

## **THE PARADOX OF REMITTANCES: HOW NIGERIA'S LACK OF BORDER POLICY DRIVES YOUTH EMIGRATION WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY CREATING DEPENDENCE ON DIASPORA INCOME**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examines the paradoxical relationship between Nigeria's inadequate border management policies and the country's growing dependence on diaspora remittances. While weak border governance contributes to the insecurity and instability that compels youth emigration, the resulting remittance flows have become integral to Nigeria's economic survival, contributing approximately 6% to GDP. Using secondary data from government reports, international organizations, and academic studies, this paper argues that Nigeria has inadvertently created an unsustainable economic model that exports unemployment through porous borders while importing foreign exchange through diaspora remittances. The study reveals that this paradox perpetuates a vicious cycle: border policy failure fuels youth emigration, which generates remittances that temporarily mask governance deficiencies, thereby reducing pressure for meaningful reforms. The paper concludes that breaking this cycle requires integrated policy interventions addressing both border management and youth employment simultaneously, transforming the current "brain drain-remittance dependence" model into sustainable domestic economic development.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria faces a profound paradox in its migration and economic landscape. On one hand, the country's porous borders and governance failures drive an unprecedented wave of youth emigration colloquially known as "japa", a Yoruba expression meaning "to flee" or "to run for your life" (Okunade, 2023). On the other hand, these same emigrants send home remittances that have become indispensable to Nigeria's economic survival, exceeding oil revenues and constituting a vital lifeline for millions of families.

According to the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM, 2019), Nigeria's remittances from the diaspora exceeded \$25.368 billion in 2019, surpassing the nation's oil revenues of \$20 billion. In 2023, diaspora remittances reached \$19.5 billion, representing 35% of all remittances to sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2024). This financial inflow constitutes approximately 6% of Nigeria's GDP (Cardoso, 2024), making it one of the largest recipients of remittances in Africa.

Yet this economic benefit emerges from a governance crisis. Afrobarometer (2024) reports that 56% of

Nigerians have considered leaving Nigeria, a dramatic increase from 36% in 2017. Among youth aged 18-35, the figure rises to 70% according to the African Polling Institute (2022). The proportion of young people planning to leave permanently increased from 36% in 2014 to 52% in 2018, one of the highest levels in Sub-Saharan Africa (Clemens and Mendola, 2020).

This research examines the causal link between Nigeria's border policy failures and this emigration-remittance paradox. Okafor and Obiora (2024) documented that "there are over 1,499 irregular (illegal) and 84 regular (legal) officially identified entry routes into Nigeria," demonstrating the scale of border management challenges. The central argument is that Nigeria's inadequate border governance contributes directly to the insecurity, instability, and governance failures that compel youth emigration, while simultaneously creating an economic dependence on remittances that reduces governmental incentive to address root causes.

This paper investigates three interrelated questions: First, how does border policy failure contribute to the conditions driving youth emigration? Second, how has remittance dependence affected Nigeria's policy priorities and reform incentives? Third, what are the long-term sustainability implications of this brain drain-remittance cycle for national development?

The significance of this study lies in exposing a previously unexplored policy contradiction: Nigeria's informal tolerance of emigration through poorly managed borders may represent an unspoken strategy to export unemployment while importing foreign exchange, creating a dependency that undermines sustainable economic development.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Conceptual Framework: Border Governance and Migration**

Border management represents a fundamental attribute of state sovereignty and capacity. Bodunde (2015) observed that "some Nigeria borders are demarcated with drums and logs of woods," a visible symbol of state incapacity that undermines governmental legitimacy. Spencer (2007) argued that "border is the first point of combat against terrorism and the last line of a state's territorial integrity", when this line fails, it signals broader governance collapse.

Nigeria's border challenges are substantial. Fifteen of Nigeria's thirty-six states have international land boundaries (Okafor and Obiora, 2024), with borders shared with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Monguno (2021) stressed that "unless and until our borders are adequately manned and policed, Nigeria will never have peace," noting that "porous borders remain a major source of concern as this has aided smuggling of prohibited items and irregular migration as well as other transnational organized crimes."

The 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons was designed to facilitate regional integration. However, Saka and Amusan (2022) observed that "Nigerian politicians accuse foreigners of contributing to the many security challenges in the country," leading to securitization of migration issues. The government's 2019 border closure, lasting until December 2020, represented a dramatic acknowledgment of border management failures (Aniche et al., 2022).

## **2.2 The Youth Emigration Crisis: Drivers and Dimensions**

Nigeria's youth emigration has reached crisis proportions. The number of international migrants from Nigeria increased from approximately 450,000 in 1990 to 1.4 million in 2019 (Clemens and Mendola, 2020). However, this official figure likely underestimates actual emigration, with NIDCOM estimating 15 million Nigerians living abroad (Dabiri-Erewa, 2017).

Ambali et al. (2025) highlighted "an alarming rise in the rate of skilled youth emigration over the past decade, resulting in notable brain drain that adversely affects critical sectors like healthcare, education, engineering, and information technology in Nigeria." Udeorah and Odiche (2025) noted that "over 5,000 Nigerian doctors practice in the UK alone," while Oluwafunke (2025) reported that "about 15,000 nurses left Nigeria in 2022 to take up job abroad."

The drivers of this emigration are multifaceted but interconnected. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2023), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stood at approximately 60%, while overall unemployment reached 33.3%. John-Oti and John-Oti (2025) identified push factors including "economic challenges such as unemployment, inflation, and poverty, as well as political instability and insecurity."

Critically, insecurity directly linked to porous borders features prominently in emigration decisions. Okunade (2023) found through qualitative research that for many Nigerian youth, "japa doesn't mean to migrate; it means to run for your life," capturing the existential desperation behind contemporary emigration. The 2020 #EndSARS protests and their violent suppression proved particularly decisive, with 70% of Nigerians aged 18-35 surveyed in 2022 reporting they would relocate if given opportunity (African Polling Institute, 2022).

## **2.3 Remittances as Economic Lifeline**

Remittances to Nigeria have grown exponentially over two decades. According to NIDCOM (2019), remittances grew from \$1.392 billion in 2000 to \$25.368 billion in 2019. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remittances globally declined by 20%, Nigeria received \$17.208 billion in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). By 2022, remittances recovered to \$19.8 billion (Nairametrics, 2023), and reached \$19.5 billion in 2023 (World Bank, 2024).

PwC (2019) documented that "Nigeria's 2018 migrant remittances translated to 83% of the Federal Government budget in 2018 and 11 times the FDI flows in the same period." The report further noted that "Nigeria's remittance inflows was also 7.4 times larger than the net official development assistance (foreign aid) received in 2017 of US\$3.4 billion."

The primary sources of these remittances are the United States and United Kingdom, which host the largest Nigerian diaspora communities estimated at over 5 million people (Nairametrics, 2023). According to the British High Commission, between April 2023 and March 2024, 255,000 visa applications to the US were approved, while over 300,000 UK visa applications were approved in 2023 (World Bank, 2024).

## **2.4 The Utilization Problem: Consumption versus Investment**

Despite massive remittance inflows, their developmental impact remains limited. According to PwC (2019), "70% of remittances are used for consumption purposes, while 30% of remittance funds go to investment." This consumption-heavy pattern has significant implications. As The Borgen Project (2024) noted, "unfortunately in Nigeria, this remittance has principally provided improved welfare for families as opposed to transparent investment and development of the nation."

Adeagbo (2024) found that "diaspora remittances exact a positive and significant effect on the quality of the residual domestic human capital," suggesting some developmental benefits. However, The Borgen Project (2024) argued that "remittances have continuously allowed the Nigerian government to strategically take a back seat with regard to welfare, as it reassures government officials that Nigerian counterparts abroad will financially cover its families. It simply reduces the incentive to provide for the basic needs of their citizens."

This critique highlights the moral hazard problem: remittance dependence may reduce governmental accountability and reform pressure. Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (2023) observed that "remittances undeniably provide critical support to many families," but warned that "the remittances from migrants have made many parents and relatives back home perpetually reliant and dependent on children abroad."

## **2.5 Border Failure, Insecurity, and Emigration: The Causal Link**

The connection between border management failures and youth emigration operates through insecurity as a mediating variable. Wilcox et al. (2025) documented that "porous borders, abuse of ECOWAS protocol, globalization/manpower problem, inadequate cooperation between security agencies, educational opportunities, lack of social safety, poor governance, corruption, lack of social justice, equity, and fair play, youth unemployment, among others affect national security."

Okafor and Obiora (2024) noted that "the influx of non-Nigerians and illegal immigrants mixing up with the teeming unemployed youths engage into various criminal activities

which cannot be managed by our security personnel's has led to possessions of the sophisticated arms uses by militants." This arms proliferation directly contributes to insecurity that drives emigration.

According to Udentia and Nwosuji (2015), "the Boko Haram terrorist group in Northern Nigeria consists mostly of young men recruited as a result of their lack of means of livelihood," and "it has been established that there is a link between the Boko Haram sect and external radical forces in the region, especially the Al-Qaeda in Maghreb." Cross-border recruitment and arms trafficking through porous borders directly fuel conflicts that make Nigeria unlivable for many youths.

Okunade (2023) documented that "the state of insecurity in Nigeria has heightened the fear of many Nigerians. This continues to manifest in the form of hijacking, kidnapping, armed robbery, and so on within the Nigerian space. Nigerians have responded to this differently by evolving different survival strategies. One of the coping strategies is emigration."

## **2.6 The Missing Link: The Remittance-Reform Paradox**

While extensive literature exists on brain drain, remittances, and border management separately, no existing research has systematically examined how remittance dependence affects policy incentives for addressing the border governance failures that contribute to emigration pressures. This represents a critical gap because the causal chain operates bidirectionally:

1. **Border failure → Insecurity → Emigration → Remittances:** Weak borders facilitate arms trafficking and cross-border terrorism, creating insecurity that drives youth emigration, which generates remittances.
2. **Remittances → Reduced reform pressure → Continued border failure:** Substantial remittance inflows mask governance deficiencies, reduce fiscal pressure for reform, and create path dependence on diaspora income.

This creates what might be termed a "remittance trap", an equilibrium where short-term economic benefits from emigration reduce long-term incentives for the governance reforms (including border management) necessary to make emigration unnecessary.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Push-Pull Theory and Border Governance**

This study adopts the Push-Pull Theory as its primary theoretical framework, modified to incorporate border governance as a structural variable. Traditional push-pull theory, as articulated by Lee (1966) and applied to Nigerian context by John-Oti and John-Oti

(2025), posits that migration results from push factors (unemployment, insecurity, poverty) in origin countries and pull factors (better opportunities, security, quality of life) in destination countries.

However, this framework requires modification to account for how border governance failures amplify push factors. Border porosity does not merely permit emigration; it actively creates conditions that necessitate it. Specifically:

#### **Push Factors Amplified by Border Failure:**

- Insecurity resulting from cross-border arms trafficking
- Economic instability from smuggling and revenue losses
- Governance crisis symbolized by inability to control territory
- Youth unemployment exacerbated by insecurity affecting agriculture and commerce

#### **Pull Factors Enhanced by Diaspora Networks:**

- Information flows through diaspora connections
- Financial support for migration costs through remittances
- Reduced psychological barriers as emigration normalizes

### **3.2 Economic Dependency Theory**

Dependency Theory, originally developed to explain relationships between developed and developing nations, provides insights into the remittance paradox. Frank (1967) argued that underdevelopment results not from absence of development but from exploitative relationships that extract resources from periphery to core.

Applied to the Nigeria remittance context, a modified dependency framework reveals how:

1. **Human Capital Extraction:** Nigeria invests in education and youth development, but benefits accrue to destination countries through skilled labor contributions.
2. **Consumption Dependence:** Remittances create consumption-oriented dependency rather than productive investment, similar to how resource extraction creates Dutch disease effects.
3. **Policy Capture:** Like resource-dependent states that prioritize extraction over diversification, remittance-dependent governments may prioritize maintaining emigration channels over addressing root causes.



4. **Structural Lock-in:** The remittance economy becomes embedded in household survival strategies, creating political resistance to reforms that might reduce emigration.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a secondary data analysis approach, synthesizing existing quantitative and qualitative data from multiple authoritative sources to examine the remittance paradox in Nigeria. The study draws upon government publications including Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) annual economic reports and balance of payment data, National Bureau of Statistics unemployment figures, Nigerian Immigration Service migration records, and Nigerians in Diaspora Commission remittance flow reports covering the period 2015-2024. Additionally, the research incorporates data from international organizations such as the World Bank Migration and Development Briefs, International Monetary Fund country reports, United Nations migration statistics, and International Organization for Migration assessments. The analysis is further enriched by peerreviewed academic literature on Nigerian migration and border security, Afrobarometer survey data on migration intentions, and policy documents from organizations like PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Center for Global Development.

The analytical approach combines content analysis and trend analysis to identify four key dimensions of the remittance paradox. First, temporal pattern analysis examines changes in emigration rates, remittance flows, and border security incidents over the 2010-2024 period to establish developmental trajectories. Second, the study identifies documented causal relationships between border governance failures, insecurity, emigration drivers, and remittance patterns through systematic cross-referencing of multiple data sources. Third, policy gap analysis scrutinizes official government documents to assess how remittance dependence may influence border management priorities and resource allocation decisions. Finally, comparative analysis contrasts Nigeria's situation with other countries experiencing similar migration pressures to contextualize findings and identify distinctive features of the Nigerian case.

This secondary data approach acknowledges several inherent limitations that must be considered when interpreting findings. Data accuracy concerns arise from the likelihood that unofficial emigration through irregular channels and informal remittance transfers via unbanked systems are significantly underreported in official statistics. Establishing definitive causal links from observational data remains methodologically challenging, as correlation does not necessarily confirm causation in complex socio-economic systems. Attribution of policy choices to specific motivations is difficult to prove conclusively without access to internal government deliberations, and temporal lags in data publication mean the most recent statistics may not capture the very latest trends. Despite these

constraints, the convergence of evidence across multiple independent data sources, governmental, international, academic, and civil society provides robust triangulation that substantiates the remittance paradox thesis.

## **5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 The Scale of Border Governance Failure**

Nigeria's border management challenges are extensive and well-documented. Okafor and Obiora (2024) identified "over 1,499 irregular (illegal) and 84 regular (legal) officially identified entry routes into Nigeria," meaning illegal entry points outnumber official ones by nearly 18:1. Bodunde (2015) noted that "some Nigeria borders are demarcated with drums and logs of woods," highlighting infrastructure inadequacies.

The consequences are severe. Monguno (2021) documented that porous borders have "aided smuggling of prohibited items and irregular migration as well as other transnational organized crimes." Okafor and Obiora (2024) found that "the influx of non-Nigerians and illegal immigrants mixing up with the teaming unemployed youths engage into various criminal activities which cannot be managed by our security personnel's."

Arms proliferation through porous borders directly fuels insecurity. Wilcox et al. (2025) established that "arms proliferation due to porous borders allows for the unrestricted flow of small guns into and out of Nigeria, with the majority of these weapons ending up in the hands of non-state actors." This has led to "raising increase of various categories of crime from Boko Haram Insurgency, Kidnapping, arms banditry, militancy /Oil bunkering and farmers/herders conflicts" (Okafor and Obiora, 2024).

### **5.2 Insecurity as Migration Driver**

Insecurity features prominently among emigration motivations. Okunade (2023) documented through qualitative research that "the state of insecurity in Nigeria has heightened the fear of many Nigerians. This continues to manifest in the form of hijacking, kidnapping, armed robbery, and so on within the Nigerian space. Nigerians have responded to this differently by evolving different survival strategies. One of the coping strategies is emigration."

The 2020 #EndSARS protests proved particularly decisive. According to research by Okunade (2023), "for many young Nigerians, the bloodshed that ended the 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality proved to be a decisive factor. Their desire to leave the country crystallised into action. Leaders had disregarded their criticisms and, for some youth, it seemed futile to continue struggling."



Quantitative data confirms this trend. The African Polling Institute (2022) found that 70% of Nigerians aged 18-35 would relocate if given opportunity, while Afrobarometer (2024) reported that 56% of all Nigerians have considered leaving, compared to just 36% in 2017. The number of passports newly issued or renewed almost doubled, from one million in 2021 to 1.9 million in 2022 (Okunade, 2023).

### **5.3 The Brain Drain Dimensions**

The skilled emigration crisis affects all professional sectors. In healthcare, Udeorah and Odiche (2025) documented that "over 5,000 Nigerian doctors practice in the UK alone," while Oluwafunke (2025) reported "about 15,000 nurses left Nigeria in 2022 to take up job abroad." Adepoju (2006) found that "over 38,000 Nigerian doctors practice abroad, leaving the country's healthcare system severely understaffed" (cited in John-Oti and John-Oti, 2025).

The education sector faces similar losses. Ambali et al. (2025) highlighted "notable brain drain that adversely affects critical sectors like healthcare, education, engineering, and information technology in Nigeria. This exodus undermines national development and exacerbates existing skill shortages in essential fields."

The World Bank Development Prospects Group (2007) reported "an estimated emigration rate of 36 percent for Nigerians with tertiary education. For physicians and nurses, the rates were about 13.6 percent and 11.7 percent, respectively" (cited in Mberu and Pongou, 2021). Given population growth and recent emigration surges, these rates have likely increased substantially.

### **5.4 Remittance Growth and Economic Significance**

Remittance growth has been extraordinary. NIDCOM (2019) documented growth from \$1.392 billion in 2000 to \$25.368 billion in 2019, an 18-fold increase in two decades. Even during COVID-19 disruptions, remittances remained substantial at \$17.208 billion in 2020 (World Bank, 2020), recovering to \$19.8 billion in 2022 (Nairametrics, 2023) and reaching \$19.5 billion in 2023 (World Bank, 2024).

The economic significance is profound. According to Cardoso (2024), remittances constitute approximately 6% of Nigeria's GDP. PwC (2019) found that "Nigeria's 2018 migrant remittances translated to 83% of the Federal Government budget in 2018 and 11 times the FDI flows in the same period." Critically, NIDCOM (2015) reported that "Diaspora remittances, in 2015 was \$21.2 billion that was officially sent home by Nigerians overseas, which surpassed the \$19.6 billion proceeds from oil exports."

This means remittances have exceeded oil revenues consistently since 2015, fundamentally altering Nigeria's economic structure. NIDCOM (2019) noted that "remittances were worth 5.6 per cent of GDP in 2017, exceeding Nigeria's oil revenues of \$20 billion."

### **5.5 The Consumption Trap**

Despite massive inflows, remittances primarily fund consumption rather than productive investment. PwC (2019) documented that "70% of remittances are used for consumption purposes, while 30% of remittance funds go to investment." The Borgen Project (2024) elaborated: "Many families in rural areas are heavily reliant on remittances as the money sent is a large proportion of the recipient household's total income, despite it paradoxically only being a minuscule part of the sender's income."

This consumption orientation has several implications. First, it provides immediate welfare improvements without building productive capacity. Second, it creates dependency relationships where households prioritize maintaining diaspora connections over domestic economic opportunities. Third, it reduces pressure on government to provide social services.

The Borgen Project (2024) argued that "remittances have continuously allowed the Nigerian government to strategically take a back seat with regard to welfare, as it reassures government officials that Nigerian counterparts abroad will financially cover its families. It simply reduces the incentive to provide for the basic needs of their citizens." This represents a fundamental accountability failure enabled by remittance dependence.

### **5.6 Evidence of Policy Distortion**

While direct evidence of intentional policy distortion is difficult to establish, circumstantial evidence suggests remittance dependence affects policy priorities. The government's enthusiastic embrace of diaspora contributions contrasts sharply with lackadaisical border management investments.

Cardoso (2024) "revealed plans to double diaspora remittances, which makes 6% of Nigeria's GDP, in 2024," indicating high-level policy focus on maintaining and expanding remittance flows. In contrast, border management remains chronically underfunded. Bodunde (2015) documented basic infrastructure deficiencies like borders "demarcated with drums and logs of woods," suggesting minimal investment.

The 2019-2020 border closure represents an exception that proves the rule. Aniche et al. (2022) noted this policy violated ECOWAS protocols and was ultimately unsustainable, lasting only 14 months despite ongoing smuggling problems. This suggests political will for comprehensive border management remains weak.

Meanwhile, the government actively cultivates diaspora relationships. President Obasanjo convened meetings in Atlanta and London in 2000 to "effectively be mobilized and involved in Nigeria's development process" (Mberu and Pongou, 2021). The creation of NIDCOM itself demonstrates institutional prioritization of diaspora engagement over border management.

## **5.7 The Sustainability Question**

The long-term sustainability of this model appears questionable. Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (2023) warned that if "all the youths keep escaping," the question emerges "which population will stand in the gap or who are the future drivers of the country?" The foundation projected that "Nigeria's economy would suffer, as the youth are vital to innovation and productivity. The lack of a skilled labour force would continue to hamper development and hinder technological progress."

Demographic implications are severe. With an aging domestic population and productive youth abroad, Nigeria faces potential fiscal crises as the dependency ratio worsens. Moreover, reliance on remittances makes Nigeria vulnerable to economic shocks in destination countries. World Bank (2024) noted that "lower-than-expected growth in developed countries that will lead to a decline in remittances sent by the African diaspora" represents a significant risk.

Perhaps most troubling, this model perpetuates the conditions that necessitate it. Insecurity continues because border management remains weak. Youth unemployment persists because productive investment is insufficient. Emigration pressures intensify because governance failures are not addressed. And remittances continue flowing because economic conditions remain poor—creating a self-reinforcing cycle of decline masked by diaspora income.

## **6. DISCUSSION: THE VICIOUS CYCLE UNPACKED**

### **6.1 Border Failure as Root Cause**

Nigeria's border governance failures operate as a root cause in the remittance paradox through multiple mechanisms. First, porous borders facilitate arms trafficking that directly fuels insurgencies like Boko Haram. Udentia and Nwosuji (2015) established links "between the Boko Haram sect and external radical forces in the region, especially the Al-Qaeda in Maghreb," with cross-border recruitment and training in Mali and Sudan. This external support network exists only because borders cannot interdict movement.

Second, border porosity undermines economic productivity. Uwak and Ebong (2023) documented that before the 2019 border closure, Nigeria experienced "20% decrease in fuel imports" which "reduced the Nigerian state's hefty fuel subsidy" by substantial

monthly amounts. This smuggling represented massive revenue hemorrhaging that reduced funds available for youth employment programs and infrastructure.

Third, visible border failures symbolize broader state incapacity. When citizens observe borders "demarcated with drums and logs of woods" (Bodunde, 2015), it communicates governmental incompetence that erodes institutional legitimacy. This psychological impact amplifies emigration by suggesting the state cannot protect or provide for citizens.

## **6.2 Insecurity: The Mediating Variable**

Insecurity functions as the critical mediating variable linking border failures to emigration. The causal chain operates clearly: porous borders enable arms trafficking and cross-border terrorism → insecurity manifests as Boko Haram, banditry, kidnapping → citizens feel unsafe and economic opportunities disappear → youth emigrate to escape danger.

Okunade (2023) captured this mechanism through respondent testimony: "japa doesn't mean to migrate; it means to run for your life." This framing positions emigration not as opportunity-seeking but as survival strategy necessitated by security failures rooted in border management inadequacies.

The scale of insecurity-driven displacement is staggering. Migrants & Refugees Section (2023) documented "3,098,4040 internally displaced persons recorded in 2022, and 375,552 of them were directly caused by violence and conflict." While internal displacement differs from international emigration, it reflects the same insecurity drivers. Many internally displaced persons subsequently emigrate internationally when opportunities arise.

## **6.3 The Remittance Compensator**

Remittances function as a compensatory mechanism that masks underlying governance failures while enabling their continuation. PwC (2019) documented that remittances at "83% of the Federal Government budget" effectively substitute for domestic revenue generation. This reduces fiscal pressure that might otherwise force governance reforms.

The consumption orientation of remittance use is critical to understanding this dynamic. If remittances primarily funded productive investment, building businesses, creating jobs, developing infrastructure, they might catalyze development that reduces emigration over time. However, with 70% dedicated to consumption (PwC, 2019), remittances provide temporary relief without addressing structural problems.

The Borgen Project (2024) articulated the accountability problem clearly: remittances allow "the Nigerian government to strategically take a back seat with regard to welfare" because "Nigerian counterparts abroad will financially cover its families." This creates moral hazard where government can avoid responsibility for citizen welfare because diaspora income fills the gap.

#### **6.4 Political Economy of Reform Avoidance**

Why hasn't Nigeria addressed border management despite clear connections to emigration and economic losses? The remittance paradox provides explanation: doing so would reduce political and economic benefits that accrue from current arrangements.

Politically, emigration functions as a "safety valve" for unemployment and youth dissatisfaction. Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (2023) noted that "addressing the root causes of mass migration, such as unemployment, insecurity, and lack of opportunities, is crucial." However, addressing these root causes requires difficult reforms combating corruption, improving education, creating jobs, securing territory that threaten entrenched interests.

In contrast, allowing emigration exports these problems. Unemployed youth become diaspora remitters rather than domestic protesters. Their departure reduces political pressure while generating foreign exchange. From a narrow political calculus, this represents an attractive equilibrium even if it undermines long-term development.

Economically, remittance dependence creates path dependency and constituency resistance to change. Millions of households rely on diaspora income for survival. Any reforms that might reduce emigration—even beneficial ones like improved security and employment—risk disrupting these income flows in the short term, creating political opposition.

#### **6.5 Comparative Context**

Nigeria's situation is not unique but represents an extreme case of patterns visible across developing countries. However, the scale of Nigeria's remittance dependence combined with the severity of its border governance failures creates a particularly acute paradox.

Successful development transitions typically involve moving from remittance dependence toward domestic productivity. Countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and more recently Vietnam managed this transition by creating domestic opportunities that eventually attracted returnees and reduced emigration pressures. Nigeria's trajectory moves in the opposite direction deepening remittance dependence while losing productive capacity through brain drain.

The key difference lies in investment orientation. In successful cases, remittances funded productive investment in manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure. In Nigeria's case, consumption orientation means remittances provide temporary relief without building future capacity.

#### **6.6 The Gender Dimension**

While not the primary focus of this study, gender dimensions merit attention. Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (2023) noted that "5,400 of which were women" among

18,000 Nigerian migrants arriving in Europe in 2017, with the International Organization for Migration recording "an almost 600% increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving in Italy via the Mediterranean" between 2014-2016.

This suggests border governance failures create particular vulnerabilities for women migrants, who may face trafficking and exploitation. Meanwhile, remittances often support female-headed households left behind, creating complex gender dynamics in the migration-remittance system.

## 7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Breaking Nigeria's remittance paradox requires integrated policy interventions addressing border management, security, employment, and diaspora engagement simultaneously. Isolated reforms will fail because the system's elements reinforce each other.

**7.1 Border Management Transformation:** Nigeria must fundamentally overhaul border governance by replacing inadequate infrastructure ("drums and logs of woods") with proper border posts, surveillance technology, and secure facilities across 1,499 irregular entry points. This requires substantial personnel recruitment and training with adequate compensation to reduce corruption, deployment of biometric systems for effective monitoring, and harmonized inter-agency coordination among Immigration, Customs, Police, and Military to address the inadequate cooperation currently undermining security.

**7.2 Security Sector Reform:** Comprehensive security sector reform must extend beyond borders to address the insecurity driving emigration, including strict controls on arms proliferation through porous borders that fuel violence, counter-terrorism strategies targeting links between Boko Haram and external radical forces through intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation, and police reform addressing the brutality highlighted by #EndSARS protests that serves as a major emigration driver.

**7.3 Youth Employment and Economic Opportunity:** Tackling the 60% youth unemployment rate requires multi-pronged interventions including skills development through technical and vocational training aligned with market demands, entrepreneurship support via access to credit and mentorship, agricultural revitalization through restored rural security, technology sector development leveraging Nigeria's innovation talent, and strategic public sector recruitment particularly in healthcare and education sectors devastated by brain drain. These employment initiatives address both immediate emigration pressures and long-term economic sustainability.

**7.4 Remittance Channeling and Diaspora Engagement:** Nigeria must transform remittances from a consumption lifeline (currently 70% consumption-oriented) into a development catalyst by developing diaspora bonds and investment funds, reducing



transaction costs to maximize amounts reaching recipients, connecting diaspora capital with domestic entrepreneurship through investment platforms and mentorship programs, and creating skills transfer mechanisms enabling diaspora professionals to contribute expertise without permanent relocation. Critical to success is building trust through transparent governance that assures the diaspora their investments will not be lost to corruption, addressing the fundamental legitimacy crisis driving emigration.

**7.5 Integrated Policy Coordination:** Success requires simultaneous and synergistic implementation through a comprehensive national migration strategy linking border management, security, employment, and diaspora engagement under a unified framework with inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, robust data infrastructure tracking emigration patterns and remittance flows for evidence-based policy, clear metrics with regular monitoring and evaluation, and high-level political commitment recognizing that breaking the remittance paradox serves long-term national interest despite short-term political costs.

**7.6 Social Contract Restoration:** Underlying all technical interventions must be fundamental restoration of the social contract between citizens and state through improved service delivery in healthcare, education, and infrastructure that reduces emigration incentives, aggressive anti-corruption measures addressing the poor governance and corruption identified as key migration drivers, creation of channels for citizen participation in governance to reduce alienation, and articulation of a compelling national vision that gives youth reason to invest their futures domestically rather than seeking opportunities abroad.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Nigeria is trapped in a self-reinforcing paradox where weak border governance contributes to insecurity and instability that drive mass youth emigration, while the resulting \$19.5 billion in annual remittances (6% of GDP, exceeding oil revenues) reduce political pressure to address the governance failures that caused the emigration in the first place. With 56% of Nigerians considering leaving and 70% of youth willing to relocate if given the opportunity, the country increasingly relies on exporting its most productive citizens, including over 5,000 doctors and 15,000 nurses to generate survival income. Meanwhile, 1,499 irregular border routes remain open, arms flow unrestricted to fuel conflicts, and the insecurity that drives emigration persists unchecked. This model is fundamentally unsustainable, as an aging population, depleted professional sectors, and consumption-dependent economy (70% of remittances) cannot sustain development or security. The cycle proves difficult to break precisely because it serves short-term interests: politicians benefit from emigration as a "safety valve" for unemployment, households depend on remittance income, and destination countries gain skilled labor at Nigeria's expense.

Breaking this paradox requires integrated policy interventions addressing border management, security, employment, and diaspora engagement simultaneously, coupled with political will currently undermined by remittance dependence itself. Border transformation must interdict arms flows and demonstrate state capacity, security reforms must address police brutality and terrorism, youth employment programs must create alternatives to emigration, and diaspora policies must channel remittances toward productive investment rather than consumption. Civil society organizations must mobilize citizens to demand reforms addressing root causes rather than symptoms, while international partners should reduce remittance transaction costs, enable skills transfer programs, and recognize their complicity in brain drain. As one study noted, for many Nigerian youth, "japa doesn't mean to migrate; it means to run for your life." Nigeria faces a stark choice, continue the current trajectory toward demographic hollowing and institutional collapse masked by diaspora income, or undertake difficult reforms to transform into a country that retains and rewards its talent, the only pathway toward sustainable development and genuine national security.

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