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Climate Diplomacy and Nigeria's 4D Foreign Policy: National interest, Energy Transition and Climate Security

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Abstract

Climate change now shapes Nigeria's external relations through climate finance, energy transition, regional security and multilateral negotiations, even though it is not one of the Tinubu administration's four foreign-policy pillars. This article examines how climate diplomacy fits within Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy and what this reveals about the pursuit of national interest. Drawing on policy documents, diplomatic statements and multilateral records from 2015-2026, with particular attention to 2021-2026, it identifies three main forms of engagement: resource, transition and positioning diplomacy. The strongest link with the 4Ds is Development, while Demography is connected more indirectly and Diaspora and Democracy remain much less developed. Nigeria's climate diplomacy is also shaped by hydrocarbon dependence, unmet energy needs, implementation gaps and reliance on external finance. The article argues that the 4Ds help explain part of Nigeria's climate diplomacy, but do not fully capture the national interests driving it.

Keywords: Nigeria; Africa; climate diplomacy; foreign policy; national interest; energy transition; climate security; climate finance

1.introduction

Climate change is no longer only an environmental issue in international politics. It now reaches into development finance, energy policy, trade, security, technology and questions of international equity. For countries whose economies remain tied to carbon-intensive sectors, the challenge is especially difficult. They are expected to contribute to global decarbonization while also expanding energy access, creating jobs, supporting growth and protecting fiscal stability. Climate diplomacy has become one of the spaces in which these competing pressures are negotiated, including access to finance and technology, the sharing of transition costs and the policy space available for national development (Doussis & Dikaios, 2025; Heinrichs, 2026).

Nigeria brings these tensions into sharp focus. The country is highly exposed to flooding, drought, land degradation, coastal risks, extreme heat and pressure on climate-sensitive livelihoods. At the same time, it continues to face large energy-access and development gaps and remains economically dependent on hydrocarbons. Climate change therefore matters to foreign policy because many of the resources, partnerships and rules that shape Nigeria's response are negotiated beyond the domestic sphere. These include climate finance, technology, investment, carbon markets, trade measures and regional cooperation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025; Strambo et al., 2025). Nigeria's climate-policy framework has also changed considerably over the past decade. The Climate Change Act 2021 created a statutory basis for national climate governance, while the Energy Transition Plan linked the country's net-zero-by-2060 ambition to energy access, poverty reduction and economic development. NDC 3.0, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in September 2025, updated Nigeria's mitigation and adaptation commitments and again emphasized the need for finance, technology and implementation support (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021a, 2022, 2025). Climate policy has, as a result, become more closely connected to Nigeria's external economic and diplomatic relations.

This shift has taken place alongside the Tinubu administration's 4D Foreign Policy, built around Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs presents the framework as a way of advancing national interest, economic transformation, African integration and international cooperation (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). In 2026, the Ministry reaffirmed the 4D agenda while also emphasizing strategic autonomy in Nigeria's external relations (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026b). Climate change is not one of the four pillars, yet it increasingly touches several of the interests the framework is intended to advance. This raises the central question of the article: How does climate diplomacy intersect with Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy, and what does this reveal about the pursuit of national interest under the 4D framework? The question matters because Nigeria's external climate engagement now extends across climate finance, energy transition, multilateral negotiations, carbon markets, regional cooperation and climate-security concerns. These issues affect development, energy security, competitiveness and Nigeria's position within African and wider Global South diplomacy.

Recent scholarship has examined both sides of this relationship, but mostly separately. Studies of the 4D framework have considered its implications for regional integration, democracy, development, national interest and the wider direction of Nigerian foreign policy (Nwangwu, 2024; Odukoya & Anene, 2025; Anele & Ikegwuiro, 2025; Ayuba & Limam, 2026). Research on Nigeria's climate and energy politics has focused on the tension between climate commitments and hydrocarbon expansion, the development implications of energy transition and the institutional weaknesses affecting climate diplomacy (Atedhor, 2025; Strambo et al., 2025; Animashaun, 2025). Less attention has been given to how climate diplomacy fits within the 4D framework and what this tells us about the national interests Nigeria is trying to protect or advance.

Drawing on Nigerian policy documents, diplomatic statements and relevant regional and multilateral records from 2015 to 2026, with particular attention to developments from 2021 onward, the article argues that climate diplomacy has become a cross-cutting part of Nigerian foreign policy rather than a separate environmental pillar. Its clearest connection with the 4Ds is Development, where climate finance, energy transition, investment and technology overlap directly with economic priorities. The connection with Demography is more indirect, while links with Diaspora and Democracy remain much less developed.

The analysis identifies three forms of climate diplomacy. Resource diplomacy refers to Nigeria's efforts to secure finance, investment and technology. Transition diplomacy concerns the terms on which decarbonization is pursued in relation to energy access and industrial development. Positioning diplomacy captures Nigeria's efforts to advance its interests through African, Global South and multilateral climate engagement. These forms of diplomacy do not fit evenly across the four pillars, and the 4Ds do not fully account for the wider set of climate-related interests Nigeria seeks to pursue. There are also clear limits to what diplomacy can achieve. Nigeria's climate engagement is constrained by continued hydrocarbon dependence, large unmet energy needs, institutional weaknesses, implementation gaps and reliance on external finance. Diplomacy can help Nigeria negotiate the external conditions of transition, but it cannot replace the domestic political, economic and institutional choices needed to make that transition credible.

2. Climate Diplomacy, Foreign Policy and National Interest: Conceptual and Analytical Framework

2.1 Climate Diplomacy

Climate change has broadened the scope of diplomacy. International climate negotiations were initially concerned mainly with environmental cooperation and the development of multilateral rules under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Over time, climate diplomacy has come to include development finance, energy, technology, trade, security and questions of international equity. It now extends beyond negotiations at Conferences of the Parties to bilateral partnerships, regional cooperation, energy-transition arrangements and other forms of international engagement linked to climate action.

Elliott (2013) places climate diplomacy within the wider development of international climate governance and the growing involvement of actors beyond traditional interstate diplomacy. Doussis and Dikaios (2025) focus more closely on the negotiating processes that have shaped cooperation under the UNFCCC, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement. Heinrichs (2026) takes a broader view, showing how climate diplomacy also involves questions of justice, development and international order. Taken together, these perspectives show that climate diplomacy is concerned not only with reducing emissions, but also with the political and economic conditions under which climate action takes place. Climate diplomacy is understood here as the use of diplomatic relationships and processes to advance and negotiate climate-related interests across bilateral, regional and multilateral settings. This includes formal climate negotiations as well as engagement on adaptation, climate finance, energy transition, technology transfer, climate security and regional cooperation.

This broader understanding is particularly relevant to Nigeria. As a climate-vulnerable developing country that also depends heavily on hydrocarbons, Nigeria has to manage interests that do not always point in the same direction. It seeks international support for climate action while protecting development priorities, commits to long-term decarbonization while facing immediate energy-access needs, and supports a just transition while petroleum remains important to the economy. Climate diplomacy is therefore not simply environmental cooperation. It is also one of the ways Nigeria negotiates development, energy and economic interests internationally.

The key question is not only whether Nigeria participates in international climate processes, but what it seeks to achieve through that engagement and how those goals connect with its wider foreign policy.

2.2 Foreign Policy and National Interest

Foreign policy provides the wider setting in which climate diplomacy takes place. It concerns the goals a state pursues in its relations with other countries and international institutions and the choices it makes in response to opportunities and pressures beyond its borders. Although foreign policy has traditionally been associated with sovereignty, security and interstate relations, it also increasingly involves development, trade, technology, investment, migration and environmental risks. National interest remains central to understanding these choices, even though the concept is widely debated. Nuechterlein (1976) argues that the concept is most useful when the particular interests being pursued are clearly identified rather than simply assumed. States often pursue several interests at the same time, and these may differ in urgency, importance and long-term consequences.

For developing and postcolonial states, domestic and external priorities are often closely connected. Ayoob (2011) shows how foreign policy in such settings is shaped by domestic state-building, political economy and competing internal needs. Development, economic transformation and access to international resources may therefore be as important to foreign policy as more traditional security concerns. This connection is particularly relevant to Nigeria. Ndidigwe (2023) points to the continuing difficulty of clearly defining Nigeria's national interest and ensuring that external commitments produce tangible benefits at home. Ayuba and Limam (2026) similarly identify security, economic development and regional influence among the interests Nigeria has pursued externally, while noting that domestic insecurity and institutional weaknesses can limit what foreign policy achieves.

National interest is used here as a way of examining what Nigeria seeks to protect or advance through climate diplomacy, rather than assuming that every official position automatically serves the national interest. Five areas are especially relevant: development and access to international finance; energy security and transition; climate-related security and regional stability; international influence and African positioning; and policy space or strategic autonomy. These interests can also pull in different directions. Protecting petroleum revenues may serve an immediate economic need while increasing Nigeria's longer-term exposure to changes in global energy markets. International climate commitments may strengthen the country's diplomatic standing while also creating major financing and implementation demands at home. National interest is therefore better understood as a balancing of priorities over time rather than as a single, fixed objective.

2.3 The 4D Framework as Contemporary Foreign-Policy Architecture

The Tinubu administration's 4D Foreign Policy provides the immediate policy setting for examining these interests. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines the four pillars as Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy and links them to broader goals that include protecting Nigeria's national interest, supporting African integration, strengthening international cooperation and promoting a fairer international economic order (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

The 4Ds are treated here as a foreign-policy framework, not as a theory. They set out the administration's stated priorities and provide a useful basis for considering where climate diplomacy fits within contemporary Nigerian foreign policy. The framework has already attracted scholarly debate. Nwangwu (2024) questions aspects of its implications for regional integration and peacebuilding in West Africa. Odukoya and Anene (2025) ask whether the 4Ds represent a major shift in Nigerian foreign policy or a new expression of long-standing ambitions under continuing structural constraints. Ayuba and Limam (2026), by contrast, identify a stronger emphasis on proactive and economically focused diplomacy, while also pointing to domestic and regional challenges that may affect implementation.

Climate change is not identified as a fifth pillar, nor does it need to be treated as one. Its relevance lies in the way climate-related interests cut across parts of the existing framework. The strongest connection is with Development, through climate finance, investment, technology, infrastructure and energy transition. Demography may be relevant through employment, energy access, mobility and livelihoods. Possible links with Diaspora include expertise, investment and knowledge networks, while Democracy may connect with climate governance through accountability, participation and international commitments.These connections should not be assumed to be equally strong. The question is whether Nigeria's actual climate engagement provides evidence of a meaningful link with each pillar. This allows the 4Ds to be used as a guide without forcing every aspect of climate diplomacy into one of the four categories.

2.4 Analytical Framework

Taken together, these concepts provide a way of examining how climate-related pressures become matters of foreign policy and national interest. The starting point is the domestic and international conditions shaping Nigeria's choices, including climate vulnerability, development and energy needs, hydrocarbon dependence, regional insecurity and changing international climate and trade rules. The analysis then considers the interests Nigeria seeks to advance, the diplomatic channels through which those interests are pursued and how far these activities connect with the 4D framework.

The framework also draws attention to the tensions that limit Nigeria's room for maneuver. These include climate ambition alongside hydrocarbon dependence, energy access alongside decarbonization, international commitments alongside domestic implementation challenges, and reliance on external finance alongside the desire for greater strategic autonomy. Nigeria's climate diplomacy is therefore assessed not simply by its participation in international climate processes, but by what the country is trying to achieve, how it pursues those interests, how this relates to the 4Ds, and the constraints that shape its choices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Sources

This article uses qualitative documentary analysis to examine how climate diplomacy relates to Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy and the pursuit of national interest under the 4D framework. This approach is appropriate because Nigeria's climate and foreign-policy priorities are set out in laws, policy documents, international commitments, diplomatic statements and regional agreements. These sources make it possible to examine both what Nigeria has formally committed to and how the government presents its priorities and interests in its dealings with international partners (Morgan, 2022; Anasel & Swai, 2023).

The documents cover the period 2015-2026, beginning with Nigeria's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution in the period leading to the Paris Agreement. Particular attention is given to 202-2026, when several important developments changed Nigeria's climate and foreign-policy landscape. These include the Climate Change Act, the net-zero-by-2060 commitment, the Energy Transition Plan, the Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy, the 4D Foreign Policy and NDC 3.0.

The study draws on 18 primary documents. They include Nigerian climate, energy, legal and foreign-policy documents; official presidential and ministerial statements; Nigeria's interventions at international climate meetings; bilateral diplomatic communiqués; and selected ECOWAS, African Union and UNFCCC documents relevant to Nigeria's climate engagement.

Documents were selected for their direct relevance to the research question. They needed to address Nigeria's climate or foreign-policy priorities, have a clear international or diplomatic dimension, come from an identifiable institution, and provide evidence on issues such as climate finance, energy transition, regional cooperation, international positioning or strategic autonomy. Duplicate documents and materials with little direct relevance to these issues were excluded.

Peer-reviewed research and independent policy studies were used to place the official documents in a wider context and to provide other perspectives on issues such as hydrocarbon dependence, institutional weaknesses, climate security and the 4D framework. Statistical sources, including the World Bank and National Bureau of Statistics, were used where relevant to provide economic, energy and emissions data.

3.2 Approach to Analysis

The documents were read alongside one another to identify how Nigeria describes its climate-related interests, how it seeks to pursue them internationally, and where tensions appear between different priorities. The reading was informed by the ideas developed in Section 2 but also remained open to patterns that became clearer as the documents were examined (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

Six areas provided the main focus: development and climate finance; energy security and transition; climate security and regional stability; African and international positioning; strategic autonomy and policy space; and implementation challenges and trade-offs.

The four pillars of the 4D framework: Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy were then considered alongside these areas. The aim was not to make climate diplomacy fit neatly within all four pillars, but to establish where the relationship was clear and where the evidence was weaker.

The analysis also looked for change over time. This included the growing importance of climate finance in Nigeria's international engagement, the closer connection between energy transition and development, and the more recent attention given to international trade rules and strategic autonomy. Different types of documents were considered in their own context; a national policy, for example, was not treated as having the same purpose or weight as a presidential statement or regional declaration.

3.3 Strengths and Limitations

Official claims were checked against other sources wherever possible. Government policies and diplomatic statements were considered alongside regional and multilateral records, statistical evidence and relevant scholarly research. This was especially important where the evidence revealed tensions between stated ambitions and practice, including the coexistence of climate commitments with continued hydrocarbon expansion and the gap between international commitments and domestic implementation.

A working record was kept of the documents examined, the issues they addressed and how they contributed to the analysis. The importance of an issue was not judged simply by how often it appeared. A position expressed in a small number of high-level diplomatic statements may carry considerable weight, while repeated references to a policy goal do not necessarily mean that it has been implemented.

There are also limits to what documentary analysis can show. Publicly available documents provide useful evidence of official priorities and diplomatic positions, but they cannot reveal everything that happens within government or during international negotiations. They do not provide direct access to confidential discussions, disagreements between institutions or the motivations of individual decision-makers. Official documents may also say more about what governments intend to do than about what they eventually achieve.

For this reason, the article does not try to prove that climate diplomacy itself caused particular outcomes. Its focus is on what Nigeria seeks to achieve through climate diplomacy, how those interests relate to the 4D framework, and the tensions that shape their pursuit.

4. Nigeria'S Evolving Climate and Foreign-Policy Context

Nigeria's climate diplomacy has developed alongside changes in its domestic climate policy, energy planning and foreign-policy priorities. Climate change did not initially have a distinct place in Nigeria's foreign policy, but its international importance grew as climate commitments became more closely tied to development, energy access, finance and the future of a hydrocarbon-dependent economy.

4.1 From the Paris Agreement to Domestic Climate Governance

Nigeria's current climate-policy framework began to take clearer shape around the Paris Agreement. In 2015, the Federal Government submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), setting out the country's mitigation and adaptation priorities ahead of the Agreement (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). Nigeria signed the Paris Agreement on 22 September 2016 and ratified it on 16 May 2017 (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). In 2021, Nigeria submitted an updated Nationally Determined Contribution. The revised NDC broadened the country's climate commitments and gave greater attention to mitigation, adaptation and the international support needed for implementation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021b). It also brought climate policy into closer contact with decisions on energy, agriculture, transport, finance and development.

The Climate Change Act 2021 strengthened this domestic foundation. The Act established the National Council on Climate Change, provided for carbon budgets and national climate-action planning, and created a legal framework for coordinating Nigeria's response to climate change (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021a). It also connected domestic climate action more clearly with Nigeria's international obligations. Together, the updated NDC and the Climate Change Act gave climate policy a broader place in national planning and created a stronger basis for Nigeria's engagement with international climate institutions, development partners and sources of climate finance.

4.2 Energy Transition and the Development-Climate Nexus

The Energy Transition Plan (ETP) brought climate ambition more directly into Nigeria's development and energy debate. Built around the country's net-zero-by-2060 target, the Plan was launched internationally in August 2022 and covers power, cooking, transport, industry, and oil and gas. The ETP is notable because it does not present decarbonization as separate from Nigeria's development needs. It links the transition to wider goals such as expanding energy access, reducing poverty, supporting economic growth and managing the employment effects of changes in global fossil-fuel demand. Natural gas is also assigned a transitional role, reflecting Nigeria's argument that the pace and form of transition must take account of African development conditions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

This approach has an obvious international dimension. Nigeria cannot finance or implement its transition through domestic resources alone; investment, technology and international cooperation are central to the Plan. At the same time, the continuing importance of oil and gas means that changes in global energy markets directly affect the country's economic interests. Nigeria's Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy to 2060 (LT-LEDS), submitted to the UNFCCC in April 2024, extended this approach over a longer period. It links low-emission and climate-resilient development with poverty reduction, energy access, adaptation, food security and investment (National Council on Climate Change, 2024). Climate, energy and development policy had therefore become closely connected well before the 4D framework emerged.

4.3 The 4D Foreign-Policy Framework

The Tinubu administration's 4D Foreign Policy added a new foreign-policy framework to this existing climate and energy agenda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines its four pillars as Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy and links them to national interest, economic transformation, regional cooperation and Nigeria's wider international role (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Climate change is not one of the four pillars. Its relevance lies instead in the way climate-related issues connect with broader foreign-policy priorities, especially development, investment, energy and international cooperation.

The 4D framework remained an official reference point in May 2026, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the agenda alongside citizen diplomacy and strategic autonomy (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026b). By then, however, Nigeria already had an established climate-governance and energy-transition framework. The relationship between climate diplomacy and the 4Ds is therefore best understood as the meeting of a newer foreign-policy agenda with climate and energy interests that had been developing for several years.

Nigeria's NDC 3.0, submitted to the UNFCCC in September 2025, further strengthened this connection between climate policy, energy and development. It renewed Nigeria's climate commitments while emphasizing the importance of finance, technology and international support for implementation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025). By this point, climate change had become closely tied to several of the economic and development interests Nigeria was pursuing internationally.

5. Climate Change and Nigeria'S National Interest

Climate change matters to Nigeria's foreign policy because many of the pressures it creates cannot be addressed through domestic policy alone. Climate vulnerability, regional insecurity and energy transition all depend, to varying degrees, on access to finance, technology, investment, regional cooperation and international rules. For Nigeria, three areas are especially important: protecting development from climate-related disruption, responding to climate pressures that may worsen insecurity, and managing the difficult relationship between energy security and decarbonization.

5.1 Climate Vulnerability and Development

Nigeria's exposure to climate change poses direct risks to economic and social development. NDC 3.0 identifies prolonged dry periods, intense rainfall, flooding, land degradation, desertification and coastal hazards among the pressures affecting livelihoods, agriculture, infrastructure and human settlements. Adaptation priorities extend across agriculture, water, health, infrastructure, livelihoods and human settlements (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025).

These pressures matter because large parts of the population depend on climate-sensitive livelihoods, while floods, droughts and other extreme events place additional strain on infrastructure, public services and already limited government resources. Protecting development gains is therefore closely tied to the country's ability to adapt to climate change.

Finance is part of that challenge. NDC 3.0 acknowledges that climate-finance flows remain well below Nigeria's needs and identifies inadequate financing as one reason for the limited implementation of the previous NDC. It places greater emphasis on direct access to international climate funds, private-sector participation, viable investment projects and stronger coordination of climate finance (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025).

Nigeria's position is also shaped by questions of equity. World Bank data place the country's carbon dioxide emissions, excluding land-use change, at about 0.6 metric tons per person in 2024, which remains low by global standards (World Bank, 2026). This gives Nigeria a clear interest in international climate arrangements that take account of differences in historical responsibility, development needs and the ability of countries to finance transition. Its calls for concessional finance, adaptation support and technology transfer are therefore tied not only to climate action, but also to the protection of development space.

Climate action may also create opportunities. Investment in renewable energy, resilient infrastructure, green industry and new technologies can support economic diversification while reducing exposure to future climate and transition risks. Nigeria's development interest is therefore two-sided: limiting the damage caused by climate change while also gaining from the economic opportunities created by the global transition.

5.2 Climate Security and Regional Stability

Climate change also matters to Nigeria's national interest because of its interaction with human security and regional stability. The relationship is complex. Conflict in Nigeria and across the wider Sahel is shaped by governance failures, political competition, inequality, disputes over land, historical grievances, armed groups and other social and economic pressures. Climate change does not by itself cause these conflicts, but it can worsen some of the conditions in which they develop. Nigeria's NDC 3.0 reflects this understanding. It identifies pressure on land, water and pastoral resources as one way climate change can contribute to insecurity and includes migration, displacement, livelihoods and conflict prevention among its adaptation concerns (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025).

Recent research supports this more cautious interpretation. Efobi, Adejumo and Kim (2025) examine the relationship between climate vulnerability, pastoral migration and farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria. Faiyetole and Abiodun (2026) likewise find that rainfall variability, temperature and water availability can influence conflict dynamics in some pastoral areas, while in others social, political and cultural factors are more important. Climate change is therefore better understood as a risk multiplier than as a direct cause of insecurity. Climate shocks can increase pressure on resources, affect mobility and livelihoods, and place additional strain on institutions already dealing with conflict and displacement.

The regional dimension is particularly important for Nigeria. Pastoral movement, food markets, ecosystems, displacement and security pressures do not stop at national borders. ECOWAS has increasingly recognized climate change as part of its wider human-security and resilience concerns. In 2025, the Commission included climate change among the challenges affecting security and stability in West Africa and, with the African Development Bank, moved to strengthen the regional early-warning system to better account for climate-related risks.

For Nigeria, regional cooperation is therefore more than an environmental concern. Instability in neighboring countries can affect trade, migration, food security, humanitarian needs and domestic security. Nigeria has an interest in stronger regional cooperation on early warning, climate-resilient agriculture, disaster preparedness and the management of shared environmental risks. The ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy similarly recognizes that many of these challenges require cooperation across borders (ECOWAS, 2022).

The foreign-policy concern is not that climate change explains insecurity on its own, but that stronger climate resilience and regional cooperation can help reduce some of the pressures that contribute to instability (ECOWAS, 2025a; ECOWAS, 2025b).

5.3 Energy Security and the Transition Dilemma

Energy presents perhaps the most difficult climate-related national-interest question for Nigeria. The country is expected to contribute to global decarbonization while also expanding electricity access, supporting industrial growth and managing an economy in which hydrocarbons remain important. The energy-access gap is still substantial. World Bank data indicate that 62.5% of Nigeria's population had access to electricity in 2024, leaving a large part of the population without access (World Bank, 2026). At the same time, petroleum remains central to Nigeria's export economy, with crude oil continuing to account for the largest share of individual export commodities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2026).

This creates a difficult transition. A rapid decline in oil and gas activity without sufficient alternative investment could affect export earnings, foreign exchange, public revenue, employment and industrial development. But prolonged dependence on hydrocarbons also carries risks as global energy demand changes, low-carbon technologies expand and major trading partners introduce climate-related trade measures. Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan attempts to manage these competing pressures. It combines the net-zero-by-2060 goal with expanded energy access, poverty reduction and economic development, while giving natural gas a transitional role (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022). The question is not simply whether Nigeria should decarbonize, but how quickly it can do so, which technologies it can rely on, how the transition will be financed and what the economic and social costs will be.

Recent scholarship shows why this balance is difficult. Strambo et al. (2025) find that Nigerian policy presents continued oil and gas development alongside climate commitments through arguments about development, energy security and transition. This reflects the reality that fossil fuels continue to serve immediate economic and fiscal needs even as the country makes longer-term commitments to lower emissions. Chepeliev, Peszko and van der Mensbrugghe (2026) show that this dependence also creates longer-term economic risks. Their analysis suggests that diversification that ignores changes in the global energy system may leave Nigeria vulnerable to external climate-policy shocks, while fiscal reform and climate-compatible industrial policy can strengthen economic resilience.

Adeoye et al. (2026) similarly show that greater energy access and lower emissions do not necessarily have to work against each other. Their modeling suggests that stronger electrification and well-planned expansion of the energy system can improve access while reducing emissions, although natural gas continues to contribute to grid reliability in the transition scenarios they examine. Nigeria's choices are shaped by both domestic needs and international conditions. The cost of finance, access to technology, changing demand for fossil fuels, carbon markets and climate-related trade measures can all influence the country's development path. This is why energy transition cannot be treated only as a domestic energy issue. Nigeria also has an interest in securing affordable finance and technology, attracting transition investment and ensuring that international rules do not unnecessarily restrict its development options.

There is also a question of timing. Petroleum revenues may serve immediate economic needs, while reducing dependence on hydrocarbons may provide greater protection against longer-term changes in global markets. Natural gas may help meet near-term electricity and industrial needs, but large investments in long-lived fossil-fuel infrastructure could make future transition more difficult. Nigeria's energy interest is therefore not fixed. It involves balancing today's energy and economic needs against the country's longer-term resilience. Across these three areas, the common thread is clear. Nigeria's climate vulnerability, regional security concerns and energy transition are all shaped partly by decisions, resources and rules beyond its borders. Climate change has become a matter of national interest precisely because the country cannot address these challenges through domestic policy alone.

6. Climate Diplomacy Within Nigeria'S 4D Foreign Policy

Nigeria pursues climate-related interests through multilateral negotiations, bilateral partnerships, climate-finance advocacy, energy-transition cooperation and regional engagement. These activities now extend well beyond environmental diplomacy into development finance, investment, trade, technology and international economic rules. Climate change is not one of the four pillars of the 4D Foreign Policy, but Nigeria's climate engagement clearly overlaps with some of the interests the framework seeks to advance.

Three forms of engagement stand out. Resource diplomacy involves efforts to secure finance, investment and technology. Transition diplomacy focuses on the terms under which Nigeria moves toward a lower-carbon economy while addressing energy access and development needs. Positioning diplomacy involves using African, Global South and multilateral platforms to advance Nigerian interests in international climate debates. These three forms overlap, but they help show how climate diplomacy works in practice and where it connects with the 4Ds.

6.1 Climate Finance and Development Diplomacy

Climate finance is one of the clearest links between Nigeria's climate diplomacy and its development priorities. The scale of investment required for adaptation and energy transition is far beyond what can easily be financed from public resources alone. Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan estimated that reaching net zero by 2060 while meeting energy-access and development needs would require about US$410 billion in additional expenditure above business-as-usual between 2021 and 2060 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022). The financing plan therefore depends on a combination of domestic and international private capital, concessional finance, blended finance and development funding.

Nigeria's search for these resources has brought climate diplomacy closer to economic and development diplomacy. The country is not seeking finance only to reduce emissions. It also needs investment for electricity, renewable energy, clean cooking, transport, industry and climate resilience. This position has been consistent in Nigeria's recent international climate engagements. At COP29 in Baku in 2024, Nigeria supported wider African calls for greater access to climate finance, including grants and concessional lending, more adaptation finance and effective financing for loss and damage. Its statement also highlighted the development of an Article 6 carbon-market framework intended to support Nigeria's participation in international carbon markets (Nigeria, 2024).

At COP30 in Belém in 2025, Nigeria again connected stronger climate action with access to finance, technology and implementation support. Its national statement called for international climate-finance commitments to be fulfilled and for stronger partnerships with bilateral, multilateral and private-sector actors (Nigeria, 2025). The recurrence of these issues across successive COPs suggests that climate finance has become a continuing part of Nigeria's external climate agenda rather than a demand tied to a single negotiation. The Tinubu administration has also placed greater emphasis on attracting investment. At the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in January 2026, the government presented climate action as part of a wider agenda involving energy access, economic growth, jobs and industrial development. It announced a Climate and Green Industrialization Investment Playbook with an ambition to unlock US$25-30 billion annually in climate investment (State House, 2026).

This approach strengthens the connection between climate diplomacy and the Development pillar of the 4D framework. At the same time, announcements and investment targets are not the same as actual financial flows. Their value depends on whether Nigeria can turn international interest into viable projects, secure investment and deliver results at home (Animashaun, 2025).

6.2 Energy-Transition Diplomacy

Nigeria's energy-transition diplomacy is less about whether the country accepts the need for decarbonization than about how the transition should take place. Nigeria has committed to net zero by 2060, but it also faces large energy-access needs and remains dependent on oil and gas. Its international position therefore emphasizes finance, technology and sufficient room to pursue development alongside transition. Recent government statements have repeatedly argued that developing countries should not be expected to decarbonize in ways that deepen energy poverty or restrict industrial development. At the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in 2026, Nigeria called for predictable climate finance, technology transfer and blended-finance mechanisms while presenting industrialization and decarbonization as goals that should be pursued together (State House, 2026).

The Eighth Nigeria-European Union Ministerial Dialogue in March 2026 provides a practical example. Discussions covered renewable-energy transition, climate finance and technology transfer, while Nigeria also raised concerns about the possible effects of the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on developing economies. Both sides agreed to continue discussions on climate finance, technology transfer and an equitable transition (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026a). CBAM illustrates why energy-transition diplomacy extends beyond cooperation on emissions. Climate rules adopted by major trading partners can affect Nigeria's exports, industrial competitiveness and investment decisions. Nigeria therefore has an interest not only in securing resources for transition but also in influencing rules that may affect the cost and pace of that transition.

The language of a just and equitable transition supports this position. Nigeria argues that transition pathways should take account of differences in development, energy access, historical responsibility and national circumstances. In practical terms, it is asking for enough flexibility, finance and technology to pursue decarbonization without giving up legitimate development goals. This again creates a strong link with the Development pillar. There is also an indirect connection with Demography, since energy access, employment and economic opportunity affect the welfare of Nigeria's large population. The evidence, however, is much stronger for Development than for a distinct climate agenda built around Demography.

6.3 Multilateral Climate Negotiations and Climate Justice

The UNFCCC remains the main arena for Nigeria's formal climate diplomacy. Recent Nigerian positions show that its concerns extend beyond emissions reduction to adaptation, finance, technology, responsibility and the fairness of the global transition. At COP29 and COP30, Nigeria consistently linked stronger climate action to greater international support. Its COP29 statement called for grants, concessional finance, stronger adaptation financing and more effective loss-and-damage arrangements (Nigeria, 2024). At COP30, it again emphasized finance, technology transfer, resilience and a just transition, while calling for stronger partnerships to move from commitments to implementation (Nigeria, 2025).

These positions place climate justice within Nigeria's pursuit of national interest. For Nigeria, questions of justice are closely connected to who bears the costs of climate action, who has access to finance and technology, and how differences in vulnerability and historical responsibility are recognized. The country accepts the need for climate action while arguing that developing countries should have greater support and flexibility in carrying it out.

Nigeria's position also overlaps with a wider African climate agenda. The Second Africa Climate Summit in Addis Ababa in September 2025 emphasized African-led solutions, renewable-energy investment, climate justice and reform of the international climate-finance system. The resulting Addis Ababa Declaration sought to present Africa not simply as a recipient of climate assistance, but as a contributor to climate solutions and a participant in shaping the emerging climate economy (African Union Commission, 2025). Working through African and Global South positions can strengthen Nigeria's voice where national and continental interests overlap. It is nevertheless important not to equate participation with leadership. Nigeria is an active participant in international climate negotiations and has expressed ambitions around a fair African energy transition, but stronger claims of climate leadership would require clearer evidence that it is setting agendas, building coalitions or shaping collective outcomes. The evidence here supports African climate positioning and leadership ambition more clearly than an unqualified claim of Nigerian climate leadership.

6.4 Regional Cooperation and African Climate Positioning

Regional cooperation is particularly important because many climate-related pressures affecting Nigeria cross national borders. Food systems, pastoral movement, ecosystems, displacement, energy markets and security pressures are shared across West Africa and cannot be managed effectively by one country acting alone. The ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy provides a framework for cooperation on mitigation, adaptation and climate finance and recognizes the cross-border nature of the region's climate risks (ECOWAS, 2022). For Nigeria, such cooperation can strengthen regional capacity, improve access to climate finance and give West African states a stronger collective voice in international climate discussions.

Carbon markets provide a more recent example. ECOWAS began developing a regional carbon-market platform in 2025 and held a validation workshop in Abuja in August 2026 to move toward a harmonized regional framework. The initiative aims to improve access to climate finance, build national capacity, reduce transaction costs and strengthen West Africa's position in international carbon markets (ECOWAS, 2026). Nigeria has supported this process. At the August 2026 workshop, the Director of Climate Change in the Federal Ministry of Environment described the regional platform as complementary to Nigeria's national carbon-market framework and highlighted its potential to attract investment, mobilize finance, reduce emissions and create green jobs (ECOWAS, 2026).

This is a practical example of regional climate diplomacy serving national and regional interests at the same time. A common West African approach could support Nigeria's participation in carbon markets while also strengthening regional capacity and bargaining power. At the continental level, Nigeria's priorities broadly align with African Union calls for more equitable finance, renewable-energy investment, locally led solutions, green industrial development and a just transition (African Union Commission, 2025). Working through African institutions gives Nigeria another platform for advancing its interests without assuming that every African country holds exactly the same position.

Regional climate cooperation also reflects Nigeria's longer-standing interest in African integration and West African stability. In this sense, climate diplomacy is not entirely new; it is partly being carried through regional and African traditions that have long shaped Nigerian foreign policy.

6.5 Locating Climate Diplomacy within the 4Ds

Climate diplomacy does not fit evenly across the four pillars. The clearest connection is with Development. Nigeria's pursuit of climate finance, energy investment, technology, green industry and transition support is closely tied to its broader economic and development priorities. The connection with Demography is more indirect. Energy access, employment, livelihoods and climate-related mobility all affect Nigeria's population, but the documents examined generally discuss these issues through development and energy policy rather than through a distinct climate-demography agenda.

The links with Diaspora and Democracy are much weaker. The diaspora could contribute expertise, investment and knowledge to Nigeria's transition, but the documents examined provide little evidence that diaspora engagement has become an important part of climate diplomacy. Climate governance also involves accountability, participation and international reporting, but this does not yet amount to a clear diplomatic connection with the Democracy pillar. The pattern is therefore quite clear. Climate diplomacy fits most naturally within Development, touches Demography more indirectly, and has only limited links with Diaspora and Democracy. At the same time, important concerns such as energy security, climate justice, regional stability, carbon markets and strategic autonomy extend beyond any one pillar. The 4Ds help explain part of Nigeria's climate diplomacy, but they do not capture the full range of national interests involved.

7. Contradictions and Limits of Nigeria'S Climate Diplomacy

Nigeria's growing engagement with climate finance, energy transition, carbon markets and international climate negotiations does not mean that its climate policies are fully aligned or effectively implemented. Important tensions remain between the country's climate ambitions and its economic and development needs. Four stand out: continued dependence on oil and gas despite long-term climate commitments; the need to expand energy access while reducing emissions; the gap between international commitments and domestic implementation; and the dependence on external finance alongside Nigeria's desire to retain greater control over its policy choices.

7.1 Climate Ambition and Hydrocarbon Dependence

One of the clearest tensions is between Nigeria's long-term climate commitments and its continued reliance on oil and gas. The government maintains its net-zero-by-2060 target, but hydrocarbons remain important for export earnings, public revenue, foreign exchange and investment. This gives Nigeria strong reasons to maintain petroleum production in the near term even as the global energy system gradually moves toward lower-carbon sources. This tension can be seen in current petroleum policy. In 2026, the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) reaffirmed government targets to increase oil production to 2 million barrels per day by 2027 and 3 million barrels per day by 2030 (NUPRC, 2026). These plans exist alongside Nigeria's commitments to decarbonization and economic diversification.

Strambo et al. (2025) show how Nigerian policy tries to reconcile these positions by presenting continued oil and gas development as part of a transition rather than as a rejection of climate action. Arguments about development, energy security and revenue are used to explain why hydrocarbons remain important in the short term. Atedhor (2025) similarly identifies the tension between Nigeria's low-carbon ambitions and continued fossil-fuel expansion, particularly given the financing and technological challenges facing the transition.

The difficulty is that these interests operate over different time periods. Oil and gas may continue to meet immediate fiscal and energy needs, but prolonged dependence could leave Nigeria more exposed to changes in global demand, climate-related trade measures and shifts in international investment. Chepeliev, Peszko and van der Mensbrugghe (2026) similarly warn that diversification that does not take account of the global energy transition may leave the country vulnerable to external climate-policy changes. Nigeria does not simply face a choice between oil and climate action. The harder question is how to use the present importance of petroleum without deepening a dependence that could make future transition more difficult.

7.2 Development and Energy Access versus Decarbonization

A second tension comes from Nigeria's need for more energy. The country must reduce emissions over time while also expanding electricity access, building infrastructure and supporting industrial development. It therefore begins its transition from a very different position from many high-income countries, where energy access is already largely secure. Adeoye et al. (2026) show that greater energy access and lower emissions do not necessarily have to conflict. Their modeling suggests that stronger electrification and carefully planned energy investment can improve access while also reducing emissions. The difficulty lies partly in the scale of investment required and in deciding who should bear the costs of transition.

International climate policies can make this challenge more complicated. Rules introduced by major trading partners may affect Nigeria's exports, investment and industrial competitiveness. Nigeria's concerns about the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, discussed in Section 6, illustrate how climate measures developed elsewhere can affect domestic economic choices. This helps explain Nigeria's insistence on a just and equitable transition. The country has a legitimate interest in ensuring that climate action does not deepen energy poverty or restrict development. At the same time, arguments about fairness should not become a reason to postpone domestic reforms indefinitely. The challenge is to protect Nigeria's development needs while preparing the economy for a global transition that is already underway.

7.3 International Commitments and Domestic Implementation

Nigeria now has an extensive set of climate commitments and policies, but implementation remains uneven. NDC 3.0 acknowledges that climate finance remains below the country's estimated needs and identifies problems with coordination, responsibilities across different levels of government, and systems for monitoring and reporting progress (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025).These weaknesses matter internationally because commitments made abroad ultimately have to be carried out at home. Animashaun (2025) identifies overlapping responsibilities and weak coordination among Nigerian climate institutions as problems that affect both domestic climate policy and the country's engagement with international partners.

Negotiating an agreement or announcing an investment is not the same as delivering a project. Implementation depends on institutions that can develop viable projects, coordinate across sectors, manage resources transparently and connect national commitments with action at state and local levels.

This also affects Nigeria's credibility with investors and international partners. Clear regulation, viable projects and evidence of implementation can make the country more attractive to climate finance. Repeated delays and poor coordination can have the opposite effect. Climate diplomacy therefore cannot be carried by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alone. The National Council on Climate Change, ministries responsible for finance, environment, energy, petroleum, trade and industry, as well as state governments, regulators and private investors, all have roles to play. Nigeria's ability to benefit from climate diplomacy depends in large part on how well these institutions work together.

7.4 Climate Finance and Strategic Autonomy

A final tension concerns Nigeria's need for external finance at a time when its foreign policy places greater emphasis on strategic autonomy. In May 2026, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed strategic autonomy alongside the 4D framework as part of Nigeria's approach to protecting its interests internationally (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026b). Yet Nigeria's climate transition will require substantial resources from outside the country. NDC 3.0 places considerable emphasis on international climate funds, private investment and stronger investment pipelines (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025). Such partnerships can expand Nigeria's choices by providing finance, technology and expertise that may be difficult to mobilize domestically.

The concern is not that accepting international climate finance automatically weakens Nigeria's sovereignty. What matters is whether the country can ensure that external finance supports its own development and transition priorities. Financing conditions, debt, technology choices and international regulations can all affect the options available to government. Strategic autonomy should therefore not mean avoiding international cooperation. For Nigeria, it is better understood as having enough choice and bargaining strength to decide which partnerships best serve national priorities. This requires stronger domestic institutions; a wider range of financing partners and credible projects that can attract investment on terms Nigeria can manage.

Taken together, these tensions show the limits of diplomacy. International engagement can help Nigeria attract resources, strengthen its bargaining position and influence some of the conditions surrounding the energy transition. But diplomacy cannot resolve the difficult choices that must still be made at home. Hydrocarbon dependence, energy poverty, weak implementation and financing needs cannot simply be negotiated away. Nigeria's climate diplomacy is therefore best understood as a way of managing the pressures of transition, rather than evidence that those pressures have already been resolved.

8. Conclusion

This article examined how climate diplomacy fits within Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy and what this reveals about the pursuit of national interest under the 4D framework. The evidence shows that climate diplomacy has become an important part of Nigeria's external engagement, even though climate change is not a separate pillar of the 4D Foreign Policy. Nigeria uses climate diplomacy to pursue finance, technology, energy security, regional cooperation and international influence, while also seeking greater room to shape the terms of its transition.

The relationship with the 4Ds is uneven. Development provides the strongest connection because climate finance, energy transition, investment and technology are closely tied to Nigeria's economic priorities. Demography is connected more indirectly through energy access, employment, livelihoods and population welfare. The links with Diaspora and Democracy are much weaker and are not yet clearly established in Nigeria's climate diplomacy. The 4Ds therefore help explain part of Nigeria's climate engagement, but they do not fully capture the wider national interests involved.

The analysis also shows that Nigeria's climate diplomacy works in three main ways. It seeks resources for development and transition, negotiates the conditions under which decarbonization takes place, and uses African, Global South and multilateral platforms to strengthen its position internationally. These forms of engagement show that climate diplomacy is no longer limited to environmental negotiations. It is increasingly connected to Nigeria's wider economic, development and foreign-policy interests.

At the same time, diplomacy cannot remove the tensions at the heart of Nigeria's transition. The country remains dependent on oil and gas while pursuing long-term climate goals. It must expand energy access and support industrial development while reducing emissions. International commitments also depend on domestic institutions that do not always have the capacity or coordination needed for implementation. Nigeria's reliance on external finance creates further challenges, particularly when the country is also seeking greater control over its policy choices.

These tensions point to a broader lesson. Nigeria's climate diplomacy will be most effective when international engagement is matched by stronger coordination at home. Foreign affairs, climate governance, finance, energy, trade, industry and investment institutions need to work more closely together. International partnerships also need to support projects that are realistic, transparent and clearly connected to national priorities.

Strategic autonomy should not mean turning away from international cooperation. For Nigeria, it is better understood as having enough choice, institutional strength and bargaining power to ensure that external finance and partnerships support rather than determine national priorities.

Climate diplomacy therefore provides a useful way of understanding both the possibilities and the limits of Nigeria's 4D Foreign Policy. It shows how a global issue such as climate change can cut across existing foreign-policy priorities without becoming a separate pillar. It also shows that Nigeria's national interest in climate diplomacy extends beyond the formal boundaries of the 4Ds.

Ultimately, the value of Nigeria's climate diplomacy will depend less on the number or visibility of its international commitments than on whether those commitments help expand energy access, reduce vulnerability, strengthen economic resilience and gradually reduce dependence on hydrocarbons. The central challenge is not whether Nigeria should choose between development and climate action, but whether it can shape the political, financial and technological conditions under which the two can support each other.

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