NIGERIA TECHNICAL AID CORPS (TAC) AND NATIONAL INTEREST, 1999-2023: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT
This paper assesses the impact of Nigeria's Technical Aid Corps (TAC) on the country's national interest from 1999 to 2023. TAC is a pivotal element of Nigeria's foreign policy, established to provide technical assistance to developing nations in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. This paper examines the program's effectiveness in advancing Nigeria's diplomatic, economic, and socio-political objectives. The study adopted qualitative data from books, journals, official data, and the Internet, and the soft power theory was considered in advancing the essence of establishing TAC. Findings indicate that TAC significantly enhances Nigeria's diplomatic relations and international image, promotes trade and investment, and contributes to capacity building and regional stability. However, the program faces challenges such as logistical constraints, political instability, and economic limitations. The research provides practical recommendations for improving TAC's operational framework and strategic alignment with Nigeria's foreign policy goals. This assessment not only contributes to the academic discourse on international aid and national interest but also offers actionable insights for policymakers to optimize the impact of TAC in fostering sustainable development and enhancing Nigeria's global influence.

Introduction

Nigeria's national interest and foreign policy pursuits are intertwined with its historical, economic, political, and social context. As one of Africa's most populous and economically influential nations, Nigeria's foreign policy is driven by a complex blend of factors such asregional power dynamics, economic interests, security concerns**,** diplomatic relations**,** Pan-Africanism and south-south cooperation**.** These aimed at promoting its national interests while contributing to regional stability and global cooperation. Nigeria has incontrovertibly emerged as a regional heavy weight on the continent, since its independence in 1960. The evidence of Nigeria's readiness and commitment to lead the continent resulted fromhistorical Pan-Africanism**,** taking leadership in African affairs**,** ensuring regional stability and security**,** trade and economic integration**,** cultural and educational exchanges**,** and diplomatic outreach**.**

Nigeria has not only made Afrocentric posture a policy statement but has practically been involved in the affairs that pertain to Africa. This was shown in Nigeria's first outing at the multilateral level, when Nigeria immediately contributed her troops to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in Congo, under the auspice of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC), from 1960-1964. From that period, Nigeria has been strategically involved in the liberation of other African nations under the grip of colonialism, racism, and apartheid regimes until the end of the struggle in 1994. The country has also not relented in the peacekeeping missions in Africa at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Some countries that have enjoyed Nigeria's benevolent gestures include Congo, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Ukhamiand Kumapayi,2023). According to Amao and Okeke-Ozodike (2015), the decision by Nigeria to make Africa the core of its foreign policy focus is attributable to several factors which include geo-political consideration that sees Nigeria strategically located within the West African Sub-region; demographic explanations that credit the country as the most populous black nation in the world (with a present estimate of over 200 million people); and economically viable nation among other African nations. According to Yoroms (2010), among other contentions on Nigeria-Afrocentric policy, the decision also stems from the need to protect Nigeria's security, given its cultural, geographical, and historical experiences with other African states, and also because of transnational security concerns defined by the way Nigeria's security is affected by what happens around its contiguous states.

The "manifest destiny" bequeathed to Nigeria, puts the country in a vantage position to lead Africa and ensure stability in the continent. According to Ibori (2019), the description of Nigeria as "the giant of Africa" is both symbolic and salutary. The symbolic nature has to do with her strategic location in the African continent, while the salutary aspect is how her natural endowments have enhanced her leadership roles in Africa since independence in 1960. Nigeria was and is still the most populous country in Africa and one of the fastest-growing countries globally in terms of population. Her impact is not just felt in Africa but globally.

Initially, Nigeria's Afrocentric policy was primarily focused on Nigeria's immediate neighbours and Africa in general. By the late 1980s, Nigeria shifted the emphasis in her foreign policy direction more towards technical assistance to needy nations, not just in Africa, but also in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, with the establishment of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Scheme in 1987 (Fage, 2012). The shift reflects Nigeria's commitment to addressing global challenges, promoting South-South cooperation, and advancing its national interests in various spheres. The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Scheme is conceived as a special programme that provides Nigeria with the opportunity to share its know-how and expertise, based on already-assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries. The programme involves the deployment of Nigerian graduates in the fields of Medicine, Nursing, Education, Engineering, Agriculture, Accountancy, and other related fields to African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries for two years under mutually agreed terms. The Scheme serves as a complement to direct financial assistance to ACP countries, as a way of fostering and deepening international understanding and enhancing continental integration.

According to Jinadu (2011), the Scheme is mutually owned and there are no conditionalities attached to it, but just a case of one developing country assisting another. The scheme has an impressive record. Many African countries such as Namibia, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Gambia, among others, have benefited from the goodies offered by this program. In fact, in Koutonin's (2015) estimation, over 35 African

and non-African countries demand the services of TAC worldwide. With more than 1500 skilled and non-skilled volunteers of Nigerian extraction working in these countries, Nigeria has contributed through TAC in providing key services to this country (Tella, 2017). According to Akpuru-Aja (2006), the Scheme is a brain-child of Nigeria's economic diplomacy. Economic assistance has been the main driving policy instrument used in setting up the Scheme. Such assistance envisages greater mutually beneficial economic and trade exchanges with the ACP countries. Nigeria's Technical Aid Corps is, therefore, an instrument of Nigeria's economic diplomacy. By extension, it complements diplomatic linkages between Nigeria and the ACP countries as well as creates necessary conditions for mutually beneficial economic relations.

Ironically, despite the TACs' three-decade existence and the substantial deployment of material, financial, and human resources that have tremendously benefited nations within and beyond Africa, the scheme's effectiveness in promoting Nigeria's interests, especially in African contexts like AU elections, remains uncertain. While TAC Nigeria has indeed played a role in providing social services to numerous African countries, showcasing acts of international goodwill that transcend continental boundaries, its impact extends even further. Notably, countries beyond Africa, including Jamaica, Fiji, and Belize, among others, have also reaped certain benefits through their association with TAC. The underlying motives and strategic considerations that drive Nigeria's engagement through TAC have not been adequately explored within the context of evolving global dynamics. Despite the money spent and the extensive human capital contribution of Nigeria's TAC in the provision of social services to African countries and beyond, it is argued that Nigeria is often accused of gaining almost nothing in return. The allegation is rife that the program has not in any way succeeded in enhancing Nigeria's strategic interest or position in Africa.

This paper contends that Nigeria's foreign policy stance, as demonstrated by the operations of the TACs, should primarily align to tactfully realize and enrich its interests and preferences. This approach could be effectively wielded as a form of soft power, allowing for nuanced influence on the global stage.

Conceptual Clarifications

National Interest

National interest is the premise that a country carries out domestic and external policy. It forms the basis for any action and inaction of governments' policies, all over the world. However, national interest is cumbersome to define, as it expresses a different operational framework of states in the conduct of their affairs (whether domestic or external) (Ukhami and Kumapayi, 2023). More worrisome, is the inability of some states to define what forms their national interest; which is why Agaba and Ukhami (2015) point out that a nation with no adequately defined national interest is a nation with no viable agenda for both domestic and foreign policy. According to Asobie (2007), the question of what constitutes the "interest" of a nation and the problem of how to identify it, have commanded the attention and tasked the energies, of policymakers and theorists for several decades and, in some cases, centuries. The concept is not amenable to precise definition, yet it can neither be ignored nor easily jettisoned as a basis for political analysis and action.

National interest, therefore, can be said to be the broad goals that all states share- political independence, economic growth, cultural preservation, and peace - and the distinct goals each state pursues on specific goals (Nester, 2001). National interests are evoked to justify virtually every action of the state, from generosity to genocide. The most obvious national interest is self-preservation and the greatest threat to that basic interest is an enemy of invasion. Thus, the use of national interest as a cornerstone of foreign policy is a key element of the road more travelled by world politics. Realists contend that it is a wise basis for foreign policy (Rouke & Boyer, 2004). Since it is perceived that there is no morality in international politics, where power is in view, interest actualization is certain. Although, power does not amount to physical energy but in the area of economic power, military capability, political prowess, technological/industrial capacity, etc. Since all nations have interests and all nations cannot achieve their national interests, countries tend to possess unimaginable powers that will put others in check in the process of achieving national interests. To Ebegbulem (2019), the concept of national interest has continued to play a significant role in the foreign policies of sovereign states. Since a state's foreign policy is

not operated in a vacuum, there are always goals that a state wishes to accomplish in its interaction with other states.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policymaking is as old as the first organized states and their conflicts with other states. Throughout the modern era, the issues, means, and ends of foreign policy-making for nation-states, have proliferated and changed significantly. According to Maiga (2018), with the emergence of modern nation-states, modern international relations emerged as these nation-states device and followed certain principles, courses, and standards that govern their interactions in the international community. No nation is an island, so it becomes imperative for nation-states to interact with each other. These actions therefore formed the foreign relations of such states. Traditionally, these actions are guided by national foreign policies that are clearly in pursuit of national aspirations or interests.

To buttress the argument of Maiga (2018), as regards the antecedence of foreign policy, Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999) pointed out that after the treaty of Westphalia and the end of the First and Second World War, the international system has witnessed an increasing growth in the unity and development of nation-states. The end product of this development is thus, the creation of an interaction between and amongst these nation-states. In addition, the establishment of the United Nations and the process of decolonization that has liberated many states into becoming sovereign entities have further provided the impetus to interrelationships among states. Such has resulted in the formation of 'foreign policies' to determine and identify the decisions, strategies, and ends of interaction of a state with another.

A state without a foreign policy, according to Agaba and Ukhami (2015), has been compared to a ship in the deep sea without any knowledge of directions. Foreign policy is a very important concept in the study and practice of international politics. As it is true that no nation of the world can live in isolation, there is a need for nation–states to relate with one another in the international system. Thus, these relations could be bilateral or multilateral. The relationship could be positive or negative; it depends on the country's national interest. Foreign policy cannot be achieved in isolation of national interest. Ota and Ecoma (2015) defined foreign policy as a strategy that is properly articulated and designed in a coordinated manner by institutionally designated decision-makers in a bid to manipulate the international environment to achieve identified national objectives. This conception presents foreign policy as an instrument of power via which states can react to events in the international environment by its actions or inactions to advance national goals. For Obiozor (2001), foreign policy deals with how and why a nation sets particular goals, orders its governmental policy-making machinery, utilizing its own human and natural resources to compete with other nations in the international arena. In the view of Rourke (2008), foreign policy is the goal sought, values, set decisions made, and actions taken by states and national societies and it constitutes attempts to design, manage, and control the foreign relations of national societies. Thus, foreign policy is an instrument that nations use to influence their relations with other states and to achieve their objectives within the global system. Foreign policy is associated with national interest and can be seen as the total of the goals of a sovereign state. It is the primary motivation for foreign policy formulation and implementation as a guide for actors and policymakers.

Diplomacy

The term diplomacy is derived from the word "diploma" which refers to a folded paper or document. In ancient Greece, these documents often contained agreements or treaties between states. Diplomacy has however acquired other meanings apart from the above. It is regarded as the management of international relations through the application of intelligence and skill by the representatives of states and other subjects of international relations to achieve desired goals through peaceful means. It is also at times defined as the official activity of giving state organs of external relations in pursuing through peaceful means, the objective and task of its foreign policy in protecting its right and interest as well as those of its citizens abroad.

The art of modern diplomacy is as old as mankind. It is a metamorphosed form of precedent in the process of relations inherited from some ancient state and civilization. Diplomacy has evolved over centuries, adapting to changes in technology, communication, and global politics. From traditional bilateral diplomacy to modern multilateral forums, scholars have analyzed the various stages of diplomatic practices (Smith, 2007). Diplomacy is another instrument employed by nations for the

promotion of their national interest. Diplomacy may be defined as the process of representation and negotiation by which states customarily deal with one another in times of peace (Padelford and Lincoln in Agaba and Ukhami, 2015). Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states. The conduct of international relations is usually referred to as international diplomacy (Barston in Agaba and Ukhami, 2015). The practice of diplomacy is guided by established principles and norms, including respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Diplomatic protocols and conventions govern interactions, ensuring a structured and orderly process. Moreover, diplomacy is not limited to crisis management or negotiation; it extends to preventive diplomacy, where efforts are directed at averting conflicts before they escalate, and public diplomacy, which engages with foreign publics to shape perceptions and promote cultural understanding (Berridge, 2015).

Diplomacy is therefore an indispensable tool for directing the state's domestic and foreign affairs. The machinery of diplomacy especially through the use and application of negotiation is the great engine used by civilized society to maintain peace. The essence of this is to conduct official business among the state and achieve results without rancour (Uzochukwu, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

The paperthat adopts the soft power theory (SPT) explains that the genesis of the "Soft Power" theory can be attributed to Joseph S. Nye Jr., who introduced the term in his seminal work titled "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" in 1990. As commonly understood, this concept refers to the capacity to sway others and advance national interests through attraction and persuasion, as opposed to employing coercion, military might, or economic sanctions - collectively referred to as hard power. Nye observed that in the contemporary landscape of international affairs, the costs and repercussions associated with military interventions, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions have diminished the allure of hard power as an effective toolkit for shaping state behaviour. The intricacies of globalization, accelerated by technological progress, the pursuit of nuclear armament by nations like Iran and North Korea, and swift economic expansion leading to the rise of Asian Tigers and other global complexities have significantly curtailed the capability of major powers like the United States to mold and influence global politics solely through conventional instruments of power (Vulving, 2009). Consequently, there exists a compelling argument for re-evaluating the strategy of relying solely on hard power and instead advocating for a more proactive embrace of soft power in the realm of International Relations (Wilson, 2008).

As articulated by Nye (2008:1), "Soft power entails the capacity to achieve desired outcomes by captivating others, rather than resorting to coercion or transactions. A nation's soft power draws from its reservoir of culture, values, and policies." The concept of soft power encompasses the amalgamation of a state's values, cultures, conduct, and institutions, which collectively serve as a magnetizing tool. Additionally, soft power can be viewed as a diplomatic mechanism aimed at moulding the conduct of other nations (Malone, 2011). In this context, Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) observe that soft power presupposes the strategic alignment of cultural proficiency and public diplomacy with a nation's foreign policy objectives, all geared towards the nonviolent advancement of the state's preferences on the global stage.

Delving deeper, Nye (2004) distilled the crux of the soft power theory by identifying three overarching categories: culture, political values, and foreign policies. He posited that these three dimensions have the potential to entice other nations into aligning with a country's interests. Ogunnubi (2014) presents an extensive catalogue outlining the diverse indicators within these three constituents of soft power. He discerns that culture encompasses a spectrum including literature, music, movies, tourism, media, and religion, among other elements, all underpinning the foundation of soft power. Similarly, liberal democracies, political goodwill, human rights principles, notions of equality and freedom, as well as domestic policies and democratic transition processes, collectively fall within the realm of political values. Lastly, he identifies endeavours like peacekeeping and peacebuilding, poverty alleviation initiatives, provision of international public goods, post-conflict reconstruction, debt relief, foreign aid, and more as integral threads interwoven into the tapestry of foreign policies, constituting a pivotal facet of soft power.

There is a noticeable surge in Nigeria's aspiration to attain a position of hegemony not only within Africa but also on a broader global

scale, as it discerns its "manifest destiny." This ambition has conceivably propelled the call for the embrace and implementation of soft power strategies by Nigeria, aimed at promoting its interests within the continent and beyond. The establishment of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) in 1987 by General Ibrahim Babangida, the then Military Head of State, was intended to support the growth of nations in Africa and the Caribbean. Scholars like Ogunnubi (2014) and Tella (2017) have contended that Nigeria can effectively harness this initiative to further its regional objectives. Adebanwi (2011) offers what is arguably the most comprehensive examination of the history, influence, policy imperatives, and efficacy of the TAC program. Intriguingly, the author asserts that the TAC represents a genuinely distinctive model of international volunteerism, particularly due to its emphasis on furnishing technical aid to recipient nations and promoting collaboration among countries in the Global South.

According to the Directorate of TAC (2004:15) the TACs scheme:

> *… conceptualized as a complement to Nigeria's traditional diplomacy. The scheme identified the use of Nigeria's abundant pool of well-trained human resources as a foreign policy instrument and recognized its enormous potential in enhancing cooperation, understanding, and develop(ment) amongst countries and peoples with a common background and shared aspirations.*

True to the above, the scheme has an impressive record. Many African countries such as Namibia, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Gambia, among others, have benefited from the goodies offered by this program. Koutonin (2015) estimated that over 35 African and non-African countries demand the services of TAC worldwide. With more than 1500 skilled and non-skilled volunteers of Nigerian extraction working in these countries, Nigeria has contributed through TAC in providing key services to these countries (Tella, 2017). Consequently, and more recently, TAC has been listed as part of Nigeria's soft power potential which has increased Nigeria's goodwill in Africa and can be leveraged to advance its interest in Africa. No doubt, Nigeria uses TAC to provide vital human capital that is lacking in many of these countries. TAC has helped to provide technical know-how to developing countries lacking critical and very important skills such as medicine, engineering, and law, among others. Tella (2017) and Ogunnubi (2014, 2016) have put forth the perspective that the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) constitutes a formidable instrument of soft power wielded by the Nigerian government, capable of being strategically employed to fortify its pursuit of hegemony within Africa. They jointly assert that with a substantial cadre of more than 1500 skilled and non-skilled volunteers of Nigerian origin actively engaged in these countries, Nigeria possesses an inexhaustible reservoir of soft power that has the potential to substantiate its hegemonic standing across the African continent.

Historical Overview of Technical Aid Corp

Through both bilateral and multilateral avenues, Nigeria has demonstrably exhibited acts and behaviours that profited meaningfully, the economic development of peoples and societies in Africa and beyond. One of such avenues of Nigeria's show of benevolence is the Technical Aid Corps Scheme, TAC, instituted by Nigeria during former President Ibrahim Babangida's military government in 1987, to serve as a platform for helping African states with technical manpower, to fast-track their socioeconomic and cultural transformation (Tyoden 2012). The Technical Aid Corps is a mechanism for Nigeria's foreign aid and technical assistance to especially African countries, through the use of Nigeria's abundant trained manpower, to assist needy countries both in Africa and the Caribbean.

Motivation and drive for Nigeria's foreign aid to African states generally, and the TAC scheme in particular, is based on Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy pursuit, manifested in Nigeria's unalloyed concern for Africa's economic well-being, inter alia.

> *Nigeria cannot talk about the world's rapid economic development and economic conditions without ensuring that the same conditions prevail in Africa. Nigeria has to divert a modest amount to aid and economic cooperation with other developing countries in our sub-region to combat illiteracy and to provide the necessary infrastructure lacking from the*

years of colonial neglect (Garba 1977: 142).

The TAC scheme underlies the big brother role of Nigeria in Africa, aimed at providing, as Emeka Anthony will say, more sustainable assistance to African states' (Obi 2006). Motivated by the realization that some African states have compromised their ability to respond to the legitimate aspirations and needs of the citizenry, the Nigerian government under the military administration of Ibrahim Babangida, felt the imperative to introduce the Technical Aid Corps to fill the gap created by the weak capacity of some states to produce highly trained manpower towards driving the economy of those states. As a manifestation of Nigeria's Africa-focused foreign policy agenda, the TAC scheme has its philosophical roots buried in Nigeria's conscious resolve and efforts at using its endowed human and material resources for the benefit of the black race, first enunciated by Nigeria's Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, at independence in 1960, at the United Nations General Assembly, on the occasion of Nigeria's admission to the United Nations (Daura 2010).

The proclamation by the Prime Minister articulated the Afrocentric principle of Nigeria's foreign policy, including its desire to champion the course of the black race either within the African continent or in the diaspora. The pursuit of this declaration was later to be followed by a series of financial, material, and logistic assistance to several African countries as beneficiaries of Nigeria's Afrocentric largesse. Coming from this backdrop, the TAC scheme has been described as "One of Nigeria's designed instruments of Afrocentric foreign policy, in the area of aid and development assistance, targeted at impacting positively on Africa, and involves conscious mobilization of domestic human resources, and deploying them to different parts of Africa, where they are critically needed" (Enuka 2020).

Though the TAC scheme is credited to Babangida during whose administration it got institutionalized, the idea predates his era. Nigeria, before the Babangida regime has been at the forefront of technical assistance to African countries, as well as to countries with African descent in the Caribbean (Oyelakin 2014). Apart from peacekeeping roles in Africa, Nigeria had also assigned magistrates, judges, administrators, educators, etc, to many African countries like Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Swaziland, Gambia, and Lesotho among others, in the early days of their political independence in the form of technical assistance which they needed (Enuka 2010). Particularly in the case of Botswana, Malawi, Gambia, and Zimbabwe, such Nigerian judicial officers provided a veritable platform for the take-off of their judicial systems (Eze 2010). Little wonder that to date, Nigerian professionals, accountants, lawyers, university professors, medical doctors, and others, are still found in some African countries.

From the onset, having conceived TAC as an instrument of foreign policy, its Directorate came to be placed under the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Directorate is saddled with the assignments of management and general administration of the scheme; conduct of recruitment and orientation programmes for corps volunteers, deployment of volunteers to recipient countries, and debriefing of volunteers on their final exit from the host countries. The TAC Directorate carries out these responsibilities based on directives received from the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The policy objectives of the Corps Directorate are giving assistance based on the assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries; promoting cooperation and understanding between Nigeria and Recipient countries; andfacilitating meaningful contacts between the youths of Nigeria and those of the recipient countries (The Nigerian Technical Aid Corps Scheme, 2004).

Achievements of TAC in Recipient Countries

The achievements of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) program in recipient countries have been significant, contributing to various sectors and fostering development across the regions where it operates. TAC's presence and interventions have left a lasting impact on the institutional capacity, diplomatic relations, human capital development, and socio-economic progress of beneficiary nations. According to Fage (2012:200), the impact of the TAC programme has been profound right from the outset. Fage argues authoritatively that "…the scheme has made some remarkable achievements".

Capacity Building and Skill Transfer: one notable achievement of TAC in recipient countries is its contribution to capacity building and skill transfer. Through the deployment of Nigerian professionals in fields such as education, healthcare, agriculture, engineering,

and public administration, TAC has facilitated the transfer of technical expertise and knowledge to local counterparts (Adebisi, 2016). This capacity-building approach has empowered local communities and governments to address development challenges more effectively and sustainably, thereby laying the groundwork for long-term socio-economic progress.

Through the TAC scheme, Nigeria has over the years contributed skilled personnel to many African countries, despite the shortage of such professionals in Nigeria itself. Nothing else demonstrates Nigeria's sacrificial commitment to the African course. Findings from research conducted by experts on this area reveal that this scheme has remained a great relief to many of the needy African countries that are deficient in well-trained manpower needed for meaningful development (Oyelakin 2014. Tyoden 2012, Daura 2010). About 32 African countries have experienced the presence and services of the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps. Some of those African countries are Angola; Benin Republic; Burkina Faso; Cape Verde; Central African Republic; Ethiopia; Equatorial Guinea; Kenya; Lesotho; Liberia; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Sudan; Tanzania; Gambia; Uganda; Sierra Leone; Mozambique; Zambia; Namibia; Niger Republic etc (Kamilu 2012; DTAC, 2018).

Table 1: High-skilled Nigerian manpower sent to some selected countries

S/N	Year	Country and Nature of Assistance
1	2006	Deployment of 40 Nigerian medical personnel to Kampala International University Teaching Hospital, located in Ishaka in the Bushenyi district of Uganda, to work and teach
2	2009	Spending over 70 million US dollars for the operation of 132 highly-qualified Nigerian professionals in Sierra Leone
3		Over 34 artisans, including fashion designers, auto mechanics, cosmetologists, agriculturists, and nutritionists were sent to Namibia for volunteer service
4	1999	Training of Academic and non-academic staff of Gambia's first University
5		Deployment of 50 Nigerian lecturers to Uganda Islamic University
6		Deployment of 671 Nigerian lecturers to Ethiopia
7	2007	Sending 29 Nigerian medical professionals to work in Belize, a Caribbean nation
8	2006	Deployment of 110 medical professionals to Jamaica

Sources: Tella, 2017; Adebanwi, 2011; Koutonin, 2015.

Table 1 expressly shows that since the inception of TAC, Nigeria has constantly sent skilled workers to other African countries to solve their pressing challenges. From various areas such as Engineering, Agriculture, Medical Lab, Technology, and Sport, Law, Architecture, Radiology, Accountancy, Insurance, Metrology, Lecturing, Coaching, and even Artisanship.

Diplomatic Relations: the TAC program has fostered positive diplomatic relations and goodwill between Nigeria and recipient

countries, strengthening bilateral and multilateral partnerships and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. TAC deployments have served as tangible demonstrations of Nigeria's commitment to international solidarity, friendship, and shared prosperity, fostering a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among nations in the Global South. In addition to its direct impact on recipient countries, the TAC program has also benefited Nigerian volunteers by providing them with valuable opportunities for professional growth, cross-cultural exchange, and personal development. TAC volunteers gain hands-on experience, acquire new skills, and broaden their perspectives through meaningful engagement with diverse communities and cultures, enriching their lives and careers in the process.

Improved International Image: Since the establishment of the TAC scheme, it has made gains in various areas of Nigeria's foreign relations with other countries" (Imobighe and Alli 2012: 205). The positive contributions of the Technical Aid Corps volunteers in the countries of deployment, and commendations from international agencies, have greatly enhanced the visibility of Nigeria as a donor country and thus as an effective and responsible player in the international arena. Contrary to the stereotyped image of Nigeria and Nigerians as drug traffickers, and perpetrators of other criminal acts by many countries of the world, the deployment of the volunteer corps of the TAC Scheme to the regions of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific served as publicity for Nigeria, portraying the country in a more positive light. As Kamilu puts it, "The TAC Scheme has endeared Nigeria to many countries…" (2012: 206). According to Ogunnubi (2016), TAC has been listed as part of Nigeria's soft power potential which has increased Nigeria's goodwill in Africa and can be leveraged to advance its interest in Africa.

Marketing and Showcasing of Nigerians: the TAC Scheme has provided many Nigerian professionals with the platform and great opportunities to showcase and market their worth and saleable qualities. Consequently, some foreign countries and companies have found many of these Nigerian professionals employable, and have since engaged their services either on a contract or permanent and pensionable basis. Some of these professionals retained in these recipient countries have become instrumental in facilitating and attracting internationally sponsored projects to Nigeria. Daura Mamman, a one-time Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Directorate of Technical Aid Corps, contained in his study, the story of how an ex-TAC volunteer retained by the Shelter-Afrique, in Kenya, and rose later, the Director of Operations of the company, became instrumental to the signing of a protocol between the Government of Bayelsa in Nigeria and the Shelter-Afrique, for the provision of affordable housing units in Bayelsa state.

Impact of TAC on Nigeria's National Interest

Admittedly, while the TAC was not established for the purpose of furthering Nigeria's interest regionally or even globally, the argument of this paper is that this altruistic foreign policy motivation is an anomaly given the reality of global geopolitics. Foreign policy implementation of any state should be intended to promote its interest among the comity of nations and should not be a 'Father Christmas' like posture of gift giving. Nigeria's foreign policy posture through the activities of the TACs ought to be directed mainly to actualize and enhance its interests and preferences subtly and as a soft power instrument. For instance, the associated benefits of TAC as regards Nigeria's position or interest in regional affairs is not clear or cannot be adequately proven despite the huge funds allocated to the scheme by the Nigerian government. Over 26 billion naira was allocated to TAC from 2009 to 2018 which is shown in Table2.

Table 2: Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to Technical Aid Corp

S/N	Year	Amount
1	2009	1,533,400,704
2	2010	2,021,573,574
3	2011	3,110,482,666
4	2012	1,977,659,825
5	2013	2,143,627,637
6	2014	3,110,482,168
7	2015	3,220,985,668
8	2016	2,554,300,951
9	2017	3,196,585,658
10	2018	3,909,174,942
	Total	**26,778,273,793**

Source: Budget (2009-2018).

Table 2 reveals the amount of money the Nigerian government has allocated to TAC from 2009 to 2018 showing that over 26 billion naira have been spent on TAC over a decade. Nevertheless, no evidence demonstrates that this huge investment has yielded any specific benefit in the advancement of Nigeria's position or interest in Africa. For instance, it is expected that this underutilized soft power tool will enable Nigeria's candidates to secure key positions in regional organizations such as the AU as a supposed hegemon but cases abound where Nigerian candidates are routinely defeated in these regional organizations that were created and are largely funded by Nigeria (Okereke, 2012).

Despite the money spent and the extensive human capital contribution of Nigeria's TAC in the provision of social services to African countries and beyond, it is argued that Nigeria is often accused for gaining almost nothing in return. The allegation is rife that the program has not in any way succeeded in enhancing Nigeria's strategic interest or position in Africa. Specifically, viewed from the prism of outcomes on recent elections in regional organizations such as AU, claims that TAC as a soft power tool has advanced Nigeria's position in Africa is debatable.

As Table 3 indicates, this is evident when Nigerians or Nigerian-backed candidates vie for elective positions in regional organizations such as ECOWAS and AU (Udo and Ekott, 2013).

Table 3: Positions Won and Lost by Nigerians/Nigerian-Backed Candidates in AU

S/N	Names of the Position	Names of the Individual and Year
1	African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security	A Nigerian Fatimah Mohammed lost to Smail Chergui of Algeria (2017)

2	African Union Commission Chairman	Nigeria supported Amina Mohammed who lost to Moussa Mahamet of Chad (2017)
3	African Union Commission Chairman	Nigeria supported Jean Ping who lost to Nkosazana Dlamini of South Africa (2012)
4	African Development Bank President	A Nigerian Adesina Akinwumi won the position against other contestants (2015)

Sources: Vanguard Nigeria 2012; 2015; Premium Times 2017.

Apart from the African Development Presidency, Nigeria and Nigerian-backed candidates from other countries have lost recent elections contested in the African Union, wherein countries that have benefitted from the TACs have failed to vote in support of Nigeria's preference. While state beneficiaries are not obliged to vote in support of Nigeria and also acknowledging that the TACs were not established for this purpose, Nigeria's embarrassing failure perhaps explains Koutonin's (2015) argument that the Scheme is a sheer waste of Nigeria's resources because apart from mere commendation, it does/has not helped the country to advance its interest in world politics. Also, it is quite ironic that Nigeria is home to numerous IVOs such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and German Cooperation for International Cooperation (GIS), among others trying to solve the many socioeconomic and political problems bedevilling the Nigerian state. Yet, Nigeria is going abroad to solve the socio-economic problem of other states. Invariably, the Scheme is criticized as a means by the bourgeoisie class to allocate and appropriate state funds to allies. People who are selected as TAC are often associates and proxies of those in charge of the scheme. In this regard, the TAC is seen as an avenue to compensate them for their loyalty. Buttressing the point, Adebanwi (2011) argues that there are constant contestations over the selection and appointment of volunteers. This suggests that the scheme is perceived as a means to appropriate state resources and secure benefits from the Nigerian state by the ruling class.

In the argument of this paper, with the many years of funding TAC and the provision of key services to many African countries, Nigeria is in a position to benefit more from the scheme through better outcomes at its official preference at the African Union elective positions where its strategic influence is more dominant. Often, Nigeria's interests and position in Africa are routinely disregarded (Ezirim, 2011). In fact, evidence abound of gang up by some African countries that have benefited from TAC during elections in regional organizations in Africa. For example, Niger Republic not just a beneficiary of the program but other goodies from Nigeria, voted against Nigeria's quest for a seat in United Nations Permanent Security Council in 2015. Also, the exclusion of Nigeria from AU ad-hoc mediatory committee on Libya and other actions and activities of many African countries captured in Table 5 is a pointer that TAC has been of limited value for advancing Nigeria's leadership position or presumed hegemonic interest in the Africa.

Table 5: Name/Countries of Candidates who won in 2017 AU Elections

S/N	Positions	Names	Country
1	Chairperson	H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat	Chad
2	Deputy chairperson	H.E. Quartey Thomas Kwesi,	Ghana
3	Commissioners Commissioner for Peace and Security	Smail Chergui,	Algeria
4	Commissioner for Political Affairs	Samate Minata	Burkina Faso
5	Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology	H.E. Agbor Sarah Mbi Enow	Cameroon
6	Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy	Abou-Zeid Amani	Egypt
7	Commissioner for Social Affairs	Elfadil Mohammed	Sudan
	Commissioner for Trade and Industry	Muchanga Albert	Zambia
	Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture	Sacko Leonel Correa	Angola
	Commissioner for Economic Affairs	H.E Victor Harrison,	Madagascar

Source: Retrieved from https://au.int/en/AUC/leadership/7/9/2018

From Table 5, neither Nigeria nor its supported candidates won any elective positions in the AU elections held in 2017. Although, the issues of zoning affected Nigeria's chances and interest in the elections. However, this electoral outcome did not portray Nigeria in the light of a regional hegemon. This is because it is assumed that as a regional power or supposed hegemon, its interest and positions in regional organizations within its sphere of influence should be advanced or protected without many obstacles (Prys, 2020). The illustration of the US projection of Kim Yong Kim as World Bank President and his subsequent victory is apt. The point here is that there is a need for the Nigerian government to widen the scope of TACs to drive its foreign policy interest in the African Union. Regrettably, although the activities of TAC can be strongly regarded as a huge soft power tool that has contributed to the social economic development of many African countries, yet, Nigeria needs to take pragmatic steps against countries that continue to benefit from the scheme but still vote against Nigeria's interest or positions in regional organizations.

Challenges of TAC in Achieving Nigeria's National Interest

Though the Scheme has been applauded by some who perceive it as the most ambitious foreign policy project ever undertaken by Nigeria (Oyelakin 2014), but it has attracted criticisms from those who are opposed to it. The Scheme has been weighed and found to be a clear demonstration of the foreign policy of waste pursued by Nigeria at the great expense of the

good of its citizens (Enuka 2020, Obi 2006). First, it is argued that the scheme is wasteful since young Nigerian professionals working at home do not earn as much as those in the TAC Scheme. Secondly, and most importantly, Nigeria is still much in need of these professionals herself. Many Nigerians do not have access to medical doctors, yet Nigeria sends out the ones available for other countries' needs, at the health expense of Nigeria and Nigerians. These are needed men and professionals who ought to be sent to the rural areas in Nigeria, given the dire need for them in such places. It is a paradox that Nigeria still hires and imports Engineers to execute road projects etc, and yet exports her own Engineers to other African countries.

Obi (2006) could hardly contain his avowed disapproval of this scheme and policy. He lamented that it is simply incomprehensive how Akinyemi and his master, Babangida, got to the conclusion that a country like Nigeria which is so much in need of high-class manpower for her development now has more than enough to think of exporting them to other lands at Nigeria's expense.

The pursuit of such Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, have not been without costs. Their achievements have been at the expense of the nation's economic interests, especially in the short run. Aid which are urgently required for rapid economic development in Nigeria and to enhance the material welfare of Nigerians, has been expended abroad as aid or on other uneconomic ventures. The rationale which Nigerian successive governments have proffered for the granting of economic assistance to other African countries creates the impression that such assistance is obligatory. Therefore, no serious efforts are made to tie the aid to some activity that would enhance Nigeria's national interests. More so, the TAC scheme evidently turned out to be an encumbrance on Nigeria's national budget because a huge amount of money is expended annually on the programme without immediate visible gains on the expenditure.

In addition to the matter of the foreign policy of waste, the TAC scheme is a demonstration of Nigeria's foreign policy of illusion. The pursuit of the TAC scheme and other of such programmes are informed by Nigeria's perception and image of herself. Nigeria's image of herself is that of a great African power, a view that has served as the basis for her allocation of flamboyant roles and responsibilities to herself. One begins to wonder if Nigeria really has the resources and magnitude of power that match those visions and self-imposed mission. Any serious student of International Relations and Foreign Policy will have little or no difficulty to discover that such Nigeria's image of herself is only assumed and preposterous. For Nigeria in her known real situation to be operating her foreign policy as if she is a great power is indicative of a sort of political illusion. This is nothing short of a self-imposed mission based on an obscured vision of reality. In their bid to acquire international praise, by playing big and good brother roles, fuelled by the Afrocentric foreign policy force, different Nigerian governments appeared to be more interested in expenses on foreign African states and nationals than the very Nigerian citizens for whom the resources are meant. Nigerian leaders and the different Nigerian governments forgot that "Respect from abroad acquired through the prodigal disbursement of scarce national resources in favour of external forces, cannot act as a sovereign elixir for such a nation whose internal survival is at stake" (Ukaeje 1999:137).

Nigeria is significantly charitable to African countries; while that same affection is not shown to her citizens. This is why the nation is characterized by a high rate of poverty, unemployment, lack of infrastructure, and very low industrialization. Nigeria's altruistic contributions to Africa and beyondhave made her too blind to see the economic and political realities of her actions domestically and in her ability to weigh her authority and interest in the continent(s). Nigeria is often and secretly mocked by other African countries as "a giant with clay feet" (Ukhami and Kumapayi, 2023). According to Ukaeje (1999), "our false generosity abroad and penury at home are proof that we are pretending to be what we are not in reality". Akinboye (2013), simply captured that Nigeria's Afrocentric behaviour is likened to "beautiful abroad but ugly at home."

Prospects of TAC in achieving Nigeria's National Interest

The prospects of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) in achieving Nigeria's national interest are promising, given its potential to contribute to sustainable development, regional integration, and diplomatic engagement in Africa and beyond.

One of the key prospects of TAC lies in its capacity to strengthen Nigeria's soft power and influence on the global stage. By deploying

skilled professionals to assist other developing countries, Nigeria can showcase its expertise, innovation, and goodwill, enhancing its reputation as a responsible actor and a reliable partner in international development cooperation (Ankomah, 2014). This positive image projection can pave the way for expanded diplomatic relations, economic partnerships, and strategic alliances that advance Nigeria's national interests and geopolitical objectives. TAC holds the potential to foster regional integration and cooperation among African countries, contributing to the realization of the African Union's vision of a united, prosperous, and peaceful continent. Through collaborative initiatives and knowledge-sharing platforms, TAC can facilitate cross-border dialogue, exchange best practices, and promote inclusive growth and development strategies that benefit all stakeholders (Adebisi, 2016). By championing regional integration efforts, Nigeria can harness the collective potential of African nations to address common challenges, leverage shared opportunities, and promote shared values and interests on the global stage.

TAC also offers opportunities for economic diversification, trade expansion, and investment promotion in Nigeria and recipient countries. By leveraging its technical assistance programs as vehicles for economic diplomacy, Nigeria can open new markets, attract foreign investment, and enhance bilateral trade relations with partner nations (Mwenda &Ssekamwa, 2019). Through strategic partnerships and collaborative projects, TAC can unlock synergies, create value chains, and stimulate economic growth and job creation across sectors, driving socio-economic transformation and poverty reduction in Nigeria and beyond.

Additionally, TAC can play a catalytic role in advancing Nigeria's human capital development agenda and fostering inclusive growthand social cohesion. By prioritizing investments in education, healthcare, skills training, and entrepreneurship development, TAC can empower individuals and communities to realize their full potential, participate meaningfully in economic activities, and contribute to national development efforts (Ankomah, 2014). By investing in human capital, Nigeria can build a more resilient, equitable, and prosperous society that reflects the aspirations and interests of its diverse population.

Conclusion

From the study, itis evident that TAC deployments are driven by multifaceted motivations, including altruism, diplomatic pragmatism, and strategic interests. While the Nigeria Technical Aid Corps (TAC) has undoubtedly served as a significant instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy, it is not without its criticisms and challenges. The period from 1999 to 2023 has revealed certain shortcomings and areas for improvement within the TAC framework, which merit careful consideration alongside its achievements. One notable criticism of TAC is its perceived lack of sustained impact and long-term sustainability in recipient countries. While TAC deployments have provided valuable technical assistance and expertise, there have been instances where the initiatives implemented have not translated into enduring solutions or meaningful systemic change. This raises questions about the effectiveness of TAC's approach and the need for more comprehensive strategies that address underlying structural issues and promote genuine capacity building.

In addition to these challenges, there remains a pressing concern regarding the inability of Nigeria to adequately impact its citizens before extending its generosity to other countries. While TAC embodies Nigeria's commitment to international solidarity and cooperation, critics argue that prioritizing assistance to other nations over addressing domestic challenges, such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and poverty alleviation, may divert resources away from pressing needs within the country. This highlights the importance of striking a balance between international obligations and domestic priorities to ensure that Nigeria's development efforts resonate with the aspirations and well-being of its citizens.

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