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THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ECOWAS STATES, 2000-2023

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This thesis was submitted for distance acquisition of a postgraduate degree in Information Systems and Digital Innovation **at Neapolis University**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the role of soft power shaped Nigeria's foreign policy towards the ECOWAS member states between 2000 and 2023. It investigates the ways that Nigeria's four successive administrations Obasanjo, Yar'Adua- Jonathan, and Buhari, have consolidated their influence in this region through the use of peacekeeping, cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and humanitarian aid. The study evaluates major initiatives using a qualitative methodology, such as Nigeria's mediation in regional crises, support for educational and cultural exchanges, and leadership in ECOWAS peacekeeping missions. The results suggest that soft power has played a significant role in Nigeria's foreign policy, strengthening its leadership position in West Africa and promoting stability in the region. However, uneven application and internal issues have limited these strategies' effectiveness. This also study provides several policy recommendations, including the need for a more consistent and coordinated soft power strategy that aligns with Nigeria's broader foreign policy objectives, increased investment in cultural and educational programs that promote Nigerian values and culture throughout the region, and the importance of leveraging Nigeria's diaspora as a soft power asset. Furthermore, the research proposes that investigating how educational exchanges and youth programs can promote long-term ties and improve Nigeria's image among the next generation of ECOWAS leaders. This study concludes that, while Nigeria's soft power activities have increased its regional influence, there is still room for improvement to gain a more powerful leadership position within ECOWAS.

Keywords

Soft Power | Nigeria Foreign Policy | ECOWAS | Cultural Diplomacy |West Africa | Regional Stability | African Geopolitics | Educational Exchanges | Humanitarian Assistance | Peace Building

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background of the Study

As one of Africa's largest and most populated country, Nigeria has a significant impact on regional dynamics within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and has historically aspired to be a regional leader (Adebajo, 2008). This desire stems from Nigeria's self-perception as the "giant of Africa," a title that entails a responsibility to lead and stabilize the West African region (Bach, 2007). Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been actively involved in regional issues, frequently positioning itself as a mediator and peacemaker. ECOWAS was formed in 1975 to promote economic integration and collaboration among West African governments, and it provided Nigeria with a regulated environment to exercise its leadership ambitions (Udeala, 2013).

Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, proposed in the late twentieth century, has since become a fundamental part of international relations and diplomacy. Unlike hard power, which is based on military or economic coercion, soft power is the ability to change others' preferences and influence their actions through attraction and appeal (Nye, 2004). Soft power refers to cultural diplomacy, political principles, and foreign policy initiatives that work together to establish a positive image and gain influence without using force.

From 2000 to 2023, soft power had a considerable impact on regional dynamics and collaboration in Nigeria's foreign policy towards the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This era began in 1999 when Nigeria moved from military rule to democratic governance following the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo (Smith, 2005). This political transition reshaped Nigeria's foreign policy, focusing on democratic governance, conflict resolution, and economic integration within the ECOWAS framework.

The restoration to democracy provided Nigeria with an opportunity to improve its image and influence in the region through the effective utilization of soft power. Nigeria's dedication to democratic government strengthened its soft power. Following the democratic transition, Nigeria established itself as a regional advocate of democratic values and human rights. Nigeria's support for the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Government, adopted in 2001, demonstrated this commitment by outlining standards for democratic government and human rights protection (Francis, 2009). Nigeria's role in mediating political crises and assisting with democratic transitions in ECOWAS member states such as Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrated its commitment to democracy. These actions strengthened Nigeria's position as a regional leader and helped to maintain ECOWAS stability.

Nigeria confronted new challenges and opportunities in deploying soft power as the twenty-first century progressed. The emergence of social media and digital communication changed the face of cultural diplomacy, allowing Nigeria to reach a wider audience with its cultural exports. Nigerian singers and filmmakers have gained international followings thanks to platforms like YouTube and Spotify, increasing Nigeria's cultural influence (Adamu, 2020). Internal political issues, such as corruption, election violence, and governance inefficiencies, also questioned Nigeria's commitment to democratic norms. Despite these challenges, Nigeria advocated for democratic administration in the region, engaging in election observation missions and promoting democratic transitions in countries such as The Gambia (Adebajo, 2008). It is important to comprehend the role of soft power in Nigeria's foreign policy during this time. It sheds light on the dynamics of West African regional leadership and diplomacy while emphasizing the use of soft power to promote stability and prosperity in the region.

This research also provides a case study of how Nigeria as a regional power uses soft power in its foreign policy offers suggestions thereby improving the efficiency of soft power in fostering regional collaboration and integration, which has practical consequences for policymakers in Nigeria and other ECOWAS states.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of soft power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy toward ECOWAS members between 2000 and 2023. The aims are as follows:

i. ***To Investigate the Conceptual Basis of Soft Power and Its Use in Foreign Policy*:** The first goal is to investigate the theoretical foundations of soft power and its use in foreign policy. Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, differs from traditional concepts of power that rely on coercion or financial inducement. Instead, it uses attraction and persuasion, utilizing cultural, ideological, and institutional strengths to influence the preferences and behaviors of other states. This research will look at the fundamental notions of soft power, and how they have been theorized and utilized in different geopolitical circumstances. Understanding the conceptual foundation of soft power is critical for defining its function in Nigeria's foreign policy and identifying the techniques used to cultivate and deploy soft power.

ii. ***To Analyse Nigeria's Soft Power Initiatives in Its Dealings with ECOWAS Nations:*** The second goal is a thorough examination of Nigeria's soft power initiatives inside the ECOWAS framework. This entails recognizing and analyzing Nigeria's distinctive

cultural, political, and diplomatic techniques for influencing its West African neighbors. The study will examine how Nigeria has used cultural diplomacy to increase its influence, such as by promoting Nollywood films and Nigerian music.

It will also look at Nigeria's promotion of democratic ideals and good governance, notably its support for democratic transitions and conflict resolution initiatives in ECOWAS member countries. The study will also look into Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives to promote regional cooperation and economic integration, such as contributions to ECOWAS peacekeeping deployments and support for regional economic initiatives.

iii. ***To Determine the Impact of Soft Power on Nigeria's Influence and Relationships in the ECOWAS Region***: This entails assessing how Nigeria's cultural diplomacy, political advocacy, and cooperative foreign policies influence its interactions with other ECOWAS member states. The study will examine how Nigeria's soft power has impacted its regional leadership and ability to shape regional norms and policies. It will also investigate how other ECOWAS countries and the global community have viewed Nigeria's soft power measures. This assessment will shed light on the impact of Nigeria's soft power measures and their significance in boosting the country's regional stature and diplomatic influence.

iv. ***To Identify Major Elements that Have Influenced Nigeria's Soft Power Dynamics within ECOWAS throughout the Chosen Time Period:*** This entails investigating the internal and external factors influencing Nigeria's ability to project and sustain soft power. Internally, the study will look at Nigeria's political stability, economic performance, and cultural production to see how these have influenced its soft power prospects. Externally, the study will look at regional and global trends that have affected Nigeria's soft power, such as geopolitical crises, regional wars, and changes in the international system. By identifying these influencing components, the study hopes to provide a broader perspective of the obstacles and possibilities that have influenced Nigeria's soft power trajectory within ECOWAS.

This analysis will contextualize Nigeria's soft power initiatives and provide insights into how local and foreign issues interact to shape Nigeria's regional impact.

1.3 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- What are the intellectual foundations of soft power, and how have they been used in Nigeria's foreign policy with ECOWAS members?
- What soft power tools has Nigeria used to interact with ECOWAS nations, and how effective have they been?
- How has Nigeria's use of soft power affected its influence and relationships within the ECOWAS?
- What internal and external forces have influenced Nigeria's soft power dynamics within ECOWAS from 2000 to 2023?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study on the function of soft power in Nigeria's foreign policy with ECOWAS states from 2000 to 2023 is complex. It makes a valuable contribution to both scholarly research and actual policymaking. Nigeria has been chosen specifically for this study because Nigeria in the West African sub-region is a major actor in Africa and to a lower level in the globe. It owns a range of soft power prowess and competences to negotiate with any actor in Africa and globally through the political platform of soft diplomacy.

Nigeria has Africa’s largest population, a strong economy, impressive political and cultural influence and one of the best trained armed forces on the continent.

What we have learned in the present-day global structure is that hard power works as a defensive idea, but when it’s used as an offensive tool, its results become futile for the given state. War as a means of attaining political purpose doesn’t work in the contemporary day and age. Societies accept, understand, and can justify defensive wars. Anything outside of this, social resentment and domestic strife become serious concerns.

Global politics in the contemporary world has been going through changes that have increased the importance of soft power compared to hard power.

In this changed global system, soft power will be a key element in boosting influence over international outcomes because it has become more difficult to urge nations and non-state actors through the principal levers of hard power (i.e., threats and force). The world stage has become less susceptive to political brutes, and more receptive to actors that are sensitive to the soft openings and restraints urged by this new global environment.

Academically, the study contributes to the debate on international relations by giving a detailed examination of how soft power operates in an African environment, particularly in West Africa. Existing research on soft power focuses primarily on Western powers, creating a

void in understanding its use in non-Western contexts. This study fills this vacuum by critically studying Nigeria's use of soft power, broadening the theoretical framework, and providing new insights into regional influence and diplomacy dynamics.

In addition, the study provides insight into Nigeria's foreign policy goals, including cultural diplomacy, supporting democratic ideals, and ECOWAS cooperation projects.
These insights are invaluable for academics and practitioners interested in regional leadership and diplomacy in West Africa.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The study "The Role of Soft Power in Nigeria's Foreign Policy towards the Ecowas States, 2000-2013" encompasses multiple limitations that affect the comprehensiveness and credibility of its conclusions. Data availability and dependability are two of the most significant issues. Access to government papers, detailed policy reports, and firsthand experiences are sometimes limited or unavailable, making it difficult to gather comprehensive and accurate statistics. This problem is compounded by the fact that Nigeria's government archives and digital documents are not always consistently kept or readily available to researchers.

Also, this study relies heavily on secondary sources such as academic journals, policy reports, and media articles. In contrast, these sources provide valuable insights and introduce the risk of bias because they may reflect the authors' perspectives or the political context in which they were written. Furthermore, the absence of peer-reviewed studies focusing on Nigeria's soft power strategies during this period necessitates using larger sources, which may not always address the complex nature of Nigerian foreign policy.

Another limitation is the complex nature of soft power. Soft power comprises a wide range of activities, from cultural diplomacy to educational exchanges, making it impossible to fully analyze and evaluate its impact. The qualitative nature of soft power complicates its evaluation because its impacts are frequently indirect and long-term, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of political, cultural, and social settings. Furthermore, the geopolitical environment in which Nigeria operated throughout these years adds another element of complication.

The West African region has seen substantial political instability and security concerns, influencing Nigeria's foreign policy and soft power initiatives on a continual basis. This regional instability may have diverted resources and focus from soft power efforts to more urgent security issues, reducing the effectiveness of Nigeria's soft power.

Furthermore, domestic political factors in Nigeria, such as changes in leadership, policy priorities, and administrative capacities, significantly impact foreign policy decisions. For example, the transfer from one administration to another has had an impact on the continuity and consistency of soft power initiatives, as soft power impacts are frequently gradual and require sustained efforts over long periods to have observable results. As a result, the study may underestimate the long-term consequences or potential future benefits of the policies adopted throughout these years.

1.6 Research Methodology

Using a qualitative research methodology, this study examines how Nigeria's foreign policy toward the ECOWAS nations was shaped between 2000 and 2023 by the use of soft power. The research is best served by qualitative approaches since they provide a thorough investigation of complex issues like diplomatic exchanges and strategic decision-making procedures. Specifically, the influence of Nigeria's soft power initiatives on its ties with ECOWAS nations will be analyzed through the use of a case study technique.

The research will employ document analysis as the principal method of data collection. To identify Nigeria's soft power efforts and how they have been carried out within the ECOWAS framework, official papers, policy statements, speeches, reports, and other appropriate materials from Nigerian government agencies, ECOWAS institutions, and other relevant sources will be analyzed. This will offer insightful information about the goals, tactics, and results of Nigeria's diplomatic contacts with ECOWAS nations.

Also, a comparative study will be done to analyze similarities as well as differences in Nigeria's soft power strategies throughout time (e.g., pre- and post-2000) and among ECOWAS nations. This will shed light on the effectiveness of various soft power methods and how they apply in different circumstances across the West African sub-region.

1.7 Literature Review

Joseph Nye created the phrase "soft power," which refers to a state's capacity to influence the decisions of others by enticement rather than compulsion. Soft power, in international relations, refers to a variety of non-military and non-economic means such as cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and humanitarian aid. The notion of soft power has affected Nigeria's foreign policy toward ECOWAS members, as the country strives to use its cultural, economic, and diplomatic assets to increase regional influence and foster stability in the West African sub-region.

Nigeria's foreign policy is distinctive by its emphasis on African unity, regional integration, and collective security within ECOWAS. Since its formation in 1975, ECOWAS

has functioned as an organ for encouraging economic cooperation, political discourse, and conflict resolution among its members. As a founding member and the region's largest economy, Nigeria has a significant influence on ECOWAS policies and efforts.

Also, the study of soft power in international relations is based on theoretical frameworks that highlight the significance of influence and persuasion in determining state action. In terms of Nigeria's foreign policy with ECOWAS nations, the use of soft power measures such as cultural exchange, military, economic and development aid demonstrates the country's efforts to create goodwill and collaboration among its regional neighbours.

Furthermore, foreign policy analytical frameworks provide insight into the decision-making processes and strategic calculations that govern Nigeria's relationship with ECOWAS. Scholars have investigated the impact of internal politics, leadership dynamics, and external influences on Nigeria's foreign policy aims and objectives within the ECOWAS framework.

Akinrinade, S. (2013) presents an outline of Nigeria's national interests in the context of globalization. The author underlines Nigeria's foreign policy priorities, which include fostering regional stability and economic integration.

This is consistent with soft power, as Nigeria's attempts to promote regional collaboration and stability through ECOWAS demonstrate a commitment to non-coercive methods of influence. Akinrinade's research paper emphasizes the need for regional leadership and diplomatic, cultural, and economic tools to strengthen Nigeria's position in West Africa.

Adedeji's (2002) publication focuses on the economic implications of developing-country partnerships, with a concentration on Africa. His insights on economic integration mechanisms are important for comprehending Nigeria's soft power strategy. Nigeria uses economic cooperation as a soft power, advocating measures such as the ECOWAS Common External Tariff and regional infrastructure projects to increase its influence. Adedeji's work demonstrates how economic policies and initiatives can act as soft power tools by encouraging interdependence and regional solidarity.

Adebajo, A. (2008)'s examination of Nigeria's leadership role in the African Union (AU) gives useful context for understanding the country's regional goals. The concept of "leadership by default" argues that Nigeria's leadership is frequently motivated by need rather than choice. This viewpoint is relevant to Nigeria's involvement in ECOWAS, as it frequently takes the lead in conflict resolution and democratic development. Adebajo's work fits into the soft power narrative by demonstrating how Nigeria's leadership, frequently through diplomatic and non-military means, adds to its regional impact.

Barnett, M. (2011) explores the history of humanitarianism, providing a broader context for understanding Nigeria's soft power initiatives in ECOWAS. Nigeria's participation in humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in the region might be viewed as a continuation of its soft power strategy. Nigeria's image as a beneficent and stabilizing power is enhanced by its participation in ECOWAS peacekeeping deployments. Barnett's historical view on humanitarianism helps to frame Nigeria's use of humanitarian aid and peacekeeping as soft power tools.

Bastian, M. L. (2013) study of Nollywood sheds light on the cultural components of Nigeria's soft power. Nollywood's global reach and appeal, especially in West Africa, make it an effective tool for cultural diplomacy. Bastian's explanation of how Nollywood shapes views and fosters cultural linkages is consistent with the concept of soft power, in which cultural exports have an important role in regional dynamics. Nollywood's capacity to project Nigerian culture and values strengthens Nigeria's position in ECOWAS.

Haynes, J. (2016) adds to Bastian's thesis by concentrating on the origins and evolution of Nollywood film genres. This book focuses on Nollywood's role in molding Nigeria's cultural landscape, as well as its impact on regional and international viewers. Haynes' examination of the creative processes and industry dynamics underlying Nollywood highlights the importance of cultural output as a kind of soft power. The spread of Nollywood films throughout ECOWAS countries indicates Nigeria's capacity to employ cultural appeal to influence and attract regional audiences.

Joseph Nye's (2009) foundational work on soft power is the theoretical underlying for this research. Nye describes soft power as the ability to influence preferences by negotiation rather than compulsion. His concept is vital for understanding Nigeria's use of cultural diplomacy, and economic cooperation as soft power instruments.

Nye's principles directly apply to understanding how Nigeria wants to influence ECOWAS states and strengthen regional leadership using non-coercive measures.

Maduekwe, O. (2009)'s depiction of Nigeria's diplomatic engagements in Guinea is a practical demonstration of soft power in action. His account of shuttle diplomacy and conflict resolution attempts emphasizes Nigeria's role as a mediator and peacemaker in the area. These diplomatic initiatives, which aim to promote stability and democratic governance, adhere to the concepts of soft power by employing negotiation and persuasion rather than force.

Ogundimu, F. F. (2019) examines the media's involvement in Nigeria's foreign policy, shedding light on the informational dimensions of soft power. The media serves as an outlet

for presenting Nigeria's image and ideals both domestically and globally. Ogundimu's examination of how media narratives and coverage shape views is consistent with the notion of soft power, in which information transmission and media influence play significant roles in changing regional dynamics.

Ogunsanwo, A. (2010) research on Nigeria's peacekeeping role within ECOWAS emphasizes the security dimension of soft power. Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping missions demonstrates its commitment to regional stability and security. Ogunsanwo's study highlights how these initiatives strengthen Nigeria's soft power by fostering trust and exhibiting leadership in regional peacekeeping.

Taylor, I. (2005) assessment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) sheds light on the challenges of regional development programs. His examination of NEPAD's potential and problems provides an important perspective on Nigeria's role in supporting regional development through ECOWAS. Taylor's study is important for understanding the economic components of Nigeria's soft power, mainly how regional development efforts are used to build cooperation and increase Nigeria's influence.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Overview of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives under the Obasanjo Administration (2000-2007)

A major turning point in Nigeria's political history was the country's restoration to democracy in 1999. With the election of retired general and former military head of state Olusegun Obasanjo, the nation ended years of military rule and became a civilian government. This change came about as a result of significant internal and international political and social pressure on Nigeria to adopt democratic government. Political transformation was made possible by General Sani Abacha's death in 1998, which resulted in the 1999 general elections.

Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military ruler of Nigeria from 1976 to 1979, ran as a civilian presidential candidate for the People's Democratic Party. His victory was viewed as a ray of hope for strengthening Nigeria's weakened democracy and regaining its internationally reputation. His military history, along with his dedication to democratic ideas, made him an exceptional candidate capable of bridging the gap between former military administrations and the new democratic period. The 1999 election win of Obasanjo was noteworthy for many reasons. First of all, it represented the start of a democratic government and the end of a prolonged military dictatorship. Second, many saw his administration as a chance to boost Nigeria's stature internationally. Using his standing as a previous head of state that willingly ceded power to a civilian administration in 1979 to support his democratic credentials, Obasanjo won the elections with an overwhelming margin of victory.

Nigeria's foreign policy underwent a radical change under the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007). His approach was heavily influenced by the need to restore Nigeria's leadership position in Africa after years of internal instability and military dictatorship.

During this time, soft power was strategically deployed, with an emphasis on economic initiatives, cultural diplomacy, diplomatic engagement, and peacekeeping efforts to further the country's foreign policy objectives.

2.2 Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives

During the Obasanjo administration, Nigeria's foreign policy was directed by a number of important aims and objectives aimed at re-establishing Nigeria's leadership role in Africa, ensuring regional stability, and promoting economic growth. These objectives were influenced by Nigeria's historical experiences, geopolitical realities, and the need to handle both local and international concerns.

i. Restoring Nigeria's International Image

One of the key goals of Obasanjo's foreign policy was to restore Nigeria's international standing.

Following years of military control, Nigeria's image has suffered greatly, prompting economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. As a democratically elected leader, Obasanjo's return to office was a key step toward rectifying the situation. He set out on a mission to promote Nigeria as a stable, democratic, and accountable member of the world community. According to Adebajo (2008), Obasanjo used diplomatic engagement to restore and improve Nigeria's worldwide status. His government was actively involved in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria attempted to create an image of leadership and dependability in international affairs by contributing to peacekeeping operations and regional security. As Ogwu and Olukoshi (2001) stated, this entailed re-establishing Nigeria as a responsible and respected member of the world community.

ii. Regional Leadership and Peacekeeping

Another fundamental principle of Obasanjo's foreign policy was the assertion of Nigeria's leadership position in West Africa and throughout the African continent. This goal was met by active participation in conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions. Nigeria was instrumental in resolving conflict and promoting democratic transitions in Sierra Leone, and Liberia. In this regard, Nigeria's contribution to ECOWAS was very noteworthy. The country played an important role in the formation and operation of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), though under the Obasanjo administration, he pivoted more towards diplomatic strategy rather than sending soldiers to the regions to maintain peace. As Fawole (2003) points out, Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS was not just a sign of its commitment to regional peace, but also a deliberate step to increase its influence and soft power in West Africa.

iii. Economic Diplomacy and Regional Integration

Economic diplomacy was another important component of Obasanjo's foreign strategy. His government acknowledged the value of economic stability and prosperity as the cornerstone for long-term development and regional influence. Nigeria aimed to enhance regional economic integration through programs such as NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Nigeria's goal with NEPAD was to promote economic cooperation and development across the continent. Obasanjo's government worked to make the African economy more linked and wealthy by promoting infrastructure projects, trade facilitation, and

investment programs. This strategy aims not only to reap economic gains, but also to strengthen Nigeria's soft power by establishing it as a driving force in African economic success and development.

iv. Cultural Diplomacy and Humanitarian Efforts

Nigeria's soft power armoury also included cultural diplomacy. The Obasanjo government emphasized the value of cultural interaction and education in fostering strong foreign ties. Nigeria used its rich cultural legacy, arts, and education to promote goodwill and mutual understanding with other countries.

To demonstrate the country's cultural richness and innovation, Nigerian cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and educational exchanges were pushed across the world. This style of cultural diplomacy aided in countering negative preconceptions and creating a more positive image of Nigeria overseas. Furthermore, Nigeria's humanitarian initiatives, such as delivering help to neighbouring nations during times of crisis, bolstered its reputation as a caring and responsible regional leader.

2.3 Analysis of Nigeria's Soft Power Policies and Initiatives towards ECOWAS Nations during this Period

Under President Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's foreign policy toward ECOWAS members stressed the strategic use of soft power to promote regional stability, economic growth, and cultural integration. We shall examine the various initiatives used by the Obasanjo administrations to develop soft power among the ECOWAS members. Diplomatic engagement, economic efforts, and cultural diplomacy are examples of such strategies. Each of these measures helped to shape Nigeria's impact in the West African sub region.

i. Diplomatic Engagement and Conflict Resolution

A key component of Nigeria's soft power strategy was its dedication to ECOWAS conflict resolution and diplomatic engagement. In resolving regional disputes, the nation used a proactive approach, frequently serving as a peacekeeper and mediator. Nigeria undertook a number of significant initiatives to shift from a mostly military to a more diplomatic and mediating position within ECOWAS under the Obasanjo administration:

- ***Withdrawal of Troops:*** Obasanjo withdrew a large number of Nigerian troops from Sierra Leone in 2000, reducing the financial and human costs of lengthy military deployments.
- ***Focus on Mediation and Diplomacy:*** Nigeria prioritized diplomatic mediation in regional crises, preferring peace accords and political solutions above outright military action.

- ***Support for Institutional Strengthening:*** Nigeria helped to improve ECOWAS' institutional capacity for conflict prevention and management, advocating measures like as early warning systems and peace-building efforts. Nigeria also played a significant role in mediation attempts. The Obasanjo administration was essential in brokering peace treaties and promoting talks between warring factions. As Obi (2009) points out, such activities contributed to Nigeria's reputation and influence within ECOWAS, as well as its overall worldwide stature.

ii. Economic Initiatives and Integration

Nigeria's soft power strategy also included economic diplomacy and regional integration. The Obasanjo government acknowledged the need of economic stability and progress for West Africa's long-term peace and development. As a result, Nigeria implemented policies aimed at increasing economic cooperation and integration within ECOWAS. Nigeria was a staunch supporter of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), which sought to create a single market by removing trade obstacles between member countries. The ETLS was created to allow the free movement of commodities, services, and capital across the area, therefore encouraging intra-regional trade and investment. Obasanjo's administration tried to match Nigeria's domestic policies with the ETLS's aims.

This includes reducing trade restrictions, streamlining customs processes, and giving institutional assistance to help with the ETLS deployment. Under Obasanjo's direction, Nigeria's government agencies worked with counterparts in other ECOWAS countries to guarantee the scheme's proper implementation.

In 2001, Obasanjo formed the National Approval Committee (NAC) to monitor the ETLS's deployment. This committee was in charge of verifying that Nigerian items fit the scheme's eligibility criteria, which included adhering to rules of origin and other regulations. This program sought not only to strengthen economic cooperation, but also to establish Nigeria as a driving force in regional economic integration. According to Fawole (2003), Nigeria's leadership in supporting the ETLS displayed its commitment to regional growth and economic stability, which strengthened its soft power impact. Under Obasanjo's administration, Nigeria aggressively supported NEPAD's goals of promoting economic growth, alleviating poverty, and integrating Africa into the global economy. Nigeria used NEPAD to lobby for infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and investment promotion. These initiatives benefited not just Nigeria's economy, but also the larger West African area. According to

Taylor (2005), Nigeria's participation in NEPAD demonstrated its leadership in continental economic efforts, as well as its dedication to Africa's common growth.

The establishment and operationalization of the Co-Prosperity Alliance Zone (COPAZ) under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration marked another key milestone in Nigeria's foreign policy and regional economic integration efforts. COPAZ was initially established on February 15, 2000, to create a sub-regional economic bloc that would improve trade, investment, and economic cooperation among its member countries, Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. This effort was part of Obasanjo's overall goal to foster economic growth, political stability, and regional integration in the West African sub region. The goal is to supplement the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) while also building on existing frameworks.

COPAZ's particular aims include:

- Free trade; which entails lowering trade obstacles and tariffs to encourage the free flow of goods, services, and capital between member countries.
- Promoting Investment; creating a favourable climate for both local and international investment via consistent laws and regulations.
- Infrastructure Development: Improving regional infrastructure, such as transportation networks, electricity supplies, and telecommunications, to facilitate economic activity.
- Economic Diversification; Promoting economic diversification and industrialization in order to lessen reliance on primary commodities and strengthen economic resilience
- Strengthening Political and Economic Ties: Bringing member nations closer together to foster stability and collaboration.

Trade and economic cooperation among member states of the Four-Nation Co-Prosperity Alliance Zone (COPAZ) was strengthened under the Obasanjo Administration. It also improved relations between countries and established the framework for upcoming initiatives to integrate the area.

Projects to improve connectivity and economic integration through regional infrastructure were also given priority by Nigeria. Projects like the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP). The signing of the WAGP Treaty in Dakar, Senegal, on January 31, 2003, marked the beginning of the WAGP project. The following presidents and dignitaries of the participating nations signed the treaty: Nigeria: Olusegun Obasanjo, President Ghana's John Agyekum Kufuor, Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and Benin's Mathieu Kérékou are the current presidents. In their commitment to the building and development of the pipeline meant to

transport natural gas from Nigeria to Benin, Togo, and Ghana, these leaders spoke on behalf of the four participating countries in the WAGP project.

The pipeline's construction was started in 2005 and finished in 2008. The goal of this project was to improve trade and economic cooperation among ECOWAS members by facilitating the energy supply. Nigeria made investments in regional infrastructure in an effort to foster development and economic progress. This program demonstrated Nigeria's leadership and dedication to regional economic integration while providing collective progress.

iii. Cultural Diplomacy and Educational Exchange

Nigeria's soft power strategy included cultural diplomacy and educational exchange, which helped to strengthen relations and mutual understanding among ECOWAS member states. The Obasanjo administration extensively promoted Nigerian culture as a way to foster friendly ties and improve Nigeria's image overseas. Cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and concerts were held to highlight Nigeria's diverse cultural history. Events such as the Abuja Carnival, which began in 2005 during the Obasanjo government and the promotion of Nollywood films, played an important role in this. Nollywood, in particular, developed as a potent instrument of cultural diplomacy during the Obasanjo administration. Nollywood films frequently featured themes and scenarios that many Africans could identify with, instilling a sense of cultural connection and solidarity (Haynes .J, 2011).

Educational exchange programs were another important aspect of Nigerian cultural diplomacy. Nigerian universities and educational institutions welcomed students and academics from ECOWAS nations, boosting academic exchange and understanding. These encounters contributed to the formation of a network of educated professionals who were familiar with Nigeria and its culture, increasing regional links. Nigeria also funded a variety of scholarship programs and educational projects targeted at improving the region's human capital development.

Nigeria helped to generate an educated and competent workforce in ECOWAS by investing in education and capacity-building. According to Ogunsanwo (2010), Nigeria's investment in education and capacity-building efforts helped to greatly boost human capital development in West Africa. These measures not only strengthened Nigeria's soft power but also fostered regional integration and collaboration. He also stated that these educational exchanges and activities helped to create goodwill and establish closer ties between Nigeria and its West African neighbours.

iv. Humanitarian Assistance and Aid

Nigeria also employed soft power in the form of humanitarian aid. ECOWAS nations received assistance and support from the Obasanjo government during difficult times like natural disasters and conflicts. This humanitarian aid not only reduced suffering but also enhanced Nigeria's standing as a responsible and caring regional nation. For example, during Obasanjo's presidency, Nigeria made major contributions to the post-conflict reconstruction efforts of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Financial assistance, technical help, and capacity-building programs were all a part of this support. Nigeria showed its dedication to regional prosperity and stability by aiding in the reconstruction of war-torn countries (Adebajo A, 2002).

Examining Nigeria's soft power policies and initiatives toward the ECOWAS countries under the Obasanjo administration reveals a comprehensive approach meant to improve cultural integration, economic development, and regional stability. Nigeria had a major influence in resolving regional disputes and advancing peace through diplomatic outreach and conflict resolution. Nigeria has demonstrated its leadership in promoting regional economic cooperation through economic initiatives and integration projects like the ETLS and NEPAD.

Through the development of mutual understanding and deeper relationships within the ECOWAS, cultural diplomacy and educational exchange programs further reinforced Nigeria's soft power. These complex soft power tactics strengthened Nigeria's standing as a major regional power while simultaneously advancing its foreign policy goals. The success of these programs emphasizes the relevance of soft power in modern foreign policy, particularly for countries looking to strengthen their influence and achieve strategic goals on a global level.

2.4 Case Studies that Show the Importance of Soft Power in Influencing Nigeria's Foreign Policy during this Period

The best way to illustrate the application of soft power in Nigeria's foreign policy under the Obasanjo administration is to provide specific case studies that demonstrate the significance and efficiency of these strategies. These case studies highlight Nigeria's ability in resolving disputes, engaging in economic diplomacy, and influencing culture both within and outside of ECOWAS.

1. Mediation and the Lomé Peace Accord

Nigeria played an important role in the mediation process that resulted in the Lomé Peace Accord of 1999. The Lomé Peace Accord, which sought to end the Sierra Leone Civil War, was signed on July 7, 1999, in Lomé, Togo. The Nigerian government led by Obasanjo, mediated discussions between the Sierra Leonean government and the Revolutionary United

Front (RUF) rebels. As Adekeye Adebajo stated in "Building Peace in West Africa" (2002), Nigeria's mediation efforts were vital to obtaining a negotiated settlement. The successful mediation demonstrated Nigeria's ability to use diplomatic influence to resolve issues, boosting soft power and consolidating its status as a regional mediator.

2. Peacekeeping and Support for Democratic Transition in Liberia

During the Obasanjo administration (2000-2007), ECOMOG (the ECOWAS Monitoring Group) played an important role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Liberia by maintaining a peacekeeping presence to stabilize the country following the civil war. They provided security and assisted former soldiers with their disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). ECOMOG also contributed to the security and successful conduct of Liberia's 2005 presidential elections, which were critical to the country's restoration to democracy. Nigeria had the most troops stationed in Liberia during this time. Under Obasanjo's government, Nigeria granted asylum to Liberian President Charles Taylor in 2003 as part of a peace agreement to end the second Liberian Civil War. This move was controversial, but it was deliberately targeted at promoting peace and stability in Liberia.

As Olonisakin notes in "Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL" (2008), Nigeria's willingness to take such bold steps demonstrates its leadership and commitment to regional stability. Following the end of hostilities, Nigeria actively participated in Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The Nigerian government, led by President Obasanjo, gave financial aid, technical assistance, and support for Liberia's institutional rehabilitation. This extensive support demonstrated Nigeria's commitment to the long-term stability and prosperity of its neighbours, strengthening its soft power.

3. NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) were important forums for Nigeria's soft power. NEPAD, established in 2001, aimed to promote sustainable development and good governance throughout Africa. Nigeria, under Obasanjo, was a strong supporter and driver of this program. Nigeria's NEPAD pushed policies aiming at economic integration, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction.

The APRM, in particular, was intended to encourage member states to implement best practices in governance and socioeconomic development. Nigeria's participation in these programs demonstrated its commitment to collective African progress, considerably increasing

its diplomatic and soft power on the continent. Nigeria's support for the APRM process in countries such as Ghana and Kenya demonstrated its commitment to developing good governance. According to Ian Taylor's "NEPAD: Towards Africa's Development or Another False Start?" (2005), Nigeria's support for the APRM processes contributed to the mechanism's credibility and encouraged other African countries to participate. This proactive role in promoting openness and accountability strengthened Nigeria's position as a champion of good governance in Africa.

4. Cultural Diplomacy through Nollywood

During the Obasanjo administration, the Nigerian film industry, also known as Nollywood, emerged as a successful tool of cultural diplomacy. Norimitsu Onishi, a *New York Times* journalist, coined the term in 2002 with his piece "Step Aside, L.A. and Bombay, for Nollywood" after noticing a lot of filmmaking activity in Lagos, Nigeria. By the mid-2000s, Nollywood was the world's second-largest film producer.

By the mid-2000s, Nollywood was estimated to be producing approximately 2,500 films per year, ranking second only to India's Bollywood in terms of production. Nollywood films were widely popular in Africa and beyond, producing a cultural experience that appealed to varied viewers. This cultural influence was a key component of Nigeria's soft power. Nollywood's portrayal of African stories, traditions, and modern challenges influenced perceptions of Nigeria and fostered a feeling of cultural identity beyond the continent. According to Haynes (2011) in "African Cinema and Nollywood: A Media Analysis," the popularity of Nollywood films contributed significantly to Nigeria's cultural influence and soft power.

The case studies of Nigeria's participation in ECOWAS, leadership in NEPAD and the APRM, and cultural diplomacy through Nollywood demonstrate the importance of soft power in Nigerian foreign policy during the Obasanjo administration. These actions not only benefited Nigeria's foreign policy goals, but also solidified its status as a regional leader committed to peace, development, and cultural integration.

2.5 Evaluation of the Impact of Soft Power Strategies during this Period

Nigeria's foreign policy underwent a substantial change with the implementation of soft power strategies under the Obasanjo administration from 2000 to 2007, which prioritized diplomacy, economic cooperation, and cultural influence over more conventional hard power methods. Using scholarly opinions, and empirical facts, this section evaluates the impact of these soft power methods.

Diplomatic Success and Regional Stability

The stability of the region was significantly impacted by Nigeria's diplomatic and peacekeeping operations during the Obasanjo administration. Peace and order were mostly restored in Liberia thanks to the presence of Nigerian troops under ECOMOG. Nigeria's leadership in these missions, as mentioned by Adebajo (2002), was evidence of its dedication to regional peace and security, which greatly improved its standing and influence within ECOWAS. In addition to bringing stability, the accomplishment of peacekeeping missions positioned Nigeria as a reliable and competent leader in resolving conflicts. This improved Nigeria's standing diplomatically and made it easier for it to mediate disputes in the area going forward. A key element of Nigeria's soft power, according to Obi (2009), is the view that the country is a defender of regional stability thanks to its proactive commitment to peacekeeping and mediation.

Additionally, Nigeria's ability to mediate peace agreements in Sierra Leone and Liberia proved the effectiveness of its diplomatic tactics.

The resolution of ongoing hostilities was greatly aided by the Lomé Peace Accord. The effective mediation initiatives also created a domino effect, inspiring other ECOWAS countries to approach Nigeria for support in resolving disputes. This function supported Nigeria's long-term strategic objectives by reaffirming its status as a major diplomatic player in West Africa. According to Olonisakin (2008), Nigeria's reputation as a trustworthy and powerful mediator was cemented when the immediate conflict zones were settled through mediation efforts.

Promotion of Trade and Economic Growth

Nigeria's economic achievements under Obasanjo made a substantial contribution to regional economic integration and growth. The ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), which Nigeria strongly supported, permitted the free flow of commodities, services, and capital across West Africa. According to Fawole (2003), Nigeria's leadership in promoting the ETLS was critical to increasing intra-regional commerce and investment, which drove economic growth. The successful implementation of economic policies such as the ETLS enhanced Nigeria's economy while also encouraging economic interdependence among ECOWAS members. This economic connection increased regional stability and collaboration, which strengthened Nigeria's soft power. Furthermore, Nigeria's support for NEPAD and active involvement in supporting economic development programs demonstrated its dedication to regional economic growth. Taylor (2005) noted that NEPAD provided a platform for Nigeria to showcase its economic power and leadership throughout Africa.

Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation

Nigeria's support for regional infrastructure projects, such as the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP), demonstrates its commitment to economic integration. These initiatives were aimed to improve connectivity and ease trade, adding to the region's economic development.

By initiating such activities, Nigeria established itself as a regional economic cooperation pioneer. The effective completion and operation of these infrastructure projects enhanced the region's economic conditions while also demonstrating Nigeria's ability to lead and manage large-scale developmental endeavours. This strengthened Nigeria's status as an ECOWAS leader who is aggressive and focused on development. According to Ekwe-Ekwe (2011), Nigeria's emphasis on infrastructure development has considerably contributed to regional economic stability and growth, hence increasing its soft power impact.

Cultural Diplomacy and Influence

The emergence of Nollywood as a cultural phenomenon during the Obasanjo administration had a considerable impact on Nigeria's soft power strategies. Nollywood films became extremely popular throughout Africa, fostering a shared cultural experience that appealed to a wide range of people. Nollywood's effect went beyond entertainment, promoting cultural integration and mutual understanding among ECOWAS states. As Haynes (2011) noted, Nollywood's depiction of African stories and traditions contributed to good opinions of Nigeria and its culture. This cultural influence boosted Nigeria's soft power by strengthening cultural linkages and fostering a sense of oneness in West Africa and beyond.
The popularity of Nollywood also provided Nigeria with a unique platform to project its cultural values and storylines, increasing its influence.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, after examining the role of soft power strategies under the Obasanjo administration in this chapter, we can argue that this administration's soft power methods indicated an approach that greatly increased the country's influence in West Africa. Nigeria's proactive diplomatic engagement, such as its role in crisis management and negotiations, demonstrates its dedication to regional peace and stability.

Economic measures like as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and the establishment of the Co-wealth Alliance Zone (COPAZ) encouraged regional trade and economic integration, resulting in greater wealth and growth. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy through Nollywood and educational exchanges developed a shared cultural identity and strengthened ties among ECOWAS members. At the same time, humanitarian assistance demonstrated Nigeria's commitment to regional development and reconstruction efforts.

Nonetheless, multiple challenges hindered the full implementation of these soft power approaches. Resource limitations, worsened by economic issues such as shifting oil prices, constrained the scope and sustainability of Nigerian initiatives. Domestic political instability and corruption undermined efforts, diverting attention and resources away from foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, inconsistent policy execution and institutional inefficiencies delayed the effective execution of Nigeria's soft power strategies. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's efforts were significant, but internal tensions and governance concerns continually affected the reputation of its leadership, reducing its reliability and reception.

Several actions would have necessitated and helped to strengthen the soft power strategies' during this administration. Actions like a more efficient and uniform application of policy can be ensured by strengthening institutional capacity and improving implementation processes. Finances for soft power projects will be more steadily supplied if the economy is diversified to lessen reliance on oil revenues. Nigeria will gain more credibility and influence by advancing political stability and good administration, and its leadership position will be further cemented by developing regional collaborations and cultural diplomacy. By taking on these obstacles and strengthening its current advantages, Nigeria will be able to maintain its position as a major regional force dedicated to peace, development, and cultural integration while also utilizing its soft power to promote stability and prosperity in the area.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Overview of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007-2015)

The period from 2007 to 2015 in Nigerian political history was notable by the administrations of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan. This period is important not just for political transitions, but also for the strategic use of soft power in Nigeria's foreign policy. Understanding how these presidents came to power is important to examining their foreign policy views.

On May 29, 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua took office as president. His prolonged sickness abruptly ended his presidency, creating a great deal of political unrest. This growing political pressure and appeals for a constitutional settlement resulted in the Vice President Goodluck Jonathan becoming the Acting President in February 2010 when the Nigerian National Assembly used the "doctrine of necessity" to give him presidential authority. This act was essential for maintaining governance continuity and stabilizing the political environment. After Yar'Adua passed away in May 2010, Jonathan took the oath of office and went on to win the 2011 presidential election, which solidified his right to govern (*BBC News, 2010*).

3.2 Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives

During the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, Nigeria's foreign policy objectives were determined by the larger framework of African leadership, economic diplomacy, peacekeeping, and regional stability. This study examines how these foreign policy goals and objectives were used in Nigeria under the administrations of Yar'Adua and Jonathan. These policy objectives included:

i. Promotion of Regional Integration and Leadership in Africa

Nigeria has long seen itself as an African continent leader, a position that was strengthened by the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations.

The country's foreign policy prioritized African unity and integration, with its primary focus on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping deployments and conflict resolution efforts in Liberia (2012), Sierra Leone (2009), and Mali (2013) demonstrated the country's commitment to regional stability and leadership.

ii. Enhancement of economic Diplomacy

Under Yar'Adua and Jonathan, economic diplomacy became central to Nigeria's foreign strategy. During this period, there was a driven attempt to attract FDI and promote commerce.

Yar'Adua's administration launched the Vision 20:2020 program, with the goal of establishing Nigeria as one of the world's top 20 economies by 2020. This vision emphasized the centrality of economic growth and development in Nigeria's foreign policy. Jonathan's administration maintained its emphasis on economic diplomacy, utilizing Nigeria's oil resources and strategic position to attract international investment. The Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP) and the National Enterprise Development Programme (NEDEP) were introduced to diversify the economy and promote a business-friendly environment (Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, 2014).

***iii.* Promotion of cultural diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy played an important role in Nigeria's soft power arsenal. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has played an important part in promoting Nigerian culture abroad. Nollywood films, which are extensively distributed throughout Africa and beyond, have influenced opinions of Nigeria and promoted its cultural values. The government's backing for the film industry through initiatives like as the Project Nollywood Fund shows a willingness to use cultural assets for diplomatic reasons. Nigeria has capitalized on its music sector, with performers such as Fela Kuti, Burna Boy, and Davido gaining international renown.

These cultural exports not only improved Nigeria's image, but they also provided opportunities for cultural exchange and dialogue. As Haynes, (2016) opined, c zzultural festivals, such as the Abuja Carnival and the Lagos Black Heritage Festival, served as platforms to showcase Nigeria's unique cultural legacy and build worldwide cultural relations.

iv. Promotion of Democratic Values and Human Rights

Nigeria's soft power strategy also included the promotion of democratic values and human rights. Nigeria has positioned itself as an African democracy champion, actively promoting democratic governance and conducting free and fair elections. Despite internal issues, the Yar'Adua administration stressed the rule of law and electoral reform. Nigeria played an important role in settling electoral disputes and assisting democratic transitions in countries like Mali and Guinea during Jonathan's presidency. According to Folarin et al. (2016), Nigerian government worked with international partners, including the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative, to offer expertise and resources to other African nations. These partnerships facilitated the exchange of best practices and the implementation of governance reforms during the Jonathan administrations.

v. Foreign Aid and Technical Assistance

Nigeria also employed technical assistance and foreign aid as soft power tools. The nation made major contributions to peacekeeping efforts, especially through the United Nations and the African Union. Nigeria's participation in these missions was a show of support and solidarity for its neighbouring countries as well as its dedication to regional stability. Nigeria offered technical help in fields like infrastructure development, healthcare, and education in addition to peacekeeping. This strategy was demonstrated by the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) initiative, which deployed Nigerian experts to offer assistance in other African nations (TAC, 2013).

3.3 Analysis of Nigeria's Soft Power Policies and Initiatives towards ECOWAS Nations during this Period

During the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, Nigeria strategically used soft power to improve its leadership position in ECOWAS. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration (2007–2010) emphasized governance changes, economic development, and regional stability. As stated by the National Planning Commission, one the key projects was the Vision 20:2020 plan, which intended to place Nigeria among the world's top 20 economies by 2020. This vision placed a heavy focus on regional cooperation and integration, acknowledging that Nigeria's prosperity was closely connected to the stability and development of its neighbours. Yar'Adua's dedication to electoral reform and good administration has had regional ramifications. Yar'Adua hoped that by creating an example for democratic procedures, it would motivate other ECOWAS countries to implement similar reforms, and this was all part of a broader scheme to position Nigeria as a leader in propagating democratic values in West Africa.

Following Yar'Adua's death, Goodluck Jonathan's administration (2010-2015) continued and further developed many of Yar'Adua's projects, with a particular emphasis on economic and cultural diplomacy. The Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP), established in 2014, sought to diversify Nigeria's economy and increase its industrial capability, with spill over benefits for the entire ECOWAS region (Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, 2014). Jonathan's administration was also actively promoting democratic transitions in neighbouring nations, offering diplomatic and technical aid during elections. This assistance was part of Nigeria's aim to promote political stability and democratic government throughout West Africa, thereby expanding its soft power influence. We will look next at the various steps taken by these administrations to increase soft power among ECOWAS members.

i. ***Project Nollywood:*** President Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Nollywood project in 2006, but it gained popularity during the Yar'Adua administration. The project aimed to boost Nigeria's film industry through funding and infrastructural development. The project included film production grants, filmmaker training, and aid with the international marketing of Nigerian films (Haynes, 2016).

ii. ***Entertainment Industry Intervention Fund:*** The Jonathan administration enacted the $200 million Entertainment Business Intervention Fund in November 2010 to promote the creative arts, especially in the music business. The fund was established to provide financial support to entertainment industry stakeholders such as filmmakers, musicians, and other creative professionals, as well as low-interest loans to artists, producers, and distributors to improve production quality and market reach. The Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) handled this financial backing, which fortunately facilitated collaborations with international artists, raising Nigerian music's global profile (Haynes, 2016).

iii. ***Nigerian Creative and Entertainment Industry Stimulation Loan Scheme*****:** In 2013, the Jonathan government established the Nigerian Creative and Entertainment Industry Stimulation Loan Scheme, which was run by the Bank of Industry (BoI) in collaboration with NEXIM Bank. This program was part of a larger attempt to maximize the economic potential of Nigeria's cultural and creative industries by improving funding access, production quality, and the building of modern production facilities. This huge financial investment enabled the development of higher-quality films capable of competing on a global level. This sponsorship helped films like "Half of a Yellow Sun" (2013) and "October 1" (2014) achieve international acclaim while also promoting Nigerian culture globally (Haynes, 2016).

iv. ***Partnerships with International Film Festivals:*** The Jonathan government promoted Nollywood in international film festivals. Nigerian films were heavily featured at events such as the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles and the Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF). These collaborations improved Nollywood's global recognition, attracting foreign investors and distributors. The international success of films like "The Figurine" (2009) and "Ije: The Journey" (2010) demonstrated Nollywood's potential as a global cultural phenomenon (Haynes, 2016).

v. ***Technical Assistance:*** Nigeria's educational and technical aid initiatives were crucial components of its soft power strategy, which aimed to increase capacity and generate goodwill among ECOWAS member nations. These initiatives aimed to address major

skill gaps and foster long-term development in the region. The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) program, which began in 1987, was a key element of Nigeria's soft power during the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations. TAC planned to provide technical support to other African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, with a particular emphasis on ECOWAS nations. The initiative sent Nigerian professionals in education, healthcare, engineering, and agriculture to these nations to promote growth and capacity building. Yar'Adua and Jonathan developed and strengthened the TAC program. For example, in 2009, Nigeria made agreements with Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Gambia to deploy more TAC personnel in critical regions specified by these countries. The program not only addressed existing skill shortages, but also established lasting relationships based on mutual support and cooperation (DTAC, 2010).

vi. ***Scholarship Programs and Educational Exchange*:** Nigeria offered various scholarships and educational exchange programs for students from ECOWAS member countries.

These projects sought to improve educational possibilities for the region's youth while also promoting cross-cultural understanding. For example, the Nigerian government, through organizations such as the African Development Bank's Nigerian Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF), granted scholarships to students from ECOWAS countries to study at Nigerian universities (African Development Bank, 2011). These scholarships spanned a wide range of subjects of study, including science, engineering, and social sciences, helping to strengthen the region's human capital.

vii. ***Capacity Building and Professional Training:*** Nigeria's commitment to capacity building included professional training programs tailored to the needs of ECOWAS states. These projects addressed a variety of issues, including agriculture, public administration, and infrastructure development. For example, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) held training workshops and seminars for ECOWAS diplomats and government officials on issues such as international relations, conflict resolution, and regional integration (National Planning Commission, 2009). These programs not only improved participants' skills and knowledge but also promoted a common sense of regional challenges and opportunities. Similarly, Nigeria's agricultural research institutes, such as the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), trained and assisted farmers and agricultural experts from ECOWAS member countries (Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, (2014). These programs were intended to boost agricultural productivity and food

security in the region, to correspond with Nigeria's developmental goals. Nigeria also built and financed regional centres of excellence in a variety of sectors to foster research, innovation, and capacity development. In 2013, the Nigerian government collaborated with foreign partners to build the African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases (ACEGID) at Redeemer's University.

ACEGID then emerged as an internationally recognized centre for infectious disease research, offering scientists from ECOWAS countries training and research opportunities while also contributing to regional health security (Folarin et al 2016). These actions not only increased Nigeria's image and impact, but also paved the way for long-term development and cooperation within ECOWAS.

3.4 Case Studies that Show the Importance of Soft Power in Influencing Nigeria's Foreign Policy during this Period

The Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations utilized soft power to achieve foreign policy goals, particularly within ECOWAS and beyond. This research features case studies that demonstrate the use of soft power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy throughout the period under study.

1. Nigeria's Role in the Guinea Political Crisis

Guinea experienced political instability as a result of a military coup conducted by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara in December 2008. The political crisis that followed, marked by brutal suppression of opposition protests, necessitated regional action to restore order and democratic governance. Under President Yar'Adua, Nigeria used ECOWAS to play an important mediation role in Guinea's unrest. Nigeria used diplomatic mediation, economic incentives, and cultural diplomacy to persuade Guinea's military dictatorship to accept a transitional government leading to democratic elections (International Crisis Group, 2011).

In early 2009, Nigeria's foreign minister, Ojo Maduekwe, was appointed to the ECOWAS Contact Group in Guinea, which was entrusted with resolving the situation and assisting the return to civilian administration. Throughout 2009, Ojo Maduekwe paid many diplomatic visits to Guinea and neighboring countries, meeting with key parties such as the military junta, opposition leaders, and civil society members. His diplomatic missions sought to foster consensus for a peaceful resolution and the restoration of democratic rule (Maduekwe, 2009). For example, at the special ECOWAS meeting in Abuja in October 2009, Maduekwe delivered information on Guinea's status and recommended mediation and conflict resolution measures. Following the attempted assassination of Captain Dadis Camara in December 2009, Nigeria, led by Maduekwe, increased its attempts to broker a transitional arrangement.

Maduekwe took part in the negotiations that culminated to the Ouagadougou Joint Declaration in January 2010. This agreement, facilitated by Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaoré, established the groundwork for a transitional administration, the appointment of an interim president, and the holding of elections within six months. Nigeria continued to help Guinea with technical aid and election observation. The transition phase concluded in the widely considered as free and fair presidential elections of June and November 2010. Alpha Condé won the elections, marking Guinea's first democratic turnover of power since its independence (International Crisis Group, 2011).

2. Nigeria's Contribution to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

The UNMIL was established in 2003, it served as a support system for the peace process in Liberia. Nigeria continued its major contribution to UNMIL under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, by sending in a large number of military and police personnel in addition to helping with peacekeeping and rehabilitation activities. Thousands of soldiers and police personnel from Nigeria made up one of the biggest contingents sent to UNMIL in order to uphold security and promote peace. Protection of civilians, disarmament of combatants, and facilitation of humanitarian aid were all made possible by Nigerian peacekeepers (UNMIL, 2012). Human rights, professionalism, and the rule of law were the main areas of training Nigeria gave to Liberian security personnel, thereby laying the groundwork for sustained stability, this capacity-building program strengthened Liberia's security sector.

To also demonstrate the significant role Nigeria played in Liberia under the UNMIL. On October 30, 2012, the acting Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Louis M. Aucoin, recognized over 1,500 Nigerian peacekeepers, including 92 women, with UN medals for their dedication to UNMIL and peace in Liberia (*Channels News, 2012*).

3.5 Evaluation of the Impact of Soft Power Strategies during this Period

The soft power initiatives employed by the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations had a significant impact on Nigeria's regional leadership, worldwide reputation, economic power, and cultural presence. Nigeria strengthened its position as a regional and global player by engaging in diplomatic mediation, contributing to peacekeeping missions, offering economic assistance, and fostering cultural diplomacy. Using scholarly opinions, this section evaluates the impact of those soft power strategies.

Enhanced Regional Leadership

During the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, Nigeria's leadership position in West Africa was considerably strengthened by its use of soft power tactics. Nigeria became

recognized as a major force in advancing security and governance by actively participating in regional peacekeeping and mediation operations. Its mediation of the political crises in Guinea and the post-election violence in Mali demonstrated its leadership. Nigeria's ability to lead and influence outcomes in regional conflicts was further demonstrated by Nigeria's Major General Abdulkadir Shehu being the first commander of AFISMA (*BBC News, 2013*). Through these efforts, Nigeria showed that it could effectively employ diplomacy and mediation as soft power instruments to strengthen its position as a regional leader and promote stability throughout West Africa.

Improved International Reputation

The Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations' commitment to soft power also helped Nigeria's standing abroad. Nigeria gained respect and recognition internationally for its contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and advocacy of democratic values. Nigeria's significant contributions to UN peacekeeping missions such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) showcased its dedication to global peace and security. Nigerian troops were essential in helping to stabilize warring areas and aid in the rehabilitation operations that followed (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2013). Furthermore, Nigeria's support for democratic government and human rights—exhibited by its participation in mediation efforts and assistance with electoral procedures in nations devastated by conflict solidified its reputation as a champion of stability and democracy.

Strengthened Economic Influence

Nigeria's economic impact in the region was reinforced by measures for cooperation and economic assistance under the governments of Yar'Adua and Jonathan. Nigeria's dedication to regional economic development was demonstrated by its support of regional trade and integration through ECOWAS initiatives like the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) (Uexkull et al, 2014). Nigeria's economic might was reinforced by these initiatives to deepen economic cooperation and integration within West Africa, showcasing its leadership in advancing regional economic expansion.

Expanded Cultural Presence

Cultural diplomacy was a key component of Nigeria's soft power efforts, helping to expand the country's cultural footprint abroad. The promotion of Nollywood and Nigerian music was critical in increasing Nigeria's global cultural impact. As Bastian, (2013) opined, Nollywood,

aided by government policies and initiatives such as the establishment of the Nollywood Fund and funding for international film festivals, grew into an effective cultural diplomacy instrument, promoting Nigeria's culture and values around the region. Nigerian music also received international acclaim, with performers such as Fela Kuti, Wizkid, and Davido gaining global fame.

The government's backing for these cultural sectors served to improve Nigeria's image and create cultural ties with other ECOWAS countries. Furthermore, Nigeria participated in various educational and cultural exchanges, which promoted goodwill and mutual understanding and contributed to the development of soft power. According to Omoera (2013), cultural exchange initiatives promoted Nigeria's rich cultural legacy and increased its cultural influence by bringing African students to Nigerian colleges and enabling Nigerian cultural groups to tour other regions. By forging enduring cultural ties with other nations, these initiatives of cultural diplomacy not only enhanced Nigeria's soft power but also showcased its cultural endowments.

3.6 Conclusion

Between 2007 and 2015, Nigeria's foreign policy underwent a reformative phase, with an intentional concentration on soft power. The Yar'Adua/Jonathan administrations aimed to project influence, and improve its image on regional and global level through cultural diplomacy, the promotion of democratic values, and foreign aid. While progress was made, notably in cultural diplomacy and regional leadership, domestic barriers such as domestic instability, corruption, and economic volatility highlighted the complexities of soft power projection. Nevertheless, Nigeria's cultural diplomacy activities had favourable effects, improving the country's image and strengthening cultural relations with other countries. The global reach of Nollywood, as well as the international success of Nigerian music, helped to improve Nigeria's image, particularly in Africa and the diaspora. Also, Nigeria's role in promoting democracy and human rights should not be overlooked, as it helped to improve its position as a regional leader. The country's role in election mediation and support for democratic transitions was widely acknowledged and welcomed, solidifying its reputation as an African champion of democratic administration.

However, domestic challenges, particularly political instability that escalated during Jonathan's government, created severe security challenges and prompted concerns about Nigeria's internal stability. Corruption scandals and economic decline undermined Nigeria's reputation and soft power appeals. Despite these obstacles, Nigeria's strategic use of soft power tools under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations demonstrated the power of cultural

diplomacy, democratic values, and foreign aid in attaining foreign policy goals. The lessons learned during this period can be used to guide future attempts to boost Nigeria's soft power and strengthen its standing in ECOWAS.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Overview of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives under the Buhari Administration (2015-2023)

Nigeria's foreign policy during Muhammadu Buhari's presidency (2015-2023) focused on regional stability, economic diplomacy, anti-corruption, and global collaborations. Buhari focused counter-terrorism efforts, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as boosting Nigeria's position in ECOWAS and the African Union. Economic diplomacy was centered on encouraging international investment, diversifying the economy, and utilizing Nigeria's resources for growth. Understanding the dynamics of soft power in the context of Nigeria's foreign policy under President Muhammadu Buhari is important for understanding the strategic direction and global influence of Nigeria during this time.

Before the 2015 elections, Nigeria faced numerous issues, including widespread corrupt practices, ongoing insecurity due to the Boko Haram insurgency, and economic insecurity. These concerns fuelled substantial public dissatisfaction with President Goodluck Jonathan's administration from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's leading political party, since its restoration to civilian governance in 1999 (Lewis, 2011). The March 28, 2015 presidential election was a key test for Nigeria's democratic system. Despite unrest and electoral fraud worries, the election was held peacefully, with many voters voting. Buhari won the election, making him the first opposition candidate to win a presidential election in Nigeria, resulting in a historic and peaceful transition of power (Owen and Usman, 2015). Muhammadu Buhari was inaugurated as Nigeria's President on May 29, 2015. His victory was viewed as an important turning point in Nigerian democracy, representing the political system's maturity and the possibility of change through democratic means.

4.2 Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives

The Buhari administration prioritized anti-corruption efforts in order to improve Nigeria's worldwide image and credibility. Buhari's foreign policy sought to establish Nigeria as a prominent actor in African and global affairs, developing bilateral and multilateral partnerships for mutual benefit. These goals and objectives were pursued by numerous means, including cultural diplomacy, economic initiatives, and strategic partnerships.

i. Promoting Regional Stability

Under the Buhari government, Nigeria's foreign policy focused on promoting regional stability, primarily through soft power. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and greatest economy,

realized the need of a stable West African area for its own national security and economic development (Ogunsanwo, 2010). Nigeria's government used its influence in regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to spearhead peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts.

They also used diplomatic endeavors to promote regional stability, such as shuttle diplomacy, resolving border issues, and assisting with democratic transitions. For example, Nigeria assisted regional democratic transitions by providing technical aid and election observers.

This soft power strategy contributed to the holding of free and fair elections in conflict-affected countries. Nigeria's effort in promoting democratic institutions and processes shows its commitment to non-coercive stability, and its resolve to develop and sustain peace in neighboring nations by emphasizing diplomacy, negotiation, and cultural relations.

ii. Fostering Economic Development

Under Buhari, Nigeria's foreign policy depended mostly on economic diplomacy, which aimed to promote economic development through the use of soft power techniques.

The administration promoted Nigeria as a desirable location for business partnerships and strengthened ties with important international economies through trade agreements and investment summits in an effort to draw foreign direct investment (FDI), increase trade relations, and secure development aid. According to Akinboye, (2013), Nigeria's participation in the World Economic Forum and several European and Asian investment conferences in Europe and Asia facilitated interactions with multinational firms and overseas investors. The numerous international economic conferences highlight Nigeria's investment potential and negotiate beneficial trade agreements. Nigeria's rich natural resources, particularly its oil deposits, were key advantages in these endeavors. Nigeria hoped to build a positive economic image and attract foreign direct investment, which was vital for domestic economic growth and development, by forming strategic alliances with countries and international organizations. Furthermore, these collaborations were mutually beneficial, emphasizing Nigeria's role as an important actor in global development endeavors (Ekpo & Umoh, 2018).

iii. ***Enhancing Nigeria's International Image***

One of Buhari's major priorities in foreign policy was to improve Nigeria's worldwide image using soft power methods. The administration acknowledged the need to combat negative stereotypes connected with corruption, political instability, and economic incompetence, which had harmed Nigeria's reputation on a global scale. Cultural diplomacy was essential in

rebranding Nigeria's image. The government actively promoted Nigerian culture by organizing international exhibitions, cultural exchanges, and collaborations with foreign cultural institutions. Nollywood, Nigeria's expanding film industry has become a symbol of modern cultural diplomacy. Nollywood films achieved international appreciation for showcasing Nigerian talent, storylines, and values. This cultural export contributed to changing worldwide opinions of Nigeria and highlighting its rich cultural legacy (Adesina, 2017).

The Buhari administration also used media and public diplomacy to improve Nigeria's worldwide standing. This entailed deliberate communication initiatives to convey a positive picture of Nigeria to the world. The government used worldwide broadcasting, social media campaigns and public relations to emphasize Nigeria's achievements and counter negative narratives. These attempts were intended to impact global opinion and foster a positive image of the country (Ogundimu, 2019).

iv. ***Advancing African Interests***

Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari firmly grounded in Pan-Africanism and the advancement of African interests on a global scale. The administration tried to establish relationships with other African nations and lobby for continent-friendly policies in international forums. Nigeria's active engagement in the African Union was vital for advancing African interests. The Buhari administration ensured that Nigeria took the lead in AU programs ranging from peacekeeping and security to economic growth and political governance.

The Buhari government also advocated for changes to international financial institutions, trade agreements, and climate change policies that benefit African countries. For instance, Nigeria received funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) for health, education, and infrastructure initiatives (Ekpo & Umoh, 2018). Such partnerships were founded on mutual benefits and highlighted Nigeria's status as a key actor in global development efforts. By aligning with global development goals, Nigeria hoped to improve its international standing, gain further support for its development program, and advocate policies that benefited the entire continent.

4.3 Analysis of Nigeria's Soft Power Policies and Initiatives towards ECOWAS Nations during this Period

Nigeria's foreign policy toward ECOWAS countries under President Muhammadu Buhari's leadership strongly emphasized using soft power to advance diplomatic relations, cultural integration, and regional stability. We will examine the strategies the Buhari administration undertook to advance soft power among the ECOWAS countries. These strategies include humanitarian aid, educational exchanges, and diplomatic involvement. Each of these actions influenced how Nigeria was perceived in the sub region of West Africa.

i. Use of Cultural Diplomacy

Nigeria's cultural diplomacy under President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023) has been defined by the purposeful deployment of its rich cultural history, primarily through festivals, films and the music industries, to boost its position within ECOWAS. This section examines important programs and events that have used cultural diplomacy to promote regional unity and strengthen Nigeria's soft power.

The Buhari administration utilized cultural festivals as a diplomatic tool. The African Wrestling Championships and African Senior Athletics Championships were two major sporting events that brought together top wrestlers from across the continent to compete in various divisions. These cultural encounters honored Nigeria's cultural diversity and developed a sense of regional solidarity and mutual respect (*Premium Times,* 2018).

ii. Educational Exchanges and Scholarships

Educational exchanges and scholarship programs have played an important role in Nigeria's soft power strategy, creating long-term partnerships and mutual understanding across the ECOWAS region. Under Buhari, various steps were implemented to improve educational collaboration and human capital development.

The Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) scholarship program has been a cornerstone of Nigeria's educational diplomacy since its inception in 1981. Its goal is to encourage academic cooperation and cultural interchange between Nigeria and other nations. This effort, which is administered by the Federal Ministry of Education, has been critical to Nigeria's soft power strategy, particularly during President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure. The initiative provides scholarships for Nigerian students studying abroad. In 2018, the Buhari administration gave approximately 115 scholarships to students study in foreign universities. These scholarships paid tuition, accommodation, and living expenses, allowing students to pursue undergraduate and doctoral studies at those universities. The Federal Scholarship Board

(FSB) collaborated with the participating countries' education ministries to conduct rigorous screening and interviews as part of the selection process. Dr. Fatima Ahmed chaired the (FSB) during this time, ensuring that scholarship grants were made in a transparent and merit-based process (*Punch*, 2018). This program not only strengthened Nigeria's educational diplomacy, but also helped to develop human capital in the recipient countries.

iii. ***Humanitarian Assistance***

Nigeria's commitment to humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, considerably increasing its soft power. Under Buhari, Nigeria took a proactive approach to addressing regional conflicts and promoting ECOWAS stability. Nigeria has been in the forefront of humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries impacted by conflict and displacement. The Boko Haram insurgency, which spread into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, triggered a serious humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad Basin. In response, Nigeria, in partnership with foreign partners, gave significant assistance to displaced people. For example, the Buhari administration's participation in the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in 2017 exemplifies Nigeria's soft power approach.

The summit, held in February 2017 in Oslo, Norway, was a pivotal moment, raising approximately $672 million in pledges to aid humanitarian efforts in the region. This conference was held to address the humanitarian crisis in the Nigeria/Lake Chad region, which has been badly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as raise finances and mobilize international support for humanitarian aid efforts in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (ReliefWeb, 2017). The conference emphasized the significance of coordinated global action in responding to the humanitarian catastrophe and Nigeria's responsibility in organizing support for impacted populations.

iv. Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Program

The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) program is a key component of Nigeria's foreign policy, providing technical help to other African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations. TAC, founded in 1987, sends Nigerian specialists to partner countries to share experiences in education, healthcare, and engineering. Under the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of Technical Aid Corps manages the program. In 2018, Nigeria sent nearly 500 TAC volunteers to Sierra Leone. These deployments were part of Nigeria's attempts to help these countries recover from violence, establish capacity, and achieve long-term development. The volunteers included experts from healthcare, education, agriculture, and engineering (*Premium Times,* 2018).

4.4 Case Studies that Show the Importance of Soft Power in Influencing Nigeria's Foreign Policy during this Period

From 2015 until 2023, the Buhari administration used soft power in various ways to achieve its foreign policy goals. The following case studies look at various events that demonstrate the relevance of soft power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy during the period under review.

Nigeria's Mediation Role in the Gambia's Political Crisis

The Gambian political crisis lasted from December 2016 until January 2017. It was a crucial test of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ability to uphold democratic norms in the region.

The crisis began on December 1, 2016, when then-President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after losing the presidential election to Adama Barrow. Jammeh's reluctance to accept the election results triggered a tense political conflict, heightening concerns about violence and instability in The Gambia and the wider West African region. ECOWAS set up a mediation team comprised of many West African leaders, notably Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama, and Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Koroma. They were charged with negotiating a peaceful settlement to the crisis and ensuring a seamless handover of power. The first significant mediation attempt occurred on December 13, 2016, when an ECOWAS delegation led by President Sirleaf and Presidents Buhari and Mahama visited Banjul, The Gambia's capital. The group met with Jammeh and Barrow to discuss the election results and the necessity for a peaceful power transition. During the meeting, the ECOWAS leaders highlighted the necessity of respecting the Gambian people's will and supporting democratic ideals (*BBC News*, 2016). Another round of ECOWAS Leaders meeting was held after Jammeh refused to accept the election results, this took place in Abuja, Nigeria, and the ECOWAS leaders emphasized the importance of a peaceful transition and intention to pay another visit to President Yahya Jammeh (*Al Jazeera*, 2017). On January 13, 2017, ECOWAS issued an ultimatum to Jammeh, giving him until January 19, President-elect Barrow's scheduled inauguration date, to stand down. ECOWAS officials, including President Buhari, maintained diplomatic efforts in an attempt to prevent a military conflict. (*BBC News,* 2017).

As the deadline approached, ECOWAS leaders, including President Buhari, made one more attempt to mediate the conflict. On January 18, President Buhari and other ECOWAS officials met with Jammeh in Banjul, urging him to accept the election results and peacefully hand over power to Barrow. Concurrently, ECOWAS military forces were stationed on the Gambian border, ready to act if necessary. The mediation efforts ultimately resulted in a peaceful conclusion of the conflict. On January 21, 2017, after lengthy negotiations and rising pressure, Jammeh agreed to step down and be exiled in Equatorial Guinea (*The Guardian*, 2017). President Buhari played an important role in the mediation process, leveraging Nigeria's influence and personal diplomatic skills to achieve a peaceful outcome. Buhari's presence demonstrated Nigeria's commitment to regional stability and democratic government. His attendance at numerous high-level talks with Jammeh and Barrow highlighted Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS and commitment to defending democratic norms in West Africa.

African Wrestling Championships and African Senior Athletics Championships

In 2018, Nigeria hosted two major sporting events: the African Wrestling Championships and the African Senior Athletic Championships.

These events not only demonstrated Nigeria's ability to organize major international competitions but also played an important role in strengthening its soft power, encouraging regional unity, and presenting an appealing global image. The African Wrestling Championships was held from February 7 to 11, 2018, at the Alfred Diete-Spiff Civic Centre in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This tournament brought together top wrestlers from around the continent to compete in a variety of categories. Hosting the championship established Nigeria as a prominent hub for African sports, emphasizing its infrastructure and organizational strengths. The event received widespread media coverage, both locally and globally, increasing Nigeria's exposure and favorable image (*Premium Times*, 2018).

This competition acted as a cultural exchange platform, allowing competitors and spectators from many African countries to interact and share their experiences. Whereas, the cultural engagement increased mutual understanding and respect among the participating nations, hence enhancing Nigeria's soft power. Furthermore, through tourism and hospitality services, the athletes, officials, and supporters increased the local economy. Nigeria's appeal was further enhanced by the good economic impact of these events, which proved the country's potential as a venue for international events. Nigeria's leadership in advancing sports-based regional cooperation and togetherness was highlighted by the championships' successful

hosting, highlighting the country's dedication to growing sports in Africa and establishing a sense of oneness among African countries.

The African Senior Athletics Championships was held at the Stephen Keshi Stadium in Asaba, Delta State, from August 1 to 5, 2018. At this competition, competitors from all across the continent competed in various track and field sports (*Premium Times*, 2018). The championships' successful management highlighted Nigeria's capacity to organize large-scale sporting events, boosting the country's reputation for organizational prowess.

Such sport exchanges helped to establish long-term partnerships and understanding amongst participating countries. In addition, the event promoted cultural interaction by bringing people from many countries together to celebrate sports prowess. Nigeria's hospitality and the successful implementation of the event had a lasting impression on participants and viewers, promoting its cultural diplomacy.

Oslo Humanitarian Conference

Nigeria participated actively in the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in February 2017. The conference's main goals were to address the humanitarian situation brought on by the Boko Haram insurgency, gather support from other countries, and obtain financial commitments to meet the region of Lake Chad's pressing humanitarian needs. It brought together officials of humanitarian groups, international organizations, and donor nations to talk about how to provide both short-term and long-term financial support. Nigeria demonstrated its commitment to tackling regional issues by actively participating in the conference, which garnered nearly $672 million in promises (ReliefWeb, 2017).

The Oslo Humanitarian Conference participation of the Buhari administration is significant to Nigeria's soft power tactics for a number of reasons. First, Nigeria portrayed an image of a responsible and proactive nation by actively participating in the international efforts to handle the humanitarian crisis, thereby improving Nigeria's reputation and credibility on the global arena and enhancing its soft power. Second, the Buhari administration's proactive role in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Lake Chad demonstrated Nigeria's regional leadership, and status as a key player in West Africa. Nigeria's efforts to mobilize international support for the region demonstrated its ability to coordinate regional responses to crises. This leadership role is an important part of soft power since it puts Nigeria as a key player in regional and international decision-making.

4.5 Evaluation of Soft Power Strategies during this Period

To improve Nigeria's international influence, the Buhari administration implemented multiple soft power tactics. This approach was evident in Nigeria's cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, humanitarian help, and regional peacekeeping initiatives, all of which attempted to boost the country's soft power, strengthen regional ties, and foster a positive worldwide image. This section evaluates the impact of soft power strategies using scholarly perspectives.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy was critical to Nigeria's soft power strategy during the Buhari administration. According to Haynes (2016), cultural exchanges and promoting a country's culture can greatly increase its global influence. In this approach, Nigeria used major sporting events to demonstrate soft power. Notably, Nigeria hosted the African Wrestling Championships on February 2018, at the Alfred Diete-Spiff Civic Center in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, and The African Senior Athletics Championships on August, 2018, at the Stephen Keshi Stadium in Asaba, Delta State (*Premium Times*, 2018).

These tournaments highlighted Nigeria's organizational strengths and facilities, attracting top wrestlers and athletes from around Africa and increasing Nigeria's visibility and positive image. It also demonstrated Nigeria's dedication to regional cooperation and sports development by showcasing competitors from all over the continent in sports events.

Educational Exchanges and Scholarships

Another important aspect of Nigeria's soft power strategy was educational exchanges and scholarship programs. According to Altbach and Knight (2007), educational exchanges are effective soft power tools for building networks of influence and mutual understanding. This assertion can be seen in the formation of the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) scholarships, which enabled Nigerian students to study at foreign universities. In 2018, more than 115 scholarships were awarded to Nigerian students to study in other countries.

This program, led by the Federal Ministry of Education, aimed to improve educational collaboration, build bilateral relations, and develop goodwill among participating nations (*Punch*, 2018).

Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance was a significant component of Nigeria's soft power strategy during the Buhari government. According to Barnett (2011), humanitarian assistance can boost a country's soft power by demonstrating its commitment to global humanitarian principles and cultivating goodwill. One significant example of Nigeria's humanitarian activities was its participation in the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, which took place on February 24, 2017. The summit, in partnership with Norway, Germany, and the United Nations, sought to solve the humanitarian calamity caused by the Boko Haram insurgency. Nigeria's involvement and campaigning at the conference resulted in pledges of approximately $672 million for humanitarian aid. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2017), Nigeria's participation in the conference demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and humanitarian values, thereby strengthening soft power (ReliefWeb, 2017).

Mediation and Peacekeeping

Nigeria's soft power strategy included peacekeeping and mediation. According to Bellamy and Williams (2010), peacekeeping missions can boost a country's soft power by demonstrating its dedication to world peace and security. Nigeria's role in resolving the political situation in The Gambia in 2017 is a notable example. As part of an ECOWAS mediation team, President Buhari engaged in extensive negotiations with then-President Yahya Jammeh to ensure a peaceful transition of power.

The mediation efforts, which included ECOWAS leaders such as Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Guinean President Alpha Condé, were held in Banjul and Abuja. These efforts culminated in Jammeh’s ultimate exit from power, averting a potential war (*BBC News*, 2017). Nigeria's leadership in achieving a peaceful resolution improved its standing as a regional stabilizing force, which strengthened its soft power.

Nigeria cultivated a positive image, promoted regional cooperation, and strengthened its soft power through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping operations. These initiatives strengthened Nigeria's influence on the world stage and showed its dedication to regional stability, global humanitarian principles, and cultural diversity.

4.6 Conclusion

Conclusively, the Buhari administration's strategy for using soft power in Nigeria's foreign policy from 2015 to 2023 showed a sophisticated comprehension of the possibilities of non-coercive influence in accomplishing regional and national objectives. Nigeria sought to improve its worldwide reputation, encourage stability in the region, and advance economic development by implementing a comprehensive plan that included economic efforts, cultural diplomacy, and regional leadership. The administration made a point of strategically using soft power as a fundamental element of its foreign policy in its attempts to fight corruption, strengthen diplomatic ties, and establish Nigeria as a major participant in African and international affairs.

Buhari's soft power policy was characterized by the successful promotion of Nigerian culture, primarily through Nollywood's global reach, and the efficient use of diplomatic channels to resolve regional crises and promote peace. The administration's emphasis on economic diplomacy, particularly efforts to attract foreign investment and promote regional economic integration, highlighted the potential of soft power to drive development.

However, these strategies were not without consequences. The continuance of corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the Boko Haram insurgency frequently hindered Nigeria's soft power operations. Furthermore, while cultural diplomacy and regional leadership produced great benefits, there was sometimes a gap between anti-corruption rhetoric and reality.

In the future, Nigeria's soft power strategy could benefit from a more consistent and transparent implementation of anti-corruption measures to increase trust and credibility both domestically and globally. Strengthening institutional capacities and improving cooperation among government departments involved in foreign policy could increase the effectiveness of soft power operations. Furthermore, engaging in public diplomacy and using digital platforms to engage a global audience has the potential to expand Nigeria's cultural and diplomatic reach. By addressing these issues, Nigeria would be able to better leverage the full potential of soft power to achieve its future foreign policy objectives.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD ECOWAS, 2000-2023

Nigeria's foreign policy has changed significantly under various administrations, especially with regard to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This research paper examined the use of soft power in Nigerian foreign policy during the tenure of three different administrations: Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023), Olusegun Obasanjo (2000–2007), and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan (2007–2015). The ability of a nation to influence others via interest and persuasion as opposed to coercion or payouts is known as soft power, a term made popular by Joseph Nye (Nye, 2004). This comparative research aimed to identify the advantages, disadvantages, and effects of each administration's use of diplomatic engagement economic initiatives, cultural diplomacy, and humanitarian assistance, to influence ECOWAS member states.

Diplomatic Engagement and Conflict Resolution

i. Obasanjo Administration (2000-2007)

Throughout his presidency, President Olusegun Obasanjo engaged in several important diplomatic initiatives to resolve disputes within the ECOWAS. The efforts of his government to transition the ECOWAS from a mostly military to a more diplomatic and mediating role were crucial in mediating and settling the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In 2000, Obasanjo pulled out many Nigerian troops from Sierra Leone, cutting down on the material and personnel expenses associated with prolonged military deployments. Nigeria's role as a mediator in the Abuja Peace Accords was critical in establishing calm in these war-torn nations (Adebajo, 2002).

Beyond the quick resolution of disputes, Obasanjo's diplomatic efforts included preventive diplomacy, in which Nigeria attempted to avert future hostilities through cooperation and communication. This assertive posture strengthened Nigeria's standing as a regional peacekeeper and mediator.

ii. Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007-2015)

Nigeria's leadership in regional conflict resolution was maintained by the Yar'Adua and Jonathan governments, although with a more subtle approach. The emphasis turned toward assisting ECOWAS institutions and frameworks in managing and resolving crises. Nigeria's role in the Guinea Political Crisis during the Yar'adua administration demonstrated this strategy. The crisis began as a result of a military coup led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara

in December 2008, during which Nigeria used diplomatic mediation, economic incentives, and cultural diplomacy to persuade Guinea's military dictatorship to support a transitional administration leading to democratic elections (Maduekwe, 2009).

iii. Buhari Administration (2015-2023)

Under President Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's diplomatic engagement was largely focused on proactive regional conflict resolution and ECOWAS stability promotion. Nigeria's participation in addressing the political situation in The Gambia in 2017 is an outstanding example. As part of an ECOWAS mediation team, President Buhari held extended talks with then-President Yahya Jammeh to secure a smooth transition of power. These efforts ended in Jammeh's removal from power, preventing a potential war (*BBC News*, 2017). Nigeria's leadership in securing a peaceful conclusion enhanced its status as a regional stabilizing influence, hence strengthening its soft power.

Comparative Analysis

Though they had different priorities, all three administrations used diplomatic engagement as an important instrument of soft power. The administration of Obasanjo was distinguished by mediation and conflict settlement, frequently entailing negotiations spearheaded by Nigeria. While Buhari's administration placed a higher priority on security cooperation and peacekeeping measures, the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations stressed support for ECOWAS institutions and multilateral diplomacy. The administration's strategic aims and the current regional difficulties were reflected in each approach.

Economic Initiatives and Integration

i. *Obasanjo Administration (2000-2007)*

Under Obasanjo, economic diplomacy aimed to promote regional economic integration through programs such as the Co-Prosperity Alliance Zone (COPAZ) and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). These programs attempted to lower trade barriers, encourage regional trade, and forge a more robust economic union among West Africans (Fawole, 2003). Additionally, the Obasanjo government-supported infrastructure development initiatives, including the West African Gas Pipeline, a project that was to facilitate energy supply and enhance trade and economic cooperation among ECOWAS countries.

ii. Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007-2015)

The Yar'Adua administration primarily concentrated on economic diplomacy by reviving the ECOWAS Vision 2020, which aspired to transform ECOWAS into a borderless, prosperous, and united region by strengthening economic integration and improving regional development (Ogwu and Olukoshi, 2011). The Jonathan administration pursued these goals, focusing on bilateral trade agreements and infrastructure development to strengthen regional economic relations.

Notable initiatives such as the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) aimed at enhancing trade flows and economic cooperation (Uexkull et al., 2014).

iii. Buhari Administration (2015-2023)

The broader global strategy influenced economic activities during Buhari's administration. The administration sought to build relationships with other African countries and advocate for continent-friendly policies in international forums. The Buhari administration advocated for changes to global financial institutions, trade agreements, and climate change measures that would benefit African countries. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) provided financing to Nigeria for health, education, and infrastructure efforts (Ekpo & Umoh, 2018). Such partnerships were based on mutual benefits and emphasized Nigeria's role in global development initiatives.

Comparative Analysis

Each of the three governments shared a common focus on economic policies, each attempting to strengthen regional economic cooperation. The foundation was set by the Obasanjo administration's infrastructure and trade initiatives. Under their administrations, Yar'Adua and Jonathan prioritized expanding bilateral agreements and innovative projects to strengthen economic connections. The Buhari administration strongly emphasized economic diversification and incorporated these initiatives within the larger global framework. Nevertheless, obstacles including financial limitations, ineffective administrative processes, and internal economic problems affected each government, limiting the successful execution of these programs.

Cultural Diplomacy and Educational Exchange

i. Obasanjo Administration (2000-2007)

The growth of Nollywood under Obasanjo gave cultural diplomacy more prominence. The enormous popularity of Nollywood films throughout Africa, especially in the ECOWAS countries, made the Nigerian film industry an effective tool for projecting Nigeria's soft power. These movies portrayed relevant African experiences, promoting solidarity and cultural connection (Haynes, 2011). Additionally, the administration supported intellectual and cultural exchanges by offering scholarships to students from ECOWAS countries to study in Nigerian universities.

ii. Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007-2015)

A strong cultural diplomacy was maintained under the governments of Yar'Adua and Jonathan. Because it saw Nollywood's potential as a cultural export that may improve Nigeria's standing and influence, the Jonathan government, in particular, backed the industry through several programs. Additionally, the administration increased the number of scholarships available, promoted academic exchanges with ECOWAS nations, and expanded educational exchange programs (Akudinobi, 2015). Cultural festivals and events featuring Nigerian literature, music, and art were organized to further cultural diplomacy.

iii. Buhari Administration (2015-2023)

Under Buhari, cultural diplomacy and educational exchange were similar to those of earlier administrations. Scholarships from the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) allowed Nigerian students to attend universities abroad. Over 115 scholarships were given to Nigerian students in 2018 so they could pursue their studies abroad. The Federal Ministry of Education oversaw this program, which sought to enhance international cooperation in education, forge bilateral relationships, and foster goodwill among member countries (Punch, 2018). The beneficiary countries' human capital was developed, and this initiative reinforced Nigeria's educational diplomacy.

Comparative Analysis

Nigeria's soft power included educational and cultural exchanges as important factors throughout all three administrations. Nollywood's potential was tapped into during Obasanjo's presidency, and under Yar'Adua and Jonathan, it was further developed and promoted. The Buhari administration emphasized the importance of cultural exports for regional integration while continuing to use them. The ECOWAS countries had a common thread of educational exchange programs that promoted mutual understanding and long-term relationships. Though

the scope and size of the efforts differed, every administration acknowledged the importance of cultural diplomacy in promoting Nigeria's soft power.

Humanitarian Assistance

i. Obasanjo Administration (2000-2007)

Under Obasanjo, humanitarian assistance was centered on post-conflict rehabilitation and capacity building in ECOWAS countries that had been devastated by war. Nigeria provided financial aid, technical assistance, and training programs to help nations such as Liberia and Sierra Leone rebuild their socioeconomic infrastructure (Adebajo, 2008). These measures were intended to stabilize the region, promote prosperity, and strengthen Nigeria's reputation as a valuable regional leader.

ii. Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007-2015)

During the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, humanitarian assistance comprised both direct aid and support for regional projects. Nigeria supported ECOWAS' humanitarian operations by giving funds and personnel for disaster relief and development projects. Yar'Adua and Jonathan established and strengthened the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) program.

For example, in 2009, Nigeria reached agreements with Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Gambia to deploy more TAC members in key regions designated by these nations. The program addressed existing talent shortages and built long-term connections based on mutual support and cooperation (Ogwu & Olukoshi, 2011).

iii. Buhari Administration (2015-2023)

Under Buhari, humanitarian assistance was fundamentally connected to humanitarian support. In 2018, Nigeria deployed almost 500 Technical Aid Corps (TAC) volunteers to Sierra Leone. These deployments were part of Nigeria's efforts to help these countries recover from violence, build capacity, and achieve long-term development. Volunteers included expertise in healthcare, education, agriculture, and engineering (*Premium Times*, 2018). This stressed the need for coordinated global action in responding to the humanitarian tragedy, as well as Nigeria's responsibilities in coordinating relief for the affected populations.

Comparative Analysis

Humanitarian assistance was a key element of Nigeria's soft power under all three administrations, with each adjusting to the unique demands and circumstances of their period. Obasanjo's administration prioritized post-conflict rehabilitation, laying the groundwork for regional stability. Yar'Adua and Jonathan increased their efforts to encompass more comprehensive health and disaster assistance measures. Buhari combined humanitarian aid and

security initiatives, meeting immediate needs while supporting long-term stability. Each administration's humanitarian strategies reflected their broader foreign policy objectives and the changing regional landscape.

Nonetheless, a comparative review of Nigeria's soft power strategy toward ECOWAS under the administrations of Obasanjo, Yar'Adua/Jonathan, and Buhari reveals a complex approach tailored to each period's unique challenges and opportunities.

Diplomatic engagement, economic initiatives, cultural diplomacy, and humanitarian assistance were all used, but with varying emphasis and results. Obasanjo's presidency was distinguished by proactive conflict resolution and groundbreaking economic and cultural endeavors. Yar'Adua and Jonathan expanded on these foundations, stressing economic integration and institutional assistance to strengthen regional cooperation and promote sustainable development. Buhari's administration prioritized security cooperation and humanitarian operations, addressing the immediate threat of terrorism while supporting long-term peace through regional collaboration and infrastructure development.

Despite their achievements, resource limits, political instability, bureaucratic inefficiency, internal conflicts, and complicated regional dynamics limited the full fulfillment of these programs. Moving forward, increasing institutional capacity, diversifying the economy, supporting good governance, guaranteeing political stability, extending cultural diplomacy, and strengthening regional alliances are critical to sustaining and expanding Nigeria's soft power. By resolving these obstacles and capitalizing on its assets, Nigeria would be able to maintain its position as a major regional force dedicated to peace, development, and cultural unity. Nigeria's soft power strategy will be successful if it can adapt to changing regional dynamics, harness its cultural and economic strengths, and maintain a consistent and coherent foreign policy stance.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This research paper, "The Role of Soft Power in Nigeria's Foreign Policy toward ECOWAS, 2000-2023," examines Nigeria's complex and strategic use of soft power during the last two decades. The academic foundations of soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, have found practical embodiment in Nigeria's foreign policy toward ECOWAS. This paper explained how Nigeria has attempted to establish a harmonious and integrated West African region through cultural diplomacy, economic cooperation, and regional stability initiatives.

Nigeria's approach has been heavily influenced by historical and cultural ties to ECOWAS countries, highlighting the necessity of leveraging common values and joint goals in foreign policy.

Nigeria utilized various soft power strategies, but three stood out: educational scholarships, cultural elements like Nollywood, and conflict resolution. The greater economic connections and shared cultural values within ECOWAS are clear indicators of these strategies' effectiveness. Nonetheless, the differing success of various administrations highlights the requirement for a consistent and flexible soft power approach. Obasanjo established the groundwork, but because of outside influences and changing political agendas, succeeding administrations have had varying degrees of success in expanding on his efforts.

Although there have been difficulties, Nigeria's soft power has had a considerable impact on its standing and relationships within ECOWAS. Nigeria's economic integration and peacekeeping leadership cemented its regional power position. However, internal problems, such as economic instability, political unrest, and corruption, have periodically hampered their attempts. Furthermore, outside factors such as regional crises and global economic trends have impacted Nigeria's soft power dynamics. It follows then that stronger regional alliances, economic diversification, and strong governance must all be combined in a comprehensive strategy to address these complex issues.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes how crucial soft power was to Nigeria's foreign policy toward the ECOWAS between 2000 and 2023. Although Nigeria has done a great job using soft power to improve its standing in the region, there is still a long way to go. To be relevant in a geopolitical environment that is constantly shifting, the country needs to keep coming up with new ideas and adjusting its soft power strategies.

Nigeria can strengthen its leadership position in ECOWAS and contribute to the long-term peace and prosperity of the region by honing and broadening its soft power framework. Nigeria's soft power strategy should take a holistic, multidimensional approach that addresses internal difficulties while also using the country's particular assets and potential. Future research must investigate the changing dynamics of soft power in a globalized world and the specific consequences for Nigeria's foreign policy. One important area of concentration should be expanding Nigeria's soft power resources beyond traditional channels such as cultural diplomacy and Nollywood. Investigating Nigeria's booming digital economy and its potential to boost soft power can bring new insights and solutions.

Furthermore, research into the effective integration of technical innovation and cultural diplomacy can expand Nigeria's global influence; scholars should look into the underlying concerns of governance and corruption that weaken soft power initiatives. Detailed evaluations of successful governance models in and outside of Africa can provide useful insights. Future research could look into the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in promoting transparency, accountability, and effective resource management.

Understanding these dynamics enables researchers to propose concrete ideas for developing a stronger and credible soft power framework for Nigeria. Comparative studies with other countries that have effectively used soft power can provide insights that Nigeria can apply to its specific situation. Future research should look at the impact of Nigeria's economic policies on regional integration, focusing on both the accomplishments and mistakes of previous projects. Detailed case studies of Nigeria's conflict resolution attempts can shed light on what works and what doesn't, allowing for more effective future engagement strategies. Collaborative research with ECOWAS's academic institutions and think tanks can build a comprehensive grasp of regional issues and encourage collaborative solutions.

In addition, education and youth engagement in Nigeria's soft power strategy deserve special emphasis. Investigating how educational exchanges and youth programs can promote long-term ties and improve Nigeria's image among the next generation of ECOWAS leaders would be very beneficial. By tackling these issues effectively, future research can help Nigeria establish a more successful and lasting soft power strategy, increasing its influence and supporting regional stability and growth.

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