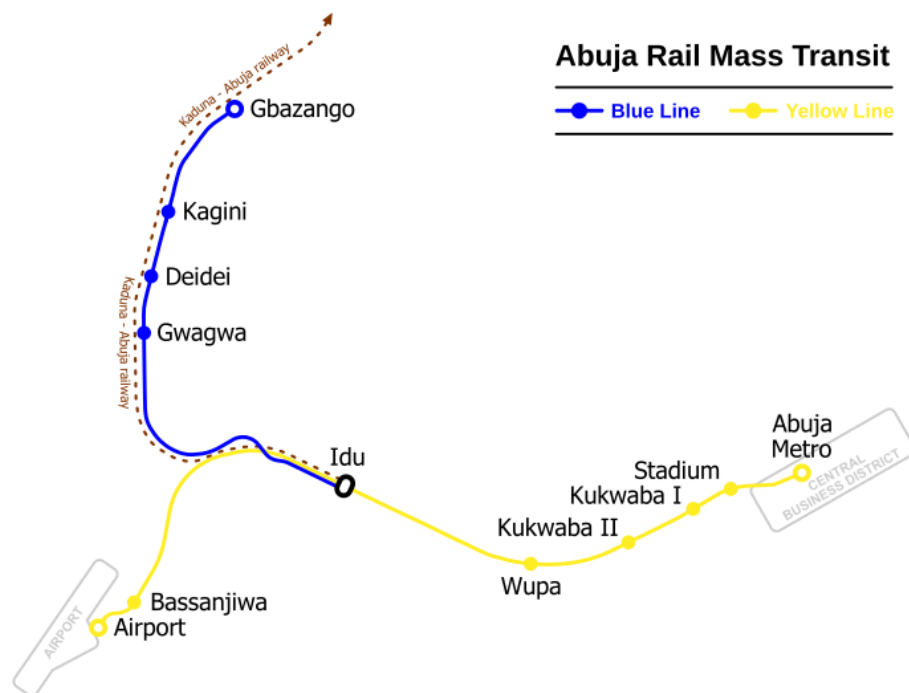


Figure 1: Abuja-Kaduna Railway line

According to the official report of the CCECC Abuja-Kaduna railway project, published by the Africa-China Economy (December 18, 2021), this project was necessary to resolve the increasing traffic congestion in Abuja metropolis, which resulted from a yearly increase in the number of cars on the streets in Abuja, thereby further exacerbating the traffic. Africa-China Economy is a media awareness campaign to enhance friendship in diplomacy, culture, technology, manpower development, education, media, agriculture, people-to-people, and a general understanding of the two sides for a more peaceful and cohesive world. The government of Nigeria and the administration of the Abuja capital territory intended to create alternative means of transportation, such as is seen in major cities of the world. The idea was to create a transport system that integrates the rail or light metro rail system with a coordinated bus system that connects Abuja and Kaduna, and finally, an airport in the city that would be linked with the light rail.

The railway line that covers 186km was delivered by the CCECC in July 2016, and two years later, the light metro rail system linking the city centre to the airport, the Airport station, and the Abuja Metro station was delivered. This project has facilitated and provided a safer and faster alternative to road travel in the region, creating a freer, more prosperous, and peaceful city (Alqali, 2018)

## **Data Collection**

This study employed a case study research design to investigate the impact of multi-ethnicity on aid effectiveness within development programs in Nigeria, focusing on the railway transport sector. Given the complexity of this topic, a document-based and interview-driven approach was adopted to gather rich, contextual insights into how utilizing foreign aid in railway construction has promoted economic growth in Nigeria. Feagin et al. (1992) defined the case study approach as a comprehensive and detailed exploration utilizing qualitative research techniques to examine a single social phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Yin (1984) proposed that case studies are widely recognized as being more effective in developing new theoretical insights into complex social phenomena rather than in empirically validating pre-existing theoretical claims.

The advantages of employing a case study approach in this study are, it allows for an in-depth analysis of how multiethnicity influences aid effectiveness in Nigeria's development programs, capturing the complexities and nuances of local realities. It also allowed the researcher to focus on the railway sector, offering direct insight into policy implementation, budget allocation, and project outcomes. Another advantage of this approach is that it allows researchers flexibility in data collection, integrating document analysis, stakeholders' perspectives, and comparative assessment.

One common critique of case studies is that their unique and context-specific nature does not produce testable or consistently reliable generalizations. Additionally, they are often seen as susceptible to investigator bias and subjective interpretation (Blalock, 1970). However, when these limitations are acknowledged and case study findings are treated as exploratory rather than conclusive, they can serve as a valuable research tool. However, this was countered by Kai Erikson, who stated that the focus on generalization in positivist, quantitative research can sometimes overlook the depth and complexity of social life.

## **Project Selection**

The railway sector was chosen for this study for several key reasons. First, it offers structured and well-documented data, including project reports, policies, budgets, and operational records, which facilitate a thorough and reliable analysis.

Second, railways play a crucial role in economic development, urban connectivity, and infrastructure expansion, making them a valuable case for examining aid effectiveness in multiethnic states. This particular railway project, funded through international partnerships between China and Nigeria under China's Belt and Road Initiative, provides insights into foreign aid dynamics and policy implementation.

Additionally, railway projects typically span multiple years and phases, allowing researchers to evaluate how aid effectiveness evolves within diverse ethnic and political contexts. Finally, multi-ethnic considerations make the railway sector an ideal subject of study in Nigeria, as railways serve a wide range of communities, offering a unique perspective on ethnicity's influence on aid distribution, stakeholder engagement, and project success.

### **Primary Sources of Data**

This study utilized a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather insights from key stakeholders, including program beneficiaries, government officials from the Federal Ministry of Transport, and representatives from the CCECC office in Nigeria. Given the geographical distance between the researcher and respondents, all interviews were conducted via teleconferencing, while those who could not be reached through this medium provided written answers to a small number of questions (appendix 3), ensuring direct engagement despite logistical constraints. These discussions provided firsthand perspectives on how ethnic diversity influences aid distribution, program implementation, and community reception.

To protect respondent confidentiality, aliases were used to safeguard personal details while accurately capturing their responses. The choice of semi-structured interviews was deliberate, allowing for in-depth discussions rather than rigid questioning. As Parker (2018) describes, this format fosters guided conversations, enabling participants to shape their responses based on their understanding of the situation. This approach proved highly effective, revealing issues of favoritism and ethnic affiliation that might not have surfaced in a more formal interview setting.

The initial set of interview questions, which served as a foundation for these discussions, is included as Appendix B to this study.

### **Secondary Sources of Data**

To complement the primary data, a rigorous document analysis was conducted using program reports, policy documents from the Federal Ministry of Transport, budget allocations, and evaluation studies related to development initiatives in Nigeria, particularly the Abuja–Kaduna Railway project. These sources provided insight into project structure, implementation, financial commitments, and strategic approaches to aid deployment across multi-ethnic regions. By systematically reviewing these materials, the research identified historical patterns, assessed alignment with stated goals, and evaluated the effectiveness of initiatives. This integrative approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, enabled a comprehensive understanding of how Nigeria's multi-ethnic landscape influences the outcomes and challenges of development aid.

## **Sampling Method**

This study employed a purposive sampling method to ensure diverse representation across ethnic groups and key stakeholders involved in the railway project. The selection criteria included government officials from the Federal Ministry of Transport, individuals directly engaged in aid management, those affected by the project's implementation, and experts specializing in ethnicity and development effectiveness.

A total of 25 respondents were selected from 35 interviews, comprising:

- Three officials from the Federal Ministry of Transport
- Four independent observers- two commentators on public affairs and two from the non-governmental sector.
- Three representatives each from the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning and the CCECC
- Fifteen project beneficiaries who ply this road for work or business, and small business owners who operate along the rail lines.

This sample was carefully structured to reflect ethnic diversity while maintaining methodological balance. Additionally, the interviews were supplemented by extensive policy and project reports, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the railway project's impact.

## **Recording and Transcribing Data**

Each interview and focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed using Transcript LOL, an AI-powered transcription tool designed for accuracy and efficiency. Minimal notes were taken during the interviews to allow the researcher to focus on identifying recurring themes and categorising them for data analysis. The resulting transcripts served as the primary data source for the analysis phase, ensuring a structured and comprehensive approach to interpreting findings.

## **Triangulation**

The researcher applied triangulation techniques to eliminate the possibility of the researcher's biases and the influence of diverse respondents' experiences, which may threaten instrumentalization and participant selection. This included people and space, and through the integration of a diverse group, varied responses to the research questions were obtained.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract qualitative insights, identifying patterns and recurring themes in stakeholder responses and policy documents. Respondents' responses were categorised into different themes, which emerged and were presented in a table. Additionally, comparative analysis was avoided in examining how different ethnic groups in Nigeria perceive the siting of aid-sponsored developmental projects and their effectiveness in fostering economic growth.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the first stage of data analysis was conducted during the in-depth interviews, as they were transcribed in real time. The researcher focused on identifying commonalities in respondents' statements, particularly those that aligned with the initial hypothesis, that favoritism and ethnic affiliation are key factors affecting aid effectiveness in Nigeria.

### Thematic Table Presentation from Interview Transcripts

Code	Theme	Frequency	Representative Quote
Favoritism	Ethnic Bias in Aid Distribution	12 mentions	“Aid seems to favour the Northerner over other regions”.
Policy Gaps	Inconsistencies in Implementation	9 mentions	“There are no clear-cut modalities for allocating projects and how the funds should be allocated”.
Stakeholder Engagement	Community Involvement in Aid Programs	7 mentions	“National leaders and elites should play a crucial role in ensuring fair distribution”.

### Thematic Table Presentation from Case Study (Abuja-Kaduna Railway) Reports

Themes	Code	Frequency	Key Findings	Representative Quote
<b>Policy Implementation</b>	Funding Gaps	10 mentions	Delays due to the diversion of funds for personal gains by politicians and	“Budget constraints slowed down progress significantly”.

			bureaucratic hurdles	
<b>Infrastructure Impact</b>	Urban/National Connectivity	12 mentions	Improved accessibility between different parts of the nation and reduced travel time	“The railway could have made commuting much easier for businesses and residents across the whole nation”.
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	Community Involvement	8 mentions	Limited engagement of local communities and national stakeholders in decision-making.	“We were barely consulted where and how the railway would affect our different parts of the country and our towns”.
<b>Ethnic Consideration</b>	Aid Distribution	9 mentions	Concerns over favoritism in the execution of projects across different ethnic groups	“Certain regions seem to benefit more than others from such a project”.

**DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

This section critically examines the findings presented in the data analysis phase, interpreting their significance in the light of the study objectives, that is inclusivity of aid policies toward different ethnic groups in Nigeria, and the theoretical framework of the study. Nigeria’s aid policies are primarily formulated by the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning (FMFBNP), which integrates foreign assistance into national development plans such as the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2021–2025), subject to ratification by the Federal Executive Council following stakeholder consultations (Akachukwu & Osagu, 2023). Implementation is carried out by relevant ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), while monitoring and evaluation are overseen by the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department within FMFBNP. Fiscal accountability and audit

functions are performed by the Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation (OAuGF), with legislative oversight provided by the National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee (Debt Management Office, 2020; Akachukwu & Osagu, 2023).

This section explores how the identified patterns and themes align with or challenge the existing literature on aid effectiveness, ethnic diversity, and development outcomes in Nigeria. Particular attention is given to how ethnic affiliation, stakeholders' perceptions, and foreign aid dynamics intersect to shape the implementation and the impact of aid-funded infrastructure projects. The discussion also situates these findings within the broader sociopolitical and economic contexts, offering insights into the structural factors influencing aid distribution and project success. Ultimately, this section provides a nuanced interpretation of the evidence, laying the groundwork for the practical policy recommendation and further scholarly inquiry.

### **'Aid seems to favour the Northerners over other regions'**

A recurring concern among many respondents is the perception that aid disproportionately favours Northern Nigeria. They raise questions about political influence, ethnic affiliations, and systemic imbalances in development planning. According to them, the distribution of foreign aid reflects deep-rooted issues of regional inequity and perceived bias. In recent years, there has been a notable surge in major infrastructure projects in the North, such as the Kaduna–Abuja railway. While these projects are often justified as efforts to boost agricultural productivity, improve logistics, and connect remote communities, respondents argue that the South, particularly the South-South and South-East, remains the economic engine of the country, given its dominance in oil production and import-based commerce.

Despite this, projects like the Kaduna–Abuja railway, which could have been strategically positioned to facilitate the movement of petroleum products from the South, are instead located in the North. Many respondents believe this reflects a historical pattern of favouritism dating back to the colonial era. One respondent opined that if we go back to 1914, when Nigeria was amalgamated by Lord Lugard, the North was seen as underdeveloped and lacking in resources. The South's wealth was meant to support the North, and that mindset has never really changed.

You see, look, if you go back in history, and then you go back to 1914, when Nigeria was amalgamated by Lord Lugard, go back and read what happened. For them, they felt the North was underdeveloped and very poor, and it would not survive on its own because they have no resources. So the only way they can do that is to merge the North and the South together so that the resources from the South can be used to help the North. So, the North has always received some special attention from the beginning, and it is simply because, first of all, it was about seeing that they were backward, they needed to be helped, and they had no resources.

The once-thriving agricultural economy of the North has declined significantly. The groundnut pyramids are gone, and cattle rearing remains one of the few active sectors. Meanwhile, insecurity and attacks by herdsmen have forced many farmers in the North-Central and Middle Belt to abandon their land. Respondents question the current agricultural output of the North, noting that staple foods like rice and cassava are not widely cultivated there, and that Nigeria is now heavily reliant on food imports.

One respondent emphasized that the Kaduna–Abuja railway, a flagship aid-funded project, disproportionately benefits the North, especially in the absence of comparable investments in the South. He argued that in a country as large and diverse as Nigeria, infrastructure should be designed to connect all six geopolitical zones, fostering national integration. Instead, he claimed, politicians often prioritize their regions of interest, and pointed out that over 70% of Nigeria’s past heads of state have come from the North, many of whom have governed with a clear regional bias.

Yeah, for me, if you ask me, we have six geopolitical zones. If Nigeria wants to be a working country, the whole idea will be, how can we have major train lines, rail lines, connecting these six geopolitical zones concretely?

The perceived concentration of development aid in the North has diminished public trust in both the government and donor organizations, which are seen as neglecting the developmental needs of other regions. Communities in the South-East and South-South feel especially excluded from the benefits of mainstream politics, reinforcing the belief that ethnic and political ties continue to influence where and how infrastructure projects are located and implemented. Multiple studies and commentaries confirm this. Onwubiko and Ugorji (2022) conducted a targeted survey revealing that residents in these areas face systemic marginalization rooted in post-civil-war dynamics and minority status, fueling unrest and calls for restructuring. Mefor (2024) argues that the South-East’s underrepresentation in federal appointments, uneven state distribution, and exclusion from major national decisions violate principles of equal rights and self-determination. Amadi, Allen, and Mai-Bornu (2023) also highlight how ongoing marginalization has intensified separatist movements like IPOB, linking exclusion to broader democratic gaps and militarized state responses.

### **‘There are no clear-cut modalities for allocating projects and how the funds should be allocated’**

One of the most pressing challenges highlighted in this study is the absence of clearly defined frameworks guiding the allocation of development projects and funding in Nigeria. Respondents expressed concern over the lack of standardized modalities to ensure transparency, equity, and accountability in determining where projects are sited and how resources are distributed. The majority of the respondents observed that the absence of formal criteria allows for discretionary decision-making, often shaped by political, ethnic, and regional interests. The analysis underscores the need for an

institutionalized approach to project planning—one that prioritizes national development objectives over sectional favouritism or patronage politics.

Respondents in this study consistently highlighted the absence of clear, formal criteria guiding the allocation of development projects in Nigeria, both at the federal and state levels. This gap creates space for subjective decision-making, often shaped by political, ethnic, or regional affiliations. Even where frameworks like the Federal Character principle exist, ambiguity in their application continues to undermine accountability, breed public mistrust, and reinforce the perception that development is driven more by favouritism than by actual need.

One respondent specifically pointed to the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2021–2025), noting that while it outlines ambitious objectives for inclusive growth and infrastructure development, it lacks concrete operational guidelines on how projects should be equitably distributed across Nigeria’s geopolitical zones. He argued that such an omission is intentional, suggesting that Nigerian policymakers avoid setting transparent standards, despite the fact that the country is home to globally recognized experts in economics, policy, and development science. According to him, this failure reflects not a lack of expertise but a deliberate disregard for fairness in policymaking.

You recall that the plan emphasizes outcomes like poverty reduction and job creation, but leaves implementation strategies vague, especially regarding regional balance and transparency mechanisms. These people know what they are doing, trust me.

Respondents are strongly advocating for policy reform to address the persistent lack of transparency and structure in project allocation. Many stakeholders expressed frustration that they were rarely consulted about the potential impact of large-scale projects, such as the Kaduna–Abuja railway, on their communities and surrounding regions. In response, they are calling for the establishment of an engagement framework that actively involves local communities in the planning and prioritization of development initiatives.

In addition, several respondents proposed the creation of independent oversight bodies to monitor how projects are sited and how funds are disbursed. These bodies, they argue, should rely on a codified project allocation formula that factors in population size, developmental indicators, and regional needs, ensuring that infrastructure investments are equitable, data-driven, and aligned with national development goals.

**‘The railway could have made commuting much easier for businesses and residents across the whole nation’**

One of the central observations emerging from this study is that the railway infrastructure in Nigeria, particularly the Kaduna–Abuja railway, holds untapped potential to transform national mobility and economic integration. Respondents noted that if strategically planned and equitably implemented, such railway projects could have significantly eased commuting for both businesses and residents across the country, enhancing trade efficiency, labour mobility, and regional connectivity. Instead, the perceived regional concentration of rail investment has raised concerns about missed opportunities to foster inclusive development and national cohesion.

In addition to aid projects favouring the North, the respondents in this study rightly observed that the Kaduna–Abuja railway, while significant, represents a missed opportunity for broader national impact. If designed with a pan-Nigerian vision, such a project could have served as a backbone for inter-regional commuting, linking commercial hubs, industrial zones, and rural communities across all six geopolitical zones. Instead, its regional concentration has limited its utility to a specific corridor, leaving businesses and residents in other parts of the country underserved.

One respondent noted that a nationally integrated rail system would have significantly stimulated commerce, reduced regional disparities, and boosted productivity across multiple sectors. He argued that while the North covers a vast landmass and comprises the majority of Nigeria’s states, the Kaduna–Abuja railway only serves a limited section of the region. As such, it falls short of facilitating connectivity across the broader northern corridor, from Maiduguri in the Northeast to Sokoto in the Northwest, thus missing a key opportunity for comprehensive regional integration.

Well, just to make things clear, Kaduna to Abuja is just a very short distance. So if we talk about it, I think so to say, the railway does not in any way cover up 95 % of the north. If you want to look at it from that perspective, it's simply a few people who are benefiting from it. Because when you talk about the north, we have more states in the north. Some of these states are not even close to the railway. They can't even access it.

Respondents emphasized that infrastructure planning in Nigeria often lacks a cohesive national vision. The Kaduna–Abuja railway, though recognized as a valuable development, is viewed as emblematic of a broader pattern in which projects are sited based on political or regional interests rather than aligned with a strategy for national integration. A truly transformative railway system, they argued, would connect the resource-rich South, which includes industrial hubs like Onitsha, Aba, and Lagos, to other parts of the country, linking agricultural regions in the Middle Belt with urban markets, and establishing economic corridors that transcend ethnic and regional divisions.

Respondents specifically called for the development of a national railway master plan that emphasizes inter-zonal connectivity, guided by transparent criteria such as economic potential, population density, and developmental needs. Officials from the federal ministry, though speaking with some frustration,

urged the Department of Budget and Planning to involve a broader range of stakeholders in project design, ensuring that local priorities and regional equity are factored into decision-making.

They also expressed the view that a project of this scale should have been leveraged to decongest overburdened urban centers such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Onitsha, where lengthy commute times hinder productivity and impact overall well-being. Beyond functionality, they emphasized that a well-integrated railway network could have been a powerful tool for promoting social cohesion by physically connecting diverse communities and fostering interregional collaboration and unity.

### **‘Budget constraints slowed down progress significantly’**

A major concern expressed by respondents is that budgetary constraints have significantly hindered the timely execution of infrastructure projects in Nigeria. While limited funding is often cited as the primary challenge, several respondents argued that mismanagement and unethical practices exacerbate the problem. One respondent noted that *“some government officials stuck these monies in a savings account to yield profits for them, and such actions delay project delivery.”* This practice not only reflects a breach of public trust but also contributes directly to development delays, undermining both the intent and impact of aid-funded initiatives.

This concern of corruption has been echoed in the literature. For instance, Fiebai, Baghebo, and Nathan (2025) found that corruption has a statistically significant negative impact on Nigeria’s development outcomes, particularly in the long term. Their study, which analyzed corruption trends from 1990 to 2023, concluded that persistent corruption erodes public service delivery, weakens institutional capacity, and delays infrastructure implementation. Similarly, Bakare and Ozegbe (2022) observed that while human capital development and government spending can enhance economic performance, corruption consistently undermines these gains, especially in the long run.

These findings reinforce the need for greater transparency, financial oversight, and institutional accountability in Nigeria’s development planning. Respondents in this study emphasized that without robust monitoring mechanisms and ethical leadership, even well-funded projects risk being stalled or derailed by self-serving practices.

### **Political Disruption and the Reinforcement of Regional Favouritism**

A striking theme that emerged from the document analysis is the conspicuous absence of detailed operational guidelines within key national policies related to infrastructure development, particularly the Kaduna–Abuja railway project. While many of these documents outline broad development goals, they are often silent on critical implementation details, such as criteria for project siting, regional equity considerations, and mechanisms for stakeholder consultation. This lack of specificity fosters a vacuum

of accountability, allowing room for political discretion and undermining the transparency that should underpin equitable infrastructure planning.

Document review and respondent testimonies reveal that the Kaduna–Abuja railway project was halted following the 2015 general elections, when President Goodluck Jonathan was voted out of office. A report by *The Africa China Economy* highlighted that this disruption marked a turning point in project execution, revealing the vulnerability of major infrastructure investments to political transitions.

Respondents in this study linked such disruptions to a broader pattern of political favouritism in Nigeria’s development planning. One stakeholder noted that the timing and location of the project's resumption, under a Northern-led administration, reinforced the perception that infrastructure priorities shift to benefit regions aligned with those in power, rather than adhering to a consistent, nationally inclusive strategy.

Multiple interviewees expressed concern that this form of discretionary project advancement, often shaped by political interest rather than regional equity or developmental need, reflects a systemic issue. As one respondent put it:

Once political power changes hands, it’s like the projects have to be realigned to serve the interests of the new leadership. That’s why some regions benefit repeatedly while others are forgotten.

The lack of a binding, institutionalized framework for project continuation across political administrations enables this dynamic, allowing leaders to prioritize their political bases while neglecting other regions. According to respondents, this not only results in developmental imbalance, but also deepens mistrust in government and donor intentions, especially among communities in the South-South and South-East who feel consistently overlooked.

Findings from this study reveal that infrastructure development in Nigeria, particularly the Kaduna–Abuja railway, has been shaped by a complex interplay of regional favoritism, politically driven decision-making, limited stakeholder engagement, and inadequate financial oversight. Although national policy frameworks such as the Federal Character Principle (Section 14[3] of the 1999 Constitution) promote inclusivity and equitable representation across Nigeria’s diverse ethnic groups (Suberu, 2022), their implementation has often fallen short. Complementary strategies like the National Social Protection Policy (2016) and the National Urban Development Policy (2012) are designed to reduce poverty and expand equitable access to services, but weak enforcement and institutional gaps have contributed to persistent marginalization (Onwujekwe et al., 2021).

The consequences of such failures include heightened political agitation, declining public trust, and recurrent social unrest, particularly in regions that feel sidelined from national policymaking (Amadi,

Allen, & Mai-Bornu, 2023; Kukah Centre, 2024). Nigeria does possess quasi-judicial mechanisms such as the Federal Character Commission, established under the Federal Character Commission Act (1995), to adjudicate complaints about unequal representation in public institutions. The Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal, created by the 1991 Act, reinforces ethical accountability among public officials, while the Commissions of Inquiry Act (1961) enables executive authorities to investigate public grievances and misconduct. However, the absence of transparent project allocation criteria, budget continuity across successive administrations, and genuine community participation has contributed to widespread perceptions of regional bias and exclusion. These governance gaps not only compromise the credibility and efficacy of foreign aid and development programs but also risk exacerbating ethno-political tensions, weakening national cohesion, and eroding confidence in public institutions. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a shift toward participatory, transparent, and inclusive development planning that prioritizes long-term integration over short-term political interests.

## CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the complex interplay between multiethnicity and aid-driven development initiatives in Nigeria, using the Abuja–Kaduna railway as a focal case. The findings support Alqali’s (2018) assertion that the railway significantly improved regional mobility by offering a safer, faster alternative to the kidnapping-prone Abuja–Kaduna highway. Beyond enhancing commuter safety, the line has stimulated local economies, particularly in Rigasa, where new businesses and jobs have emerged around the station. Passengers report increased comfort, reduced travel stress, and greater confidence in transit reliability. However, findings related to the first research question reveal a troubling gap between inclusive policy rhetoric and aid implementation. While national frameworks advocate equity, aid distribution remains concentrated in economically strategic states like Lagos, Calabar, and Port Harcourt. Lagos alone received \$381.73 million in aid due to its status as economic capital and host to Nigeria’s major seaports, while Calabar and Port Harcourt were prioritized for their oil export infrastructure (Ministry of Budget & National Planning [MBNP], 2015; Nigerian Ports Authority, 2024; Okon & Smart, 2018). This pattern reflects regional favoritism, politically motivated project siting, and poor stakeholder engagement, ultimately undermining the promise of inclusive development.

On the second research question, findings indicate that while aid policy narratives often portray Northern Nigeria as disadvantaged, the region in fact holds vast economic potential due to its abundant mineral resources. States like Zamfara, Kebbi, Kaduna, and Niger host significant gold deposits, alongside other valuable minerals such as iron ore, coal, limestone, and kaolin (Wasiu & Melodi, 2023; National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Finelib, 2024). Despite challenges in formal mining regulation, these assets contribute to livelihoods and suggest untapped industrial potential. Furthermore, Northern states have made visible progress in road infrastructure development, with Kano and Adamawa benefiting from strategic highways and rural connectivity projects. Examples include the Kano–Zaria and Mayo-Belwa–

Toungo corridors, which bolster trade and access to remote communities (Desert Herald, 2024). Notably, road development in Northern Nigeria has attracted donor funding through initiatives like the Second Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP2), supported by the World Bank and federal agencies. While federal allocations remain primary sources, aid disbursements to Kaduna (\$54.49 million), Kano (\$7.84 million), and Adamawa (\$4.7 million) show the complementary role of external assistance in enhancing Northern connectivity (MBNP, 2015; Lands of Nigeria, 2025). These findings suggest that regional infrastructure development is shaped by a combination of economic positioning, political incentives, and donor alignment, not purely ethnic equity objectives.

Moreover, the study reveals a prevailing public scepticism toward the effectiveness of foreign aid. Many Nigerians perceive aid as a driver of unequal infrastructural development, citing instances where foreign-funded projects appear to disproportionately benefit the Northern region at the expense of other zones. This perception has reinforced the belief that aid is often manipulated through political channels, further entrenching regional disparities rather than correcting them. As a result, foreign aid, despite its developmental promise, is viewed by many not as a neutral tool for national progress, but as a conduit for reinforcing historical imbalances and favouritism within the country's infrastructure landscape.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

To address the systemic challenges revealed in this study, including the political interference in aid-driven development initiatives, regional imbalance, weak institutional safeguards, and public scepticism about these initiatives, this section outlines key policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and equitable infrastructure development framework in Nigeria.

First, there is a pressing need to establish a National Infrastructure Equity Framework. This should be a legally binding policy instrument designed to ensure that development projects, especially those funded through foreign aid, are allocated fairly across all six geopolitical zones. Project siting must be guided by clear, data-driven indicators such as population density, regional development indices, infrastructure deficits, and economic potential. This approach will help correct the current imbalance, which official reports suggest that the South has been the major recipient, but research findings reveal that this is due to their economic potential, not merely to drive infrastructural development. There is a need to restore public confidence in the objectivity of national development planning.

Second, Nigeria must codify a project continuity mechanism that protects long-term infrastructure plans from the volatility of political transitions. As demonstrated by the suspension of the Kaduna–Abuja railway project after the 2015 elections, politically motivated disruptions can undermine development progress and fuel regional grievances. Instituting legislation that guarantees the completion of projects, regardless of leadership changes, would promote stability, planning integrity, and fiscal responsibility.

Third, there is a vital need to institutionalize community engagement in the planning and implementation of major infrastructure initiatives. This involves creating structured platforms where local stakeholders, including traditional leaders, civil society groups, and community associations, can participate meaningfully in determining the relevance, design, and impact of projects. Such inclusion would ensure that development reflects local needs, mitigates resistance, and fosters grassroots ownership. By these, reports sent to the donors on projects will truly reflect the thoughts of the local community.

Fourth, the federal government should strengthen financial transparency and oversight through empowered independent monitoring bodies. These agencies should be mandated to track fund disbursements, audit project implementation, and publicly report instances of mismanagement or corruption. Transparent monitoring mechanisms, alongside legal consequences for financial misconduct, would help curtail practices such as the diversion of public funds into private interests—a concern strongly voiced by respondents in this study.

Finally, it is essential to develop a comprehensive National Railway Master Plan and other transport initiatives that prioritize inter-zonal connectivity and inclusive economic development. This plan should integrate key commercial hubs, agricultural belts, and densely populated urban corridors across Nigeria's regions. Beyond easing urban congestion and improving mobility, such a master plan would contribute to national cohesion by physically linking diverse communities and fostering interregional exchange.

## **STUDY LIMITATIONS**

One of the primary limitations of this study was the restricted access to official data. The bureaucratic nature of public institutions, coupled with limited transparency in documentation, made it difficult to obtain comprehensive records, particularly those related to budget allocations, contract details, and internal project assessments. Consequently, the analysis relied heavily on policy documents that were publicly available, which may not fully reflect the operational realities and internal deliberations that shaped the Kaduna–Abuja railway project.

Additionally, the study's reliance on qualitative interviews introduced a degree of subjectivity. While the insights gained from participants were invaluable, they were shaped by personal experiences, socio-political affiliations, and regional loyalties. This meant that, although patterns could be discerned, the perspectives shared may not represent a balanced or nationally representative view of the infrastructure development landscape.

Political sensitivity also posed a challenge. Given the contentious nature of foreign aid, regional equity, and infrastructure allocation in Nigeria, some government officials and stakeholders were reluctant to

speak sincerely. This likely influenced both the depth and openness of responses, especially when discussing potentially controversial topics such as project siting, favouritism, or possible financial malpractice.

The study's temporal scope also presented a limitation. Data collection and analysis were confined to a specific time frame, whereas projects like the Kaduna–Abuja railway are dynamic, with policy shifts, budget reallocations, and new partnerships continuing to evolve. Thus, developments occurring after the research window may not be reflected in the findings, potentially limiting the long-term relevance of some conclusions.

Furthermore, although the document review phase was rigorous, it excluded internal government memos, classified communications, and feasibility studies that might have offered deeper insights into the motivations and strategic decisions behind the project. This limited the depth of analysis concerning inter-agency coordination and behind-the-scenes negotiations.

Finally, there is the issue of potential regional imbalance in the respondent pool. Due to the fact that the researcher had to meet most of the respondents online, logistical constraints in reaching those in the diaspora, security concerns, or access limitations, the majority of interviews were conducted based on the availability of respondents. This may have inadvertently led to an underrepresentation of views from other geopolitical zones, limiting the breadth of national perspectives captured in the study.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Building on the limitations and findings of this study, several avenues for future research present themselves. First, there is a need for comparative studies across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones to investigate patterns in infrastructure distribution and the perceived impact of foreign aid. Such studies could help determine whether certain regions have consistently benefited more from aid-funded projects and provide empirical evidence to support or challenge claims of regional bias.

Second, further inquiry should focus on community participation in infrastructure planning, particularly in the context of foreign aid projects. Given that many respondents in this study cited a lack of local engagement in the Kaduna–Abuja railway project, future research could explore how and to what extent stakeholders at the community level are included in project design and implementation. This could involve focus group discussions, surveys, or participatory mapping exercises to uncover gaps in stakeholder involvement and offer pathways to more inclusive planning.

Third, a quantitative assessment of project continuity across electoral cycles would be useful in understanding how political transitions affect infrastructure development in Nigeria and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This could involve analyzing the completion rates of major national projects

before and after general elections, revealing whether political turnover systematically disrupts development agendas and which types of projects are most vulnerable.

Another promising direction lies in evaluating the role of foreign donors and aid conditionalities. Although some studies have been carried out already, future studies could deepen an examination of how external partners influence project siting, funding decisions, and implementation timelines. Analyzing donor agreements, conditionality clauses, and negotiation records could reveal whether foreign aid is aligned with recipient priorities or swayed by external strategic interests.

Additionally, research could explore the fiscal transparency of aid usage—particularly the extent to which aid is absorbed into national budgets or diverted through informal channels. This would require a careful analysis of public expenditure tracking data, audit reports, and development finance flows to map how aid is disbursed and where inefficiencies or leakages occur.

Lastly, to expand the scope of analysis, scholars might consider conducting a cross-country comparative study within West Africa, comparing Nigeria’s experience with those of peer countries like Ghana, Senegal, or Côte d’Ivoire. Such a study could identify shared challenges in aid management, highlight best practices, and generate regional recommendations for more equitable and effective aid deployment.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Expanded Theoretical Framework

#### **Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation Theory provides a framework for expounding on the processes individuals or groups undergo when they are in contact with another culture. This often leads to changes in their cultural practices, identities, and behaviors. This theory is particularly significant in multicultural societies or multiethnic settings where such interactions are frequent and impactful.

#### Conceptualization of Acculturation

Acculturation is the process of cultural exchange and adaptation that occurs when individuals or groups from diverse cultural backgrounds interact. According to Berry (1997), acculturation involves both psychological and sociocultural changes. It describes how individuals adapt to a new cultural environment while preserving aspects of their original culture, balancing between assimilation and cultural preservation.

#### Models of Acculturation

Berry proposed a model of acculturation that is built on four primary strategies individuals or groups adopt in response to cultural contact:

1. **Assimilation:** Individuals prioritize adopting the dominant culture entirely, replacing their original cultural identity and practices.
2. **Integration:** A strategy of balancing, where individuals adapt to the dominant culture while preserving key aspects of their original culture.
3. **Separation:** Individuals maintain their original culture and limit interaction with the dominant culture.
4. **Marginalization:** Individuals experience a sense of disconnection from both the dominant and original culture due to possible rejection or exclusion.

Several factors significantly influence the process of acculturation. Socioeconomic conditions, including access to resources and opportunities, play a pivotal role in shaping how individuals navigate cultural adaptation. These resources—both tangible and intangible—determine the ease or difficulty faced during settlement in a new cultural environment. For instance, financial stability enables individuals to access essential needs such as education, healthcare, housing, employment opportunities, and technology, including smartphones and the Internet. Additionally, social support systems provide crucial emotional and practical assistance, helping individuals adapt to their new circumstances.

The concept of cultural distance, measured by the degree of similarity or difference between interacting cultures, also affects the acculturation process. Greater cultural differences may pose more challenges to adaptation, while closer cultural similarities tend to ease integration. Furthermore, the presence of strong social support within the host community, particularly through connections with one's cultural group, can significantly enhance emotional well-being and practical adjustment.

In multiethnic states like Nigeria, which encompasses over 371 identified ethnic groups, Acculturation Theory serves as a valuable lens for examining interethnic relations and promoting social integration. Nigeria's rich ethnic diversity reflects a context where cultural adaptation and coexistence are essential, yet challenges such as identity crises and cultural stress often loom. These issues can lead to ineffective integration, social tension, or alienation.

Multiethnic nations can leverage acculturation strategies to develop policies that foster social cohesion, reduce interethnic tensions, and cultivate a collective national identity. For Nigeria, understanding acculturation processes can support the design of programs aimed at facilitating national integration without compromising the unique identities of individuals or groups. Examples of such initiatives include: Promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual respect to bridge gaps between ethnic groups, addressing structural inequalities that hinder successful acculturation and exacerbate tensions, and implementing policies that balance cultural preservation with national unity, ensuring inclusivity and equity across all ethnic groups.

By incorporating acculturation insights, Nigeria can create a harmonious and united multiethnic society while celebrating its diversity.

### Activity System Theory (AST)

The Activity System Theory is a valuable framework for studying the dynamics of aid-sponsored development programs in multiethnic states such as Nigeria. The AST, with its emphasis on systemic, socially situated, and historically influenced activities, offers insights into how diverse ethnic groups interact within development initiatives. It highlights the challenges and opportunities presented by the rich ethnic diversity of multiethnic states.

#### Conceptual Framework of Activity System Theory

The AST proposes that human activity is a complex system of interconnected parts. The constituting components, as represented by the figure below, interact within a cultural and historical context, defining the outcomes of the activity. In multiethnic states such as Nigeria, the theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how diverse ethnic groups engage with the program's objectives, tools, and community dynamics. It shows how cultural and historical factors influence participation and collaboration, and

resolve conflicts. In these states, the interplay between ethnic diversity and development goals often introduces contradictions or tension within the system, which can either hinder or drive progress.

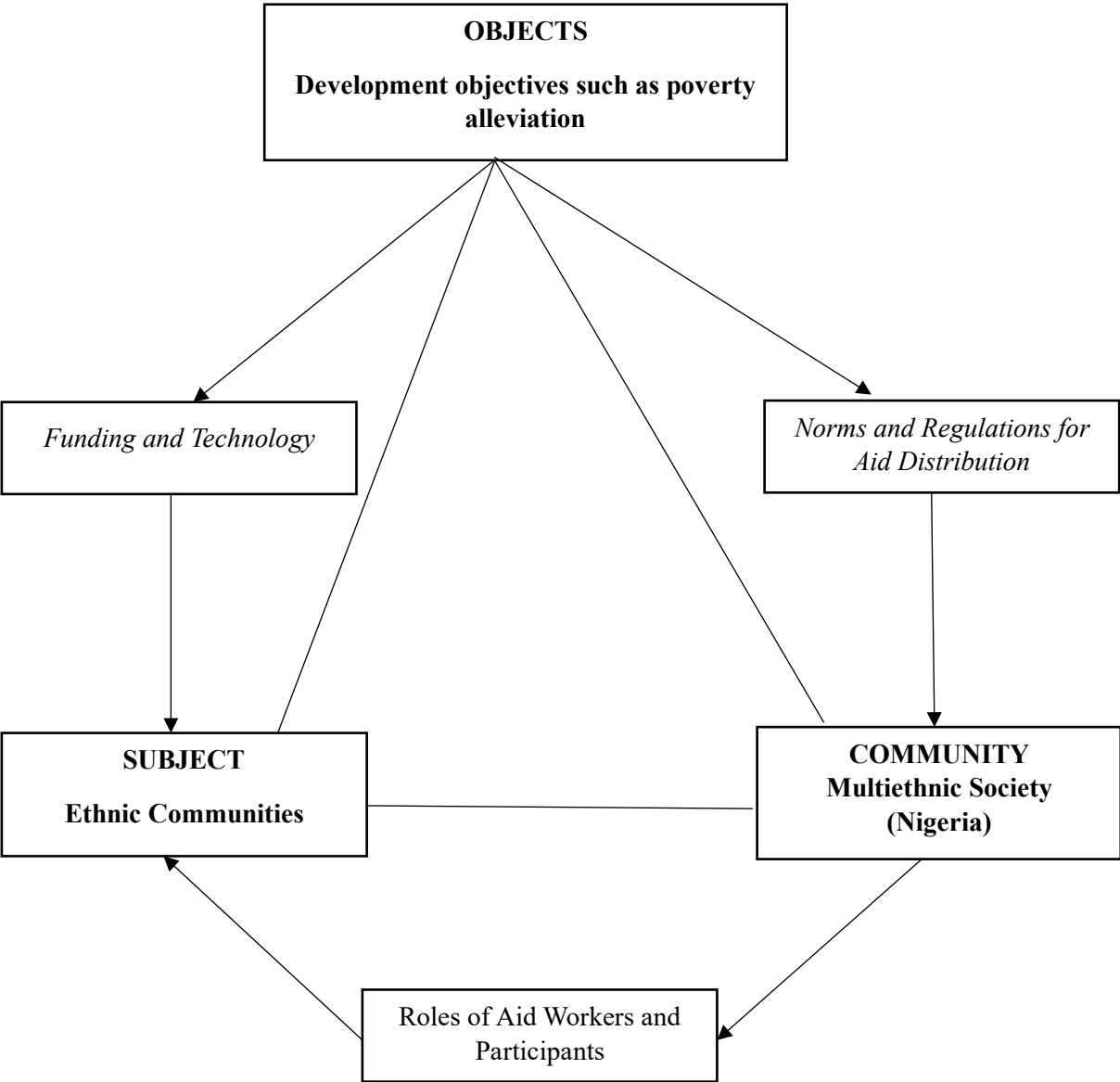


Figure: AST Conceptual Framework

Multiethnicity and Activity Systems

Multiethnic contexts present both challenges and opportunities within activity systems, owing to the diversity of cultural practices, languages, and traditions among ethnic groups. This diversity can lead to tensions and contradictions that affect the system's functioning and outcomes. For example, conflicts or

misalignment may arise when different ethnic groups have priorities that are not aligned or when program goals are misinterpreted. Additionally, the tools or artifacts used in program implementation may not be equally accessible to all ethnic groups, which could limit their participation and impact overall program outcomes.

Interethnic relationships within a community play a significant role in shaping collaboration, trust, and the success of development programs. Positive interethnic relations can foster cooperation and mutual understanding, while strained interactions may hinder progress. In a multiethnic context like Nigeria, with its complex societal structure and over 371 distinct ethnic groups, the interactions between various groups have profound implications for program outcomes, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches.

The AST can be useful in providing a guide for addressing the challenges of aid-sponsored programs in Nigeria. It can ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities by providing a framework for designing development programs that accommodate the diverse needs and perspectives of the nation's ethnic groups. When properly applied, it can identify and effectively resolve conflicts, thereby creating an environment where diverse groups can work together and maximize the program's impact and sustainability.

The AST has been applied to aid-sponsored development programs in Nigeria. There is evidence of the application of AST in education, healthcare, and community development. For instance, AST has been used in diverse classrooms to explore how cultural and linguistic differences among students impact learning activities. In healthcare, Haque, Hill, and Robin (2017) observed that the framework for evaluating the effectiveness of aid has focused on how program design, implementation, and outcomes interact with the broader context of the state and its systems. In Nigeria, this approach has been adopted to improve healthcare delivery. It has often analyzed the interactions between healthcare workers, tools such as medical equipment, and community dynamics.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

### Proposed Interview Protocol

#### 1. Introduction:

- Begin by explaining the purpose of the interview and its relevance to the Northern region.
- Highlight the importance of their unique perspectives as policymakers or beneficiaries.

#### 2. Cultural Sensitivity:

- Acknowledge the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Northern region and express an interest in understanding their specific experiences.
3. Location-Based Context:
    - Tailor opening remarks to reference the Northern region, emphasizing the importance of the Abuja-Kaduna Railway as a regional asset.
  4. Consent and Confidentiality:
    - Clearly explain consent procedures and emphasize that their responses will be used strictly for academic purposes.
  5. Flexibility:
    - Allow room for open-ended discussions and encourage them to share personal anecdotes or experiences.
  6. Follow-Up Questions:
    - Use follow-ups to delve deeper into issues unique to the Northern region, such as security concerns or ethnic inclusivity.
  7. Conclusion:
    - Thank participants for sharing their insights and ask if they would like to provide any additional comments or feedback.

#### Set of Interview Questions Focusing on the Abuja-Kaduna Railway Project

##### For Policymakers

1. Planning and Decision-Making:
  - How did ethnicity and national political factors influence the prioritization of the Abuja-Kaduna Railway Project?
  - What considerations were made to address the diverse ethnic composition during the project planning and implementation?
2. Foreign Aid Contribution:
  - How did the aid obtained from the Chinese government influence the selection of the project locations, contractors, technologies, and overall project execution?
  - Were there any conditions or constraints tied to the foreign aid that affected decision-making both in the planning and execution of the railway project?
3. Impact Assessment:
  - How do you evaluate the railway's contribution to equitable socio-economic development in Nigeria?
4. Policy Implications:
  - What policies are in place to ensure equitable access to railway services for all communities in Nigeria?

- How does the railway project align with Nigeria's broader economic developmental goals?

#### For Beneficiaries (Passengers/Residents)

##### 1. Usage Experience:

- How often do you use the Abuja-Kaduna Railway, and for what purpose (e.g., business, daily commute)?
- What motivated you to choose the railway over other transportation options?

##### 2. Economic and Social Impact:

- Do you think citing the railway project in the northern region will impact business or livelihood in Nigeria (e.g., access to markets, reduced transportation costs)?
- Do you think that railway projects can improve access to healthcare, education, or other essential services in the Northern region and Nigeria?

##### 3. Perception of Foreign Aid:

- What is your view on the contribution of the loan from the Chinese government in making this railway project a reality?
- Do you believe the siting of the railway in the Northern region was the best option for a country as big as Nigeria?

#### Appendix C: Interview Sample Transcript 1

For reasons aimed at maintaining the word count of this thesis, I have included only samples of the original transcripts.

**Interviewer:** I know you are conversant with the Abuja-Kaduna Railway project as somebody who has lived around that axis for a while before coming to Belgium.

**Respondent:** Of course, I've lived in the north all my life.

**Interviewer:** How often did you use the Abuja-Kaduna Railway, and what was your purpose for using it while you were back home?

**Respondent:** To be very honest, I didn't use it much. And the simple reason is that most time, I travel with private cars, and I travel at my convenience. Most of the time, I travel for a reason, so even when I arrive at my destination, I still need mobility to achieve all the things I've gone there to do. So most times I don't need it. So, the few times I tried to travel by train were simply to have the experience.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so what motivated you the few times you tried to choose the railway transportation over using your other private means of transportation?

**Respondent:** Well, the first one to be very honest was simply to explore. And the second one was simply that I was going to travel with someone, and we decided to make use of the train. I knew I had nothing to do when I arrived at the other end because I was just meeting somebody that we're going to be traveling together, and he was already waiting for me.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that, sighting that the project in the northern part of Nigeria will have much more business impact on the livelihood of Nigerians, and for a country as big as Nigeria, is sighting the project in the northern region the ideal place?

**Respondent:** To be very honest, you asked a very strategic question and a very important question, and I will want to answer it in two ways. The first one is to say that every project, such as that, would be a welcome project. Well, just to make things clear, Kaduna to Abuja is just a very short distance. Secondly, I would like to say, the railway does not in any way cover up 95 % of the north. If you want to look at it from that perspective, it's simply a few people who are benefiting from it. Because when you talk about the north, we have more states in the north. Some of these states are not even close to the railway. They can't even access it. They can't even use it. From that perspective. I think Karuna should be more privileged. It is people who are in the extreme part of the north that should be given such privilege, so that the long distances they go by car or sometimes forced to go by air can be limited by railway. You understand? So I think if we want to look at it from the benefit and then focus on concrete issues, it is a very small population that is benefiting from it. Okay.

**Interviewer:** Now, my next question is on foreign aid. What is your view on the contribution of the loan from the Chinese government in making this railway project a reality?

**Respondent:** Well, there has been a lot of discussion centered on this loan. But I am not surprised because our leaders have made taking loans a habit. From official data. The loan was impactful on the project, but the details are sketchy, and I know that it was not adequately utilised.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much. Now, do you think that the railway project cited in the north can impact or improve access to things like health care, education, or other essential services, first in the north and Nigeria as a whole?

**Respondent:** Yes, I think the project has impacted the other sectors you have mentioned, but the extent of this impact is what we don't know about. I sincerely don't trust these reports on such projects because our government and politicians are not sincere with us. I think such a project should have been cited in other areas down South, where the economy of the country has a stronghold. Such would have been a better way to generate the revenue to repay the loan.

**Interviewer:** Okay, my next question is still on aid, and do you think such funds are well utilised when they are received?

**Respondent:** Well, I have two sides to it. Number one is, for me, to be very honest, the integrity of our politicians is sometimes not good. Sometimes when those monies are collected, they are not used, I tell you, sometimes only a little chunk of the money goes into the project. I even prefer it to be bilateral. Let the foreign countries come study our people, study our place, study our country, and then decide how and where these projects will be located and how they will be managed. Do these projects yourself or run them for a period of time? And when you recover your money, then we can have it as our own. I think it will make more sense.

**Interviewer:** This coming, does it involve coming in to survey the country, check where is best for such a project, or are we telling you where the project is going to be located? Does it include things like that?

**Respondent:** Well, we can suggest to them. Yeah, to our country, and the aim is simply to see that our people get connected. Yeah, then they do the development, then they manage it, they can use our people to work in establishing it, use our people to run it, but then they own it and they manage it. Then, when they recover their money, they can leave it for us to continue. But to borrow this money and have our people do the work, I have always seen that it has not been very, very effective.

**Interviewer:** But do you believe that citing that project in the Northern region was the best option for a country as large as Nigeria?

**Respondent:** Yes, that's what I'm saying. I gave you two sides to this when I spoke. First, every project, provided it is for the good of the country, is for the good of the masses. So, wherever it is cited is good. But then, because we are a growing nation, sometimes we really need to also consider the monetary value the government is benefiting from for future development. Then we can think of a better place to cite it.

**Interviewer:** Okay, can I ask you, a lot of people in recent times have, or based on historical evidence, have argued that. The North has received more in terms of developmental projects than the rest of Nigeria. Even in terms of aid coming from UNESCO to improve education. For instance, sponsored education of children, the girl child, much of it goes to the North. And a lot of people still argue that we still have a lot of the "Almajirai" (the out-of-school children) in the North. We still have low educational standards in the North in terms of national results in national examinations, with the worst scores coming from the North. And people still argue that even though the southern part of Nigeria produces much of the wealth, the country relies on oil, which comes from the South, almost every development project seems to go to the North.

**Respondent:** The fact is that the people of the northern part of Nigeria seem to want to dominate politics. The people of the northern part of Nigeria seem to be favoured above other regions, and that sometimes, like you said earlier, within the politics of Nigeria, there is favouritism and ethnicity.

**Interviewer:** Do you agree to all of that, or do you distance yourself from those assertions?

**Respondent:** To be very honest, whether we like it or not, there is no fairness in Nigeria. When it comes to Nigeria, a country, has six senatorial zones or six geopolitical zones. Sorry, six geopolitical zones. And when you look at how projects are being allocated, you will see that there is no fairness. Take, for instance, recently, there were project allocations in Nigeria. If you go and study the statistics of the money that was allocated, you will see that a huge chunk of the money, almost all of it, went to the South West. There are some geopolitical zones that got more, but then an interesting thing, the South East, did not get even one dime. Is it fair that South East got nothing? So what kind of a mistake is that? You see, if you go back in history, and then you go back to 1914, when Nigeria was amalgamated by Lord Lugard, go back and read what happened. For them, they felt the North was underdeveloped and very poor, and it would not survive on its own because they have no resources. So the only way they can do that is to merge the North and the South together so that the resources from the South can be used to help the North. And if you look at it, it has been the case all this while. In the southern part of Nigeria, you have a lot of people who can survive on their own without the government. And you have a lot of people who can do without the government, but go to the North, even the people who claim to be rich are people who still use government money to make themselves rich, and still receive their salaries at the end. But how many people get a salary in the South from the government? So, the North has always received some special attention from the beginning, and it is simply because, first of all, it was about seeing that they were backward, they needed to be helped, and they had no resources. Even if you look at the, during some of these agreements that took place, you remember one time that Wike, as governor of Rivers state, was talking about revenues, and what was he saying? That they make more money and they contribute more money to the centre, and then they agree with development in their place, and then the government comes for tax, and then the Northern Governors don't do anything, and they are just spending money. Recently, they said, okay fine, let there be a change in the way revenues are generated. It was the Northern Government that stood to say no, we don't want. Because they don't know how to manage their area to be able to generate revenue. They like all the money that they are getting from the center. So, if you ask me to say, in all fairness, the North has always received greater priority when it comes to the allocation of things in Nigeria. Initially, this was to help the North because they were considered somewhat backward. But I think they are doing it to a point that sometimes it is becoming an insult to other areas.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I will just ask you two more questions, but is there any particular region you think deserves to have access to railways in terms of their services? I mean, when looking at the economic situation of the country, is there any particular region you think should have more access to railway services?

**Respondent:** Yeah, for me, if you ask me, we have six geopolitical zones. If Nigeria wants to be a working country, the whole idea will be, how can we have major rail lines connecting these six geopolitical zones concretely? And when all of them are connected, things can be better. You have

connected Nigeria, then you can look at the southeast, and there is a connecting train between Enugu State and Imo State. Anybody who wants to make use of it will have to travel only a short distance to be in the place, and then be able to connect to another geopolitical zone. For me, it's really about the masses, and then having the masses to enjoy this, and with all kinds of fairness, the project should be targeted towards connecting all these geopolitical zones, concretely and sincerely.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And finally, how can this railway project or a subsequent railway project support regional integration, which you have already mentioned? And do you think that supporting regional integration is going to contribute significantly to economic growth?

**Respondent:** Of course, for me, it's going to. Look, whether you like it or not, believe it, Nigerians travel a lot. Yeah. Internationally, locally, we travel a lot. And you, I know you're also a very good traveler. Just move around Nigeria, and then move to our motor parks, and then see the number of people that travel.

**Interviewer:** It has been a fruitful exercise, and I thank you for your time and patience, and for expressing your views on infrastructural development in Nigeria and how foreign aid is utilised in this regard.

**Respondent:** Yeah, well, I want to also thank you for really picking Nigeria as an area of interest for an investigation. We need it. And when we finish this investigation, please do not allow it to slide. Be able to publish it, publish articles, and let people read. We need people to read because knowledge is important. Okay, thank you. Thank you for the effort you are making. Thank you for bringing this up to bringing it to the table for further discussion. Thank you.

**Interviewer:** You're welcome, sir.

#### Interview Sample Transcript 2

**Interviewer:** Do you know of the Abuja-Kaduna Railway project as somebody who lives in Abuja?

**Respondent:** Of course, I use it regularly.

**Interviewer:** How often do you use it?

**Respondent:** Almost daily, if I'm not mistaken.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so what motivates you to choose this route over other means of transportation?

**Respondent:** Well, it's always fast and more convenient for me, especially with the security challenges we face on our roads.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that the location of this project in the North is the best option for a country in need of infrastructural development?

**Respondent:** This question is very timely and important at a time when there are a number of agitations and ethnic pressure all over. I think such projects should be sited in areas where the economy that drives development is at its peak. Although Abuja is the capital of the country and witnesses so much traffic, I don't think it is still the best place for such a project. We could take a look at major commercial nerve centres such as those in the South-East and the South-South.

**Interviewer:** Now, my next question is on foreign aid. What is your view on the contribution of the loan from the Chinese government in making this railway project a reality? Do you think that was wise of the government to take such a loan and utilise it in such a project?

**Respondent:** Well, in this country, we are not new to loans, and I don't think the borrowing will ever end. I think the loan was good and well used, especially as the project is something that is functional.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much. Now, do you think that the railway project cited in the north can impact or improve access to things like health care, education, or other essential services, first in the north and Nigeria as a whole?

**Respondent:** Yes, I think the project can impact the lives of every average Nigerian within this axis, and the impact on other sectors is massive. You know there are a lot of people who live in Kaduna and Abuja, and the railway has facilitated their access to these essential services.

**Interviewer:** Okay, my next question is still on aid, and do you think such funds received from foreign donors are well utilised when they are received, and can drive development?

**Respondent:** I know that the goal of the project was to drive development within the axis and also in Nigeria as a whole. However, we all question the effective utilisation of foreign aid. Our politicians and government officials have not shown any signs of accountability in the past, and when the details of government expenditure are not well spelled out, then one can only wonder about the level of accountability that the project handlers tendered.

**Interviewer:** Do you think foreign aid drives development in Nigeria, and that political leaders are committed to this or only interested in perceived personal gains?

**Respondents:** Foreign aid drives development, but we should question the commitment of our politicians and the level of trust we can repose in them. The fact is that we don't have trustworthy politicians, as I said earlier. It is clear to everyone that people go into politics just for personal gain. If only we as Nigerians could be more sincere and show commitment to nation-building, the impact of foreign aid would be far-reaching.

**Interviewer:** So, you are trying to propose that it's our politicians who are the factors that negatively influence the effectiveness of foreign aid?

**Respondent:** Seriously, you talk as if you are not a Nigerian or you are not aware of how things are done here by our politicians. Politics in Nigeria is all about personal gains, and that is why people are desperate to get in. I can tell you that politicians only care for themselves and their followers, and to an extent, their constituents. Moreover, your ethnic and religious affiliations cannot be separated from politics and political appointments. When aid projects and even national projects are proposed, these political leaders hijack them and direct them to their loyalists as a reward for their loyalty and followership. No one seems to have the interest of the nation at heart.

**Interviewer:** So, how best can aid-sponsored projects be handled to yield the required results?

**Respondent:** I think that such projects should be handled by the donors themselves because they will ensure that these projects are delivered and every fund is utilised properly.

**Interviewer:** Okay, can I ask you, a lot of people in recent times have, or based on historical evidence, have argued that. The North has received more in terms of developmental projects than the rest of Nigeria.

**Respondent:** Firstly, politics in Nigeria seems to be dominated by the Northerners, and they have acted in recent times as if no one can wrestle that from them. The Northerners are very active in politics, and their influence seems to tell a story to other regions. Secondly, I think that before the present government, most road projects, to be precise, have been directed to the North. I remember the East-West road in Rivers state, which is a major federal highway, was begging for attention for a long time, while other such roads were receiving adequate attention in the North.

**Interviewer:** What do you think the problem is, and do you think the government contributes to this?

**Respondent:** Ethnic favouritism and government policies do not promote the effective utilisation of foreign aid. Remember, the East-West road mentioned above was abandoned and became a death trap for a long time, and that was because the government at the time was not from the South-South, where the road is located. We had a president from the North, and he cared less about the other regions. President Muhammadu Buhari focused all his attention on the North, and every developmental project went in that direction. To put it in simple terms, the government of our country is built on favouritism and ethnic and religious affiliation. That has been our problem and has for eternity kept the nation divided. The policies of the government do not demonstrate any clear-cut modalities for sanctioning projects and how they are to be spread across all ethnic groups.

**Interviewer:** But we have certain principles, such as the Federal Character Principle, that insist on inclusivity, so don't you think they are meant to guide the government in project siting?

**Respondent:** That is the idea, but you and I know that government officials have become lawless and shown total disregard for the country's laws and the judiciary. The federal character principle, since the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, has remained on paper. So let us forget about that.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I will just ask you two more questions, but is there any particular region you think deserves to have access to railways in terms of their services? I mean, when looking at the economic situation of the country, is there any particular region you think should have more access to railway services?

**Respondent:** Yeah, a government cannot be building railways in the north when major commercial centres such as Lagos, Aba, and Onitsha are without good roads. I think the oil exploration centres need railways for fast transportation of petroleum products and personnel. Also, a railway link between the port areas of Lagos and other commercial centres is not something that needs to be overemphasised. This will drastically reduce pressure on our roads by tankers and heavy trucks, and the associated road mishaps. A nation like Nigeria needs to be connected by railways as well as road networks. But choosing to site such a project in a particular region is really not the best option, especially as the loan is involved.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And finally, how can this railway project or a subsequent railway project support regional integration, which you have already mentioned? And do you think that supporting regional integration is going to contribute significantly to economic growth?

**Respondent:** Of course, yes, having a railway network that runs across all geopolitical zones is the starting point for national integration and successful development. You can develop as a country when you are not connected. Traveling from Owerri in the South-East to Sokoto in the North-West is almost two days on the road. That is not good for national integration and development. With a train, that journey will only take a few hours.

**Interviewer:** It has been a fruitful exercise, and I thank you for your time and patience, and for expressing your views without reservations.

**Respondent:** The pleasure has been mine.

**Interviewer:** You're welcome, sir.

#### Appendix D: Written Answers

**Question 1:** How often do you use the Abuja-Kaduna Railway, and for what purpose (e.g., business, daily commute)?

**Answer:** I don't use it often, but when I want to use it, it is for business travel.

**Question 2:** What motivated you to choose the railway over other transportation options?

**Answer:** I prefer railway to vehicle transportation because it is faster

**Question 3:** Do you think citing the railway project in the northern region will impact business or livelihood in Nigeria (e.g., access to markets, reduced transportation costs)?

**Answer:** Yes, of course

**Question 4:** Do you think that railway projects can improve access to healthcare, education, or other essential services in the Northern region and Nigeria?

**Answer:** Yes, of course.

Question 5: What is your view on the contribution of the loan from the Chinese government in making this railway project a reality?

Answer: The loan given by the Chinese Government was used for its intended purpose.

Question 6: Do you believe the siting of the railway in the Northern region was the best option for a country as big as Nigeria?

Answer: It may not be the best option for Nigeria, but it is a good project for that part of the country.

Question 7: Is there any particular region you think deserves access to railways in terms of their services?

Answer: Yes, the southern region of Nigeria. Because economic activities are more prevalent and felt in the southern part than in other regions.

Question 8: Do you think the railway project will promote economic growth and development?

Answer: The railway services will bring more economic growth within Nigeria's regions because it is cheaper, faster, and more convenient to transport goods and services.