

*Review*

# **Manifest destiny and foreign relations: Examining the Nigeria-South Africa contradiction**

**ADETUNJI, Olumuyiwa Adebayo<sup>1\*</sup> and ADEWUMI, Eytayo Folasade<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Received 13 August, 2020; Accepted 22 October, 2020

**This article analyses the dichotomy between potentials and capabilities with respect to Nigeria-South Africa relations and how this impinges on the leadership contest majorly involving the two countries. It observed that the international recognition accorded South Africa pitched it against Nigeria though, there are other contenders including Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Rwanda to mention a few for the leadership slot. To determine the leadership contest, this illustrative paper adopts descriptive and comparative methods to match the potentials vis-à-vis capabilities of Nigeria with South Africa in resolving the leadership contest. After a review of the foregoing issues, the study found out that though Nigeria was traditionally acknowledged as the giant of Africa, certain internal contradictions were not in tandem with Nigeria's leadership status as it remained a country of potentials lacking the edge to provide leadership for the rest of the continent. It concludes that South Africa appeared to meet the criteria for leadership to a greater extent and as such should be considered as the leader of the continent though competition cannot be ruled out by other contenders.**

**Key words:** Manifest potentials, strengths, leadership, foreign relations, leadership contest.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The dichotomy between potential and real power in itself is a recipe for development though not all potentials translate to development or growth in the long run. Nigeria at inception was a country of potentials as it ranked alongside a number of leading nations in Asia, South America, the Carribeans and Europe. At inception, the economy of the country was projected positively owing to the groundnut and cocoa pyramids in the North, the growth of agriculture in the former western region as well as the industrial potentials of the then eastern region.

All of these strengths ensured the country became a rallying point for countries in Africa who had conferred on Nigeria the leadership position of the continent of Africa.

These potentials or early signs of development ensured that its image was projected positively within West Africa, within and outside the African continent. On the continent, Nigeria's image ranked high as it was a rallying point among other countries in Africa as reflected in the adoption of an Afro-centric foreign policy. In view of Nigeria's leading status, it has become pertinent to

Corresponding author. E-mail: [olumuyiwa\\_crown@yahoo.com](mailto:olumuyiwa_crown@yahoo.com). Tel: +2348033340213.

Author(s) agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

examine how these competencies are being deployed in the current circumstance especially now that there are other contenders for leadership position on the continent.

Three decades after that, a lot has changed with respect to Nigeria's image and perception in and outside Africa. While a number of reasons could be adduced for this, the entry of other formidable forces into reckoning including South Africa, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia with seeming leadership ambitions clearly undermines Nigeria's relevance on the continent. This development apart from affecting her rating internationally also takes a toll on Nigeria's relations with contemporaries in and outside the continent. It is on this premise that this paper seeks to assess the growing contest for leadership position in Africa with a view to examining the contradictions that determine relations between Nigeria and South Africa.

The paper adopts a descriptive and comparative method to explain, analyse, compare and contrast Nigeria's strengths vis-à-vis South Africa's within the context of the dynamics of relations between Nigeria and South Africa.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### Manifest destiny

The concept 'Manifest Destiny' coined in the 19th century was used to connote United States influence across North America and other regions of the world. The term emphasized the right of the United States of America to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which providence had been given to it for the development and liberty of all (McCrisken, 2002). The term manifest destiny literarily connotes the capacity of a state to either expand its frontiers or lead others based on leadership, capacity, strength and ability. A further probe into McCrisken's submission reveals that America's influence has today gone beyond North America, but felt across the entire world, a position corroborated by Hanson and Beisner (2003) who submitted that America by virtue of its size, strength in critical sectors has since emerged as a dominant power not only within the North America today but also across the entire world at large.

This term is also akin to Nigeria's leadership role in Africa due to its sense of responsibility to the black race and the big brother role to most countries on the continent. Similarly, Nigeria became a notable voice not only in West Africa, but across the entire continent shortly after independence after it emerged as a power broker in Africa through numerous interventions including its Afro-centric foreign policy and expansion of foreign missions between 1960 and 1980 which was to give effect to her hegemonic role in Africa (Saliu, 2009). These interventions were not accidental but aimed at cementing

her leadership position in Africa especially after Nigeria's leadership qualities on the continent were acknowledged by other states therein (Bach, 2007). Just as Nigeria was developing capacity to cement, its leadership position in Africa, South Africa amongst other formidable contenders were also expanding their base and influence in Africa. Between 1994 and 2000, South Africa's experienced socio-economic and industrial growth enough to attract support from the international community and within the continent to assume leadership position in Africa. Incidentally, Nigeria's capacity began to decline around the same time South Africa's profile kept rising thereby making other states on the continent to seek alternatives with respect to the leadership of the continent. Presently, there are a number of countries positioning themselves for the leadership of the continent among whom are South Africa and Nigeria now perceived as rivals for leadership position on the continent. As the leadership contest continues to rage on, this paper attempts to put in context the strengths and contradictions of Nigeria and South Africa with a view to establishing how the contest affects foreign relations. To achieve this, the concept of foreign relations is conceptualized.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

Literarily, the term foreign relations denote the level of relations or interaction that exists between states whether at bilateral or multilateral levels. Because, relations do not take place within the territorial boundary of any state, relations and interactions that are conducted within the international system can be subsumed under foreign relations. Foreign relations are defined by goals and targets that states seek to realize when they relate, expand or in some instances sever diplomatic ties. As states continue to relate, foreign relations continue to evolve. Though, foreign relations is largely expected to be cordial and friendly, relations can sometimes be hostile and strained due to a number of factors which the parties involved are predisposed to. In the middle of relations between states are multilateral organisations viz-multinational corporations and international organisations which midwife the actualization of set goals and objectives by respective states. Even when relations become strained, multilateral organisations serve as vehicles to repair foreign relations which are in realization of national interest and objectives. Since states are entities with individual national interest and set objectives, it then becomes necessary for states to seek partners who would be of assistance in achieving set goals. It is important to reiterate that no state can single-handedly achieve set goals and objectives except with other states at the sub-regional, regional, or global levels. Considering the fact that national interest forms part of what drives foreign relations, Saliu (2009) identified what makes up the national interests of states to include

national policies and objectives, needed infrastructures and framework needed by citizens to improve their daily survival as well as social security programmes to aid or fast track development and the pursuit of happiness. For most third world countries, infrastructure deficit remains a challenge hence, the need for states to seek help from willing countries. While states with relatively stable economies require friendly nations to either supply needed items or buy raw materials or manufactured goods. For example, the goal driving the foreign relations of the United States of America may not be driven by obtaining loans to develop infrastructure but perhaps for the purpose of stimulating economy or for establishing military bases in order to keep an eye on suspected or assumed adversaries. This cannot be compared with Nigeria which obtain loans to meet the deficit in infrastructure. In all, the point is that states establish and sustain foreign relations for different purposes depending on foreign policy goals and national interests.

Examining foreign relations within the context of Nigeria and South Africa would be to examine relations between two sub-Saharan countries who share a similar history of colonization and imperialism. Though, Nigeria attained independence much earlier than South Africa, foreign relations between them remains largely unpredictable and sometimes characterised by love-hate relationship (Okolo, 2008). From 1994 when relations between the two former colonies were established, relations have continued to fluctuate between cordiality, hostility, confrontation and combative (Akinboye, 2005; Ebegbulem, 2013; Wapmuk, 2010; Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012). Despite the fact that Nigeria made the defeat of the obnoxious and discriminatory apartheid policy a major goal, both countries have not been able to leverage on that to ensure cordial foreign relations is sustained. Part of what has culminated in strained relations between Nigeria and South Africa has been the seemingly leadership contest which apart from pitching some African giants against one another, has also led to open confrontation between these two sub-Saharan giants. Though relations remain unpredictable, the leadership contest involving the two would continue to define and condition relations between the two frontline states.

### **NIGERIA'S POTENTIALS VIS-A-VIS STRENGTHS**

At independence, Nigeria exhibited attributes of leadership in Africa going by her influence in regional affairs most notably her participation in the struggle to liberate a number of African states from the clutches of colonialism. This development informed Adebajo's (2006) categorisation of Nigeria as a pivotal state in the continent alongside South Africa going by their leadership roles on the continent. On the hegemonic roles played by Nigeria and South Africa in Africa, Ogunnubi (2017) and Tella (2019) held different positions on the issue. For Ogunnubi, he contended that Nigeria should not be involved in any

leadership contest with any country in Africa let alone South Africa, a country it freed from the repressive and discriminatory policy. On the other hand, Tella (2019) submitted that both Nigeria and South Africa were powerhouses on the continent and that both states should be accorded the same respect. Though, with varying views, it is important to note that South Africa has considerable influence in Africa, a development which ultimately qualifies her as a rival to Nigeria, a country traditionally recognised as the only voice in Africa. Now that South Africa's has been acknowledged as a contender for leadership of the continent, a contest for leadership has been established. To critically analyse the foregoing points, the capacity of the competing states to transform their burden potentials to actual strengths and capabilities would go a long way to resolve the leadership contest. To further analyse these issues one after the other, the potentials of Nigeria would be discussed in context of the foregoing discussion.

The potentials which present Nigeria as a country capable of leading the continent includes its population, participation in United Nations Organisation peace keeping missions, as well as her membership of multilateral organisations (Adetunji, 2018). This project Nigeria's image positively within and outside the continent though; there has been a debate as to how the country has effectively utilized these key indicators to its advantage. In view of similar leadership aspirations by other African states including Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco and Egypt and South Africa to mention a few, the question of who provides leadership on the continent remains largely unresolved. Since Nigeria's towering leadership role in Africa is now under question, it would be important to determine how much of the potentials of Nigeria have been transformed to capacities alongside its perennial competitor, South Africa.

### **ECONOMIC POTENTIALS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS**

Economic potentials or indicators no doubt contribute a lot to how states perform domestically or internationally or whether it is perceived as a powerful or weak nation. In a similar vein, economic potentials go a long way to determine the manner of foreign relations states enter into because more than often, economic gains and growth are the fulcrum of foreign relations. On the economic angle, economic and trade relations premised critical sectors such as manufacturing, telecommunications, Oil and gas, banking, Real Estate, Media and Retail marketing to mention a few have also formed basis of foreign relations between Nigeria and South Africa (Adetunji, 2018). To this end, it is safe to posit that while economic power boosts or influences foreign relations, foreign relations on the other hand is incumbent upon economic strength because, it aids the development of economies of states thereby improving their competitive abilities and global rating. That explains

why leading states including the United States of America, China, Germany, France and Russia continually dominate international affairs due to their strong economies. On the continent of Africa, trade volumes between Nigeria and South Africa which started from 89.1 million rand in 1994 reached a peak of 29.4 billion by the end of 2016 (Adetunji, 2018). Incidentally, these economic exchanges and trade relations which formed the basis of relations since 1994 also doubles as the basis of competition due to leadership ambitions on the continent making relations fluctuating between competition and cooperation (Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012). In all, economic potentials serve as backbone for states to assert their authority within the framework of bilateral and multilateral relations and global politics. To further put in context the foregoing discussion, it would be important to provide an in-depth analysis of the potentials and capabilities of Africa's two powerhouses, Nigeria and South Africa.

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA POTENTIALS VIS-À-VIS CAPABILITIES**

To embark on a comparative analysis of the potentials and capabilities of Nigeria and South Africa is to examine their strengths vis-a-vis weaknesses. There is no denying the fact that Nigeria and South Africa are two power houses on the continent of Africa capable of providing a direction for the continent. How well the two states are able to realize their failures and manage their successes would go a long way to resolving the leadership question in Africa in particular albeit determine Africa's fate in general (Tella, 2019).

One of the foremost bases of comparisons between Nigeria and South Africa is economic strength going by the categorisation of their economy as first and third leading economies on the continent respectively (Tella, 2019). Irrespective of the ranking, economic indicators continue to fluctuate placing Nigeria's economy above South Africa and vice versa. Though, both states boast of strong economies as indicated in the volumes of trade peaking at 29.4 billion ZAR in 2016 (DTI, 2016), there exist some level of competition over which of the countries has more business presence outside its territory. As growth indicators continue to dwindle with nation's economies facing uncertainties, it is yet to be seen how Nigeria's economy would maintain its leadership position in sub-Saharan Africa or Africa in general. Apart from trade volumes between the two states serving as basis for bilateral relations, there exist other competitive areas including the development of the agro-allied industry where South Africa appears to be doing well as depicted in the global competitiveness ranking which ranked South Africa in the 49th position as opposed to Nigeria's 124th position in 2016 (Ogunnubi, 2017). South Africa's strength in the agro-allied industry which guarantees the local production consumer items

cannot be compared to Nigeria where there is a heavy reliance on importation of consumer items including rice, wheat and sugar. The over reliance of Nigeria on importation of consumer goods cannot guarantee self-sufficiency thereby exposing the economy to the market forces which are largely exploitative.

Another area of comparison is the aviation sector where South Africa unlike Nigeria boasts of a national carrier, the South African airways, a leading airline in Africa. Interestingly, Nigerians who travel abroad patronise South Africa airways (SAA), a company partly owned by the South African government. The implication of having a national carrier cannot be overstated considering the huge revenue boost to the economy contributing significantly to the gross domestic product and overall the growth of the economy. Simply put, any country that is serious about expanding its revenue base as well as limiting the exploitative tendencies of other states should consider having a national carrier in view of its importance. This paper queries how Nigeria implements the bilateral air service agreement it enters with countries when it does not have a national carrier of its own to fully exploit the opportunities in those agreements.

Similarly, South Africa boasts of a military industrial complex used to ensure the production of arms and ammunitions to meet internal security requirements and for the protection of the nation's territorial integrity. Despite Nigeria's successes in peacekeeping missions within and outside Africa, one key area it is lacking is in the area of local manufacturing of arms and ammunitions. Because the production of military hardware is crucial to addressing national security concerns as well as determining the preponderance of power, it then implies that Nigeria is not a strong country militarily in the real sense as it continues to rely on allies including United States of America, Russia, China and Pakistan to meet demands for arms and ammunitions. This implies that the country remains subservient to these states despite her independence and sovereign status (Adetunji, 2018). This is not to mention the huge costs that are involved to procuring of arms and ammunitions which continue to be a major revenue earner for the affected countries. For instance, Nigeria's lack of capacity in local production of arms played out during the controversies that greeted the seizure of \$15 million cash by the South African authorities meant to procure fire arms for the Nigerian armed forces against insurgency in North-East (Nwosu, 2014). If Nigeria is to reduce the rate of security breaches across parts of the country, then, it must begin to put machinery in place to fill this void.

One other indicator for measuring strength is the existence of a viable steel industry. South Africa has a viable steel industry providing raw materials for the production of arms and ammunition and automobiles serving as a major revenue booster for its economy. As the country strives to bring back the *Ajaokuta* steel

complex into full operations, South Africa on the other hand has taken full advantage of its steel sector not only to drive the growth of its economy but also serve as a model for other states on the continent who are lacking in this regard. A corollary to the steel industry is the capacity to manufacture cars and other categories of automobiles and machineries. South Africa's steel industry acts as sine-qua-non for the assemblage of major car brands including Mercedes Benz, Dodge, Volkswagen, Ford, Chevrolet, Nissan, Toyota and Honda Kia and Hyundai amongst others. Nigeria on the other hand boasts of only Innoson vehicle motors (IVM), a private firm that assembles and manufactures cars in Nnewi, Imo state. The implication is that while the South African government has supported the car industry through the provision of the enabling environment, Nigeria cannot boast of same competency of manufacturing of automobiles and machineries.

Another important indicator for determining a strong and buoyant economy is power generation considered as a major driver for growth and development. By the end of 2018, the capacity of power generation in Nigeria was put at 7,500 megawatts (Channels TV, 2018) while that of South Africa was put at 34,000mw (Eskom, 2018). The electricity power generation capacity of 7,500 mw when matched with a population of over 200,000,000 perhaps explains why provision of stable power supply remains a challenge despite the huge investments in the power sector. South Africa on the other hand with a population of a little above 51,000,000 people boasts 34,000 mw of power used to provide power into homes and drive industries. The challenges with regular power supply continue to hurt the Nigerian economy especially the micro, small and medium enterprises who cannot contribute their quota to sustainable economic growth and progress.

From the foregoing, most of the analysed growth indicators seem to favour South Africa at the expense of Nigeria which has recorded more shortcomings generally. This reality is that Nigeria's supposed leadership position in Africa is being called to question by its perennial competitor. How Nigeria would assert its authority on the continent is yet to be seen going by the current realities but a further slope down in the economic indicators would ultimately favour South Africa. In addition to these are contradictions in the political landscape part of which form the next focus.

## **POLITICAL EVOLUTION SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

Interestingly, Nigeria and South Africa share similar colonial history with Britain overseeing the affairs of both countries at one point in time. Nigeria's colonial occupation which culminated in the merger of Northern and Southern protectorate into one country came to an end in 1960 when the country attained political

independence while South Africa went through an entirely different course occasioned by minority rule under the apartheid policy. Comparatively, while several states in Africa including Nigeria had attained independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, South Africa was still subjected to foreign rule until 1994 when it jettisoned minority rule thereby paving the way for its first multi-racial elections leading to the emergence of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first non-racial President in 1994.

From 1994 when the former apartheid enclave became independent and sovereign, South Africa has successfully transferred power from Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa as the incumbent president. Nigeria on the other hand after attaining independence went through different phases including parliamentary system of government which was truncated by the first military coup d' etat in 1966. After years of military rule, Nigeria returned to the path of democracy in 1979 when it held her first transition programme following the election of Late Shehu Shagari (Ikime, 1980). The tenure of Shehu Shagari was also cut short by another military interregnum that led to coups and counter coups until 1999 when the current fourth republic was institutionalized. From 1999 to date, Nigeria had transferred power under successive administrations including former Presidents; Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), Umar Musa Yar'adua (2007-2010), Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) and presently, President Muhammadu Buhari (2015 to date).

On a comparative note, Nigeria attained political independence much earlier than South Africa though punctuated by several military interregnums. But unlike Nigeria that witnessed interruptions in its political evolution since independence, South Africa on the other hand has not witnessed any interruptions since 1994 as it had successfully transferred power from one administration to another. On the governance level, Nigeria and South Africa do not really differ as they have both struggled with high inflation, high unemployment rate, infrastructure deficit, corruption allegations against top government officials and insecurity among others (Tetenyi, 2014). For instance, except for the tenure of Nelson Mandela 1994-1999, subsequent administrations have either left office unceremoniously either due to corruption allegations or due to some perceived inadequacies or infractions (Adetunji, 2018). For example, Former President Thabo Mbeki could not complete his tenure after he was forced to step down owing to a no-confidence vote by the African National Congress (ANC) (Cooksey, 2008). Similar fates befell former President Jacob Zuma who was alleged to have corruptly enriched himself, an allegation currently before a South African court (BBC, 2018). In a similar fashion, former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan who was in office about the same time as Zuma also faced corruption allegation while in office especially over the

alleged pilfering of state resources to prosecute the 2015 general elections. Comparatively, while Jacob Zuma was arraigned in court to answer for his misdeeds in office, Goodluck Jonathan was neither arraigned as he denied all corruption allegations levelled against him, though a few of his appointees were charged with corruption allegation. In terms of holding leaders accountable, South Africa slightly differs from Nigeria as it has proven it is a country where there are no perceived sacred cows or untouchables where past leaders can be prosecuted or called to account for their deeds while in office. In the case of Nigeria, no Nigerian former President or Head of State (military or Civilian) has been prosecuted or called to answer for their deeds while in office despite several corruption allegations levelled against them.

On the political scene, the governments of Nigeria and South Africa continue to evolve as the citizenry mount pressure on the government to perform and solve mounting economic challenges which continue to threaten livelihoods. As the expectations for good governance continue to rise, the governments of the two countries need to ensure that economic growth is stimulated to solve inherent challenges including growing poverty rate, high levels of unemployment, and poor performance of institutions of government among others require urgent attention.

### INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Another basis or ground for comparison is their respective roles in international engagement. Although, Nigeria and South Africa stand tall when it comes to international engagements, this has also been a basis for rivalry. Nigeria's foray into international engagements could be said to have started soon after independence when she adopted an Afro-centric foreign policy to drive her interest of developing the sub-region and Africa as a whole. Not only that election as the chairman of the United Nations committee for action against apartheid as well as its hosting of the UN anti-apartheid conference in 1977 to coordinate the efforts of the UNO to defeat apartheid in South Africa leading to the defeat of apartheid and leftover colonial vestiges in Africa (Adebajo, 2006; Akinboye, 2007; Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012), earned Nigeria respect within and outside the continent. Some of these roles which include advocacy for the emancipation of the African continent from colonial domination, the search for common solutions to various conflicts in Africa, addressing the continent's chronic poverty and underdevelopment among others earned her the title of 'giant of Africa' (Enikanolaiye, 2013).

Comparatively, South Africa on the other hand also distinguished itself through interventions in international engagement including participation in peacekeeping missions in several troubled states in Africa including Angola, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and Sudan to mention a few

(Tetenyi, 2014). Some of these interventions which made Pretoria the sixth largest troop contributing country to UN peacekeeping missions portrays her as a country committed to the stability of the sub-region and the continent in the general (Aribisala, 2013). In addition, Pretoria has also distinguished itself in AU and UN interventions on the continent including midwiving the power sharing arrangement between former President Lauren Gbagbo and Allasane Outtara following political crisis that engulfed the disputed Ivorian presidential elections in 2007 (Routman and Taiwo, 2011). At this juncture, this article acknowledges the prominent roles played by Nigeria and South Africa not just as leading figures in Africa, but through their laudable contributions to restoring peace in troubled parts of the continent, though, this paper acknowledges that some of the interventions were informed by the hegemonic influence and leadership position which they tried to exhibit over the rest of the continent.

### INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

Another basis of comparative analysis is international exposure by way of regularity of state visits by world leaders and global personalities. In the last ten years, South Africa have played hosts to notable world leaders including former President Barrack Obama in 2013, President Xi Jinping of China in 2018 and German President, Frank Walter Steinmeier in 2018 (Katz, 2015; Xinhua, 2018; eNCA, 2018). Within the same period, Nigeria played host to notable world leaders including Britain's former Prime Minister Theresa May, French President, Emmanuel Macron as well as the former US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson all in 2018 (Obia and Enumah, 2018; Adekunle, 2018; Kazeem, 2018). While the two countries have had a fair share of state visits by world leaders and global personalities, the decision by the former President of the United States of America, Barrack Obama to visit South Africa at the expense of Nigeria during his 2013 African tour (Katz, 2015) further cast doubt on his confidence in Nigeria and seeming preference over South Africa to lead the rest of the continent. Though, this single development may not be enough to determine the leadership contest in Africa, it nonetheless adds impetus to a seemingly leadership contest between the two countries.

Closely related to state visits by world leaders are membership of Nigeria and South Africa in international organisations. International or multilateral organisations provide a good platform for states to reach out to other parts of the world as well as seek to achieve national interest which *ab initio* cannot be achieved individually. It is on record that Nigeria and South Africa are member states of regional and international organisations including African Union and United Nations Organisation respectively, South Africa's membership of blocs such as

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa- a forum of cooperation and synergy consisting of developing economies around the world, G20 – a group of central banks governors seeking the promotion of international financial stability (Ramachandran, 2015) and IBSA forum consisting on India, Brazil and South Africa confer on her some kind of leadership status in Africa at the expense of Nigeria. On the other hand, Nigeria's membership of OPEC, the body saddled with the responsibility of regulating crude oil supplies and prices globally also stand Nigeria out with respect to how OPEC is influencing the world's economy. Comparatively, South Africa's membership of three key multilateral organisations as opposed to Nigeria's membership of one clearly puts South Africa ahead of Nigeria in terms of ranking and international exposure.

At this juncture, it is quite clear that South Africa enjoys more leverage internationally than Nigeria. How South Africa that only attained political independence in 1994 managed to overtake Nigeria with regards to membership of key multilateral organisations is a pointer to the decline of Nigeria's influence in Africa and the growth of South Africa in this regard to. Closely related is the corruption perception index of South Africa vis-a-vis Nigeria by the international community, one of which is the corruption perception index (CPI). Several African states are confronted with corrupt tendencies by successive administrations which have not only affected government performance, but also created an international image crisis that ultimately affects foreign relations (Adewumi, 2015). On the corruption perception index, Nigeria ranks 148th position out of 180 countries while South Africa ranks as the 71st nation according to Transparency International ranking (Transparency International, 2018). The fall out is that none is free of corrupt tendencies, but South Africa is however doing better than Nigeria going by the ranking from the international body.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

In respect to human rights issues, South Africa appears to be doing far better as fundamental freedoms such as press freedom, human rights, right to public protest and transparency in government are largely guaranteed. The arraignment of former President Jacob Zuma alleged to have corruptly enriched himself in office was quite symbolic as it proved that it is a society where there are no sacred cows (BBC, 2018). Conversely, Nigeria remains a society where issues of press freedom, right to peaceful assembly and protest among other human rights provisions is still a growing concern (Ekwowusi, 2019). In Nigeria, there have been widespread reports of human right abuses and the demand for police permit to hold rallies. The abuses which are clearly not in tandem with democratic principles have called for change of approach by security agencies over their obvious disregard to

human rights of citizens. Closely related to this is the access to government information under the freedom of information act intended to ensure transparency and accountability in governance (Nwoke, 2019). It is worth noting that despite the promulgation of the freedom of information (FOI) act in 2011, there are still fundamental challenges assessing information at the federal level. How then can citizens ensure transparency and accountability when they do not have access to information at the federal level or even the sub-national level over the delay by some state houses of assembly to domesticate the FOI act thereby making it practically impossible to assess government books for proper scrutiny (Asemota, 2019)? This remains one area of concern over the respect of human rights especially with the refusal by the government to respect court pronouncements and judgements on the minimum number of days a suspect can be held in custody before arraignment. For example, the disregard of judicial pronouncements over the release of the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky by the federal government have further alluded to the fact that judicial pronouncements are still not respected in Nigeria (Tijani, 2019).

Another aspect which touches on welfare is the provision of social safety nets by the government. Social safety nets are programmes targeted at poor, hopeless and vulnerable members of the society with a view to ensuring that poverty is reduced while providing some relief for this category of people. On a comparative note, the republic of South Africa has an institutionalized social welfare scheme consisting of multiple cash grants to targeted poor households, conditional cash grants, child support grant and disability grants (Jacobs et al., 2010). Its social safety nets targeted at poor and vulnerable households has seen support given to 13.9 million beneficiaries at the end of 2009/2010 fiscal year (Jacobs et al., 2010). Though, there are still concerns about growing inequality and structured poverty in the former apartheid enclave, the expansion of the social safety schemes would help mitigate this.

Nigeria on the other hand until recently did not have sustainable social security schemes which made poverty alleviation programme a difficult task. But that narrative changed with the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan following the introduction of the Sure-P scheme set up to plough back the savings from the removal of subsidy on petroleum products into programmes that would empower the Nigerian youth (Nwosu and Ugwuerua, 2014). The SURE-P programme has since been expanded by the present administration through the Social Intervention Programmes (SIPs) consisting of the N-power, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) and the National Home-grown school feeding programmes (N-SIP, 2020). Other interventions include the Federal Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programmes (GEEP) consisting of *Market-Moni, Trader*

*Moni and Farmer Moni* estimated to reached a total of 2, 238, 726 beneficiaries (N-SIP, 2020). These programmes developed for the purpose of impacting the poor and vulnerable members of the society (Kolawole and Emmanuel, 2018; Okogba, 2018) are expected to lift millions of Nigerians from poverty especially as the number of poor Nigerians continue to increase reaching a peak of 91.6 million in 2019 (Akinkuotu, 2019). This number which is the highest in the world has earned Nigeria a title of being tagged as the poverty capital of the world. To this end, it is important for the government across all levels to ensure that the growing number of poor people is drastically reduced through sustained interventions to improve their living conditions and get them out of the poverty bracket. Comparatively, it can be seen that both countries have existing social safety nets designed to improve the conditions of the poor and vulnerable members of the society, however; certain distinctions need to be spelt out. First is that social security schemes in Nigeria are yet to be institutionalized compared to what is obtainable in South Africa. While efforts of the current administration are worthy of commendation, it is more important to ensure that these programmes are strengthened and sustained to outlive the tenure of the current administration. While South Africa's scheme appear institutionalised, Nigeria can take a cue by making sure that growing poverty is reduced through these interventions for that constitutes one of the roles of government.

The existence of social security schemes takes us to the poverty level in these case studies. A significant proportion of the populations of Nigeria and South Africa are within the poverty bracket, though with some slight variations. According to Akinkuotu (2019), Nigeria has the highest number of poor people put at 91.6 million, the highest in the world. South Africa on the other hand with an estimated population of 51 million has about 30.4 million living in extreme poverty (Koyo, 2019). On a scale, Nigeria and South Africa have close to half of their population living in extreme poverty, a development this paper opines is not supportive of growth and development plans. How does Nigeria and South Africa have about half of their population living below the poverty line despite having social safety nets? Could it mean that the existing social safety nets such as the National Social Investment Programmes are not meeting desired targets or groups (Onah and Olise, 2020)? The point been reiterated is that poverty alleviation programmes or social safety nets need to be redesigned in a way that addresses growing poverty and growing misery. Nigeria and South Africa as leading figures on the continent cannot continue to be home to majority of Africa's poor persons. When growing poverty is reduced considerably, it would not only serve as springboard to actualize their hegemonic interests, but also serve as models for other states on the continent who are also faced with similar but daunting challenges.

Another key indicator of growth and development are the number of out of school children. According to figures obtained from United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2018, there are 264 million out of school children globally. Out of this, 60 million are in sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria alone accounting for 13.2 million out of the number representing 39.4% of the total. The number of out of school children that accrue to Nigeria alone in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa is a sign of looming danger especially against the backdrop of Nigeria's increasing security challenges which continue to claim lives with reckless abandon. With Nigeria having more out of school children than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa vis-a-vis South Africa which has a school enrolment put at 98% (Lesley-Anne, 2018), the future is bleak for Nigeria. Despite a 26% recommendation of annual budget to be allocated to education according to UNESCO, the Nigerian budget since 1999 have not allocated up to 10% to education every year, a situation responsible for the dismal performance in key performance index as reflected by number of out of school children at the elementary level. Comparatively, South Africa's performance index in this area is laudable going by its functional elementary school system which guarantees the enrolment and retention of all aged school children in school. The investment of the South African government in this regard is akin to the functional educational system which is now a source of attraction to many Nigerian students and scholars, who find the South African environment more conducive for teaching and research.

## LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE CONTRADICTION

The lessons drawn from this paper is that over the past two decades is that South Africa has closed the gap and even surpassing Nigeria in some key areas of development. Over this period, South Africa has shown the rest of the world it is ready for leadership position through its commitment to the growth and development of Africa. While it may not have achieved all its potentials, it is no doubt a pace setter in Africa, hence the appellation 'Europe in Africa' going by developments in the area of infrastructure, science and technology, agriculture and allied products; food security among other key performance indicators. This justifies the good rating and ranking of South Africa as a country ready to lead the rest of the continent.

The giant strides of South Africa which resulted in her subtle recognition over other African countries including Nigeria is made more visible through her membership of multilateral organisations namely G20, IBSA, and BRICS among others. The recognition has resulted in incessant diplomatic face-off with Nigeria, a country traditionally acknowledged as the giant of Africa. Whatever arguments

are made in favour of Nigeria or South Africa's claiming the leadership title in Africa, this paper expressly submits that the leadership void in Africa be filled. Going by the appellation of leadership conferred on South Africa in Africa, the onus is on Nigeria to turn the tide against South Africa to either reclaim the position or simply accept the status quo ante. As nations' across the globe grapple with issues of leadership in their respective continents to solve peculiar problems, Africa's leading states have also vied for leadership position, a position which has been claimed by South Africa. The lesson from this is that South Africa's possesses the attributes and qualities needed of a leader to meet the requirements of the twenty first century. It is worthy of note that South Africa's ascension is not determined by her seeming preference by international actors but largely due to her capacity to transform most of its manifest potentials to strengths. This has put her ahead of her contemporaries in Africa who were once considered as the leader of the continent or those who still nurse leadership position.

## CONCLUSION

Essentially, the gap between performance and failure is a function of how well manifest potentials have been transformed into capacity, competency and ability. How manifest potentials are transformed to strengths is entirely up to states as they seek to gain local acceptance and influence and gain international recognition. The ability to transform potentials to performance would not only project the image of a state positively before the international community, but also serve as a viable recipe for establishing sustainable foreign relations with key actors in the international system. In the event that a state cannot transform its potentials to strength, such a state is not only perceived as a parasite before the international community, but may become isolated by others. To this end, this paper concludes that the competency of South Africa to transform more of its potentials into strengths has earned her more accolades and recognition not only by her neighbours on the continent, but by members of the international community.

Nigeria on the other hand relatively remains a country of potentials whose manifest destiny to lead the continent has not been fully developed. Part of what has worked against Nigeria has been the failure of leadership to come up clear-cut approaches and strategies to transform these potentials to strengths. Though, Nigeria has all the qualities to emerge as Africa's undisputed leader, certain internal contradictions including growing poverty, highest number of out of school children, low value of Naira, low minimum wage, decrepit and moribund infrastructure among others make this impossible. After 60 years of independence, it remains a sleeping giant and a country of the future. In concluding, Africa's desire for growth and qualitative leadership is not questionable, as current events require the right type of leadership that

can catapult the whole of the continent to meet the challenges of the twenty first century. To achieve this, Africa needs a country that has demonstrated capacity within to provide the much needed leadership for the continent as a whole. From all available criteria, it can be seen that South Africa seems to meet both criteria so it may be worth considering her as the leader of the continent for now going by the prevailing conditions, regardless of the competition taking place in the background.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

## REFERENCES

- Adebajo A (2006). Prophets of Africa's renaissance: Nigeria and South Africa as regional hegemon (No. 3). Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.
- Adekunle T (2018). U.S Secretary of state, Tillerson, visits Nigeria on Monday. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com>
- Adetunji OA (2018). Nigeria-South Africa Diplomatic struggle for African Hegemony (1994-2017). Unpublished PhD Thesis, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Adewumi EF (2015). Nigeria's Security Challenges and Foreign Relations 1999-2012. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Akinboye SO (2005). From Confrontation to Strategic Partnership: Nigeria's Relations with South Africa, 1960-2000. In: Ogwu UJ, (ed.), New Horizons for Nigeria in World Affairs (211-230). Nigeria Institute of International Affairs.
- Akinboye SO (2007). Nigeria's National Interests and her Diplomatic relations with South Africa. In Akinterinwa BA (ed.) Nigeria's National Interests in a Globalising World: Further Reflections on Constructive and Beneficial Concentricism (300-356) Vol III. Bolytag International Publishers.
- Akinkuotu E (2019). Over 91 Million Nigerians now desperately poor, says World Poverty Clock. Available at: [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com)
- Aribisala F (2013). A Permanent Seat for Nigeria in the United Nations Security Council. *Financial Nigeria* pp. 8-10.
- Asemota A (2019). "8 Years After, 34 States yet to domesticate FOI Act". *The Leadership Newspaper*.
- Bach DC (2007). Nigeria's "Manifest Destiny" in West Africa: Dominance without power. *Afrika Spectrum* 42(2):301-321.
- BBC News (2018). South African ex-President Jacob Zuma charged with corruption. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43658953> on July 18, 2020
- BBC News (2018). Jacob Zuma: Former South African president faces corruption trial. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43426971>
- Channels Television (2018). Analysis of Power Supply in Nigeria. Available at: [www.channelstv.com](http://www.channelstv.com)
- Cooksey K (2008). Thabo Mbeki to step down as South African president after ANC request. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/28/20/southafrica1>
- Department of Trade and Industry-DTI (2016). Trade, Exports and Investment. Available at: [www.thedti.gov.za/trade\\_investment/trade\\_investment](http://www.thedti.gov.za/trade_investment/trade_investment)
- Ebegbulem JC (2013). An Evaluation of Nigerian-South African bilateral relations. *Journal of International relations and Foreign Policy* 1(1):32-40.
- Ekwowusi S (2019). Nigeria: Human Rights Violations in Nigeria. Thisday. Available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201912110595.html>
- eNCA (2018). Ramaphosa meets German President in State Visit to South AFRICA. Available at: [www.enca.com](http://www.enca.com) on

- Enikanolaiye S (2013). Nigeria's African Policy: An Overview (II) Thisday.
- Eskom (2018). Generating Electricity. Available at: [www.eskom.co.za](http://www.eskom.co.za)
- Hanson K, Beisner RL (2003). American Foreign Relations since 1600: A guide to the Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ABC – CLIO.
- Ikime O (1980). Groundwork of Nigerian History. Heinemann Educational Books
- Jacobs P, Ngcobo N, Hart T, Baipheti M (2010). Overcoming Inequality and structural poverty in South Africa: Towards Inclusive growth and development. Being a conference paper delivered at O.R. Tambo conference centre, Jo'burg 20-22, Sept 2010.
- Katz A (2015). All the U.S Presidents trips to Africa, Mapped. The Washington post. Available at: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)
- Kazeem Y (2018). Emmanuel Macron's Unconventional visit to Nigeria was low on policy but high culture. Quartz Africa.
- Kolawole Y, Emmanuel P (2018). GEEP: BOI disburse 15 billion loans to 400,000 micro-enterprises. Available at: [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)
- Koyo K (2019). Oxfam Report: 30.4 Million South Africans live in poverty. Available at: [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za)
- Lesley-Anne J (2018). 98% of South African Children attend school and other facts about access to education from the 2018 Gauge Report. Available at: [www.parent24.com](http://www.parent24.com)
- McCrisken TB (2002). Exceptionalism. Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy 2:63-80.
- National Social Investment Programme N-SIP (2020). National Social Investment Programme Available at: <https://n-sip.gov.ng>
- Nwoke U (2019). Access to Information under the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act, 2011: Challenges to Implementation and the Rhetoric of Radical Change. Journal of African Law 63(3):435-461.
- Nwosu N (2014). Arms deal: Why Nigeria resorted to Black Market Option. Thisday.
- Nwosu O, Ugwuera E (2014). Analysis and Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P) and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria 2012-2014. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science 19(12):25-32.
- Obia V, Enumah A (2018). Theresa may visits Nigeria Tomorrow as trade with Britain grows. Thisday.
- Ogunnubi O (2017). Effective hegemonic influence in Africa: An analysis of Nigeria's 'hegemonic' position. Journal of Asian and African Studies 52(7):932-946.
- Okogba E (2018). Social intervention programme: FG feeds 8.7 million school children. Available at: [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)
- Okolo B (2006). Love/Hate Relationship between Nigeria and South Africa. Africa's International Relations University.
- Onah R, Olise C (2020). National Social Investment Programme (N-SIP) and Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 24(10):20-31.
- Ramachandran J (2015). G20 Finance Ministers committed to sustainable Development Inter Press Service News Agency. Available at: [www.ipsnews.net/2015/09/g20-finance-ministers-committed-to-sustainable-development/](http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/09/g20-finance-ministers-committed-to-sustainable-development/)
- Routman B, Taiwo O (2011). Resolving the Crisis in Ivory Coast: The Role of Regional Organizations. Available at: [www.brokkings.edu](http://www.brokkings.edu)
- Saliu HA (2009). Infrastructure and Foreign Policy. A focus on Nigeria. Nigerian forum: A Journal of Opinion on World Affairs 30(11,12):347-360.
- Tella O (2019). Internal, Regional and External Impediments to Nigeria and South Africa's Hegemonic Competence in Africa. In: Tella O (ed.) Nigeria-South Africa Relations and Regional Hegemonic Competence. Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development. (3-23) Springer, Cham. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00081-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00081-3_1)
- Tetenyi A (2014). South Africa vs. Nigeria: Competing Countries for leadership position in Sub-Saharan Africa. Paper presented at the ISA/FLASCO conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.
- Tijani A (2019). Nigeria is Violating Constitution on the El-Zakzaky and Dasuki cases. African Liberty. Available at: <https://www.africanliberty.org/2019/07/22/nigeria-is-killing-its-constitution-on-the-el-zakzaky-and-dasuki-cases/>
- Transparency International (2018). Corruption Perception Index 2018. Available at: [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2018) Number of out of school children. Available at: [www.unesco.org/number](http://www.unesco.org/number)
- Wapmuk S (2010). Nigeria-South Africa's relations, 1960-2008. In: Ashafa AM (ed.) Challenges for Nigeria at 50: Essays in honour of Professor Abdullahi Mahadi (551-563). GK Press limited.
- Xinhua (2018). President's Xi arrives in South Africa for state visit. China Daily. Available at: [www.chinadaily.com.cn](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn)
- Zabadi IS, Onuoha FC (2012). Nigeria and South Africa: Competition or Cooperation. In: Imobighe TA, Alli WO (eds.), Perspectives on Nigeria's National Politics and External Relations: Essays in Honour of Professor A. Bolaji Akinyemi (384-408). University Press Ltd.