

# Diaspora Engagement and Community Development in Igboland: The Aku Ruo Ulo Perspective

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## Abstract

*The philosophy of “Aku Ruo Ulo,” meaning “wealth should reach home,” is an important cultural ethos in Igboland, emphasizing the significance of investing and developing one's homeland with the acquired resources abroad. The Aku Ruo Ulo concept is a diaspora-driven initiative for community development in Igboland, Nigeria. This philosophy advocates using wealth earned elsewhere to advance and improve one's own country. Relying on transnationalism theory, this study interrogates the impact of the Aku Ruo Ulo initiative on economic investment in southeast Nigeria. We employed an ex-post facto research design and mixed data collection methods, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The study uses content and thematic analysis to reveal that the Aku Ruo Ulo initiative has increased economic investment in Igboland and that effective diaspora engagement has improved community outcomes. Thus, we recommend that programmes be scaled up, diaspora-community links be strengthened, and development hurdles related to infrastructure and culture be addressed.*

**Keywords:** Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative, Igbo Diaspora, Diaspora Engagement, Economic Empowerment, and Community Participation.

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## 1. Introduction

The Igbo people are well known for their extraordinary mobility in Nigeria and worldwide. The Igbo people, who are mostly from Eastern Nigeria, make up around 35% of the population in their nation. For example, it is believed that 12 million Igbo people live in northern Nigeria, while over 40% of people in Lagos are Igbo. Furthermore, over 40% of the Igbo population consists of Nigerians who reside outside the Igboland, primarily in Jos and Kano social points. It is an unofficial poll, yet the majority of households in Igboland can boast of at least one member living in another country (Igbo History, 2022; Eze, 2018).

The Igbos are known for their flexibility and entrepreneurial drive, and they would easily uproot themselves and their families to greener pastures without qualms. The usage of the term "greener pastures" does not always imply more developed places. Just better opportunities, and when they can't find one upon arrival, they will create one for themselves. Igbo identity is rooted in flexibility and movement, which are embodied in the "Aku Ruo Ulo" or Akuluouno" ideology. This principle emphasizes the importance of channeling resources and wealth back to one's homeland to support and uplift the community. It underscores the notion that true wealth is measured not just by personal success but by the positive impact one has on their community and the number of people they have assisted in becoming successful (Nworah, 2022).

"Aku Ruo Ulo" or "Akuluouno," which translates to "wealth should reach home" in the real Igbo spirit, means supporting and assisting in establishing people in one's homeland. The ideology advocates returning one's riches to the diaspora, where they are most needed, and allowing one's relatives and the greater community to profit from the resources and wealth that God has graciously bestowed upon them. Thus, the Igbo adage reads, 'Aku Luo Uno, Okwuo Onye Kpataluya', meaning when one's wealth arrives home, the owner and/or source of the wealth and the individual so blessed with the wealth are known (Nworah, 2022). This is because in Igbo land, no matter how rich you are, you are judged by your impact

on your community and how many successful people you have groomed; the latter is usually used to rate traders. If you have not trained a successful trader, you are counted as nothing (Uchendu, 2007).

This is known as the 'Aku ruo ulo gospel; it's the base of the Igbo adaptability. This philosophy is fundamental to the emancipation and development of Igboland. Okafor (2019) asserts that the Igbo diaspora contributes economically, through investments, business enterprises, and remittances, to the socioeconomic development of their homeland. These contributions include but are not limited to transferring knowledge, skills, financial investments, and expertise that assist in different sectors such as healthcare, industry, education, and infrastructure development (Okafor, 2019).

Also, the diaspora of the Igbo people is imperative in trade and the industrial sector. Their passion is in social and cultural development, especially through education, music, festivals, theaters, and other community activities that have helped in the enhancement of the social and cultural lives of Igboland. The Aku Ruo Ulo philosophy that underpins this multiphase strategy of development is certain to ensure that the benefits realized from diaspora involvement are enormous and sustainable (Chukwuemeka & Chikezie, 2020).

The pliability and flexibility of the Igbo people, together with their strong cultural principles, make them an exceptional example of how diaspora communities can significantly contribute to the development of their homeland. The Aku Ruo Ulo ideology guarantees that the diaspora's contributions are significant and lasting by not only promoting the return of resources to the community but also cultivating a feeling of duty and belonging among them (Anugwom, 2000).

The Igbo ethnic group inhabiting southeastern Nigeria is one of the most migratory peoples of Africa and has a dynamic dispersion in many countries. The "Aku Ruo Ulo" philosophy entails the concept that knowledge and resources need to be circulated back to the homeland to spur the socio-economic development process. Against this backdrop, this study interrogates the impact of diaspora engagement and community development in Igboland, Nigeria, through the lens of the Aku Ruo Ulo"

perspective, with special emphasis on how the Igbo diaspora initiative increased economic investment and development in their communities back home.

## **2. Diaspora Engagement and Community Development: The Igbo “Aku Ruo Ulo” Perspective and Broader Theoretical Insights**

Diaspora engagement has continued to emerge as a central theme in discussions regarding development in the global arena as communities across borders continues to expand in size and influence. Diaspora is defined as the identification of people and groups who are in other countries but are very linked to their home countries. Such links are demonstrated by various means of transnational engagements, including but not limited to remittances, investment, knowledge transfers, and cultural exchanges that have the potential to catalyze flows of economic, social, and political development in their countries of origin. In the context of Igboland, there is a cultural proverb “Aku Ruo Ulo,” which means “wealth should reach home.” This philosophy encouraged the Igbo people to embrace diaspora involvement in community development. It is based on the ethos of the immigrant Igbos to build an economy and society and sustain their cultural heritage back in their fatherland. The concept of diaspora engagement and its rationale, the role of the Igbo diaspora in community advancement, and difficulties as well as policy aspects linked with this type of engagement are reviewed or discussed in this study.

On this basis, Igbo people have rather rich experience of migration within Nigeria and to other countries. This migration has produced viable Igbo communities in countries like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, China, and South Africa, among others. This notion of “Aku Ruo Ulo” has an ethical base in Igbo man’s value system to always contribute to the development of the home community upon his or her reasonable achievement in the host country. This cultural expectation is evident in different ways of supporting the diaspora engagement, especially through the provision of schools, hospitals, roads, and other forms of infrastructure projects in Igboland.

Several theories can assist in putting into perspective the concept of diaspora engagement. The most fitting theory is the transnationalism theory, which postulates that migrants sustain cross-border

social, economic, and political relations, hence forming transnational communities (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Such connections help the diaspora groups continue participating in the growth of their home countries even as they live outside the countries. This form of engagement is vividly demonstrated by the Igbo diaspora, who, through engagement in the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy, continue to foster the progress of Igboland, though they are physically far from the area.

The essences of diaspora engagement, as highlighted above, are also supported by social capital theory, as advanced by Putnam (2000). Social capital is the actual social relationships and networks together with attendant norms and trust that make cooperation for the common good possible. Diaspora communities always use their social capital in fundraising for the development of their home countries, whether in terms of funds or other resources. This is in line with education, health, infrastructure, and support of start-up businesses, which largely affect community enhancement. This study has systematically highlighted how the Igbo diaspora works through creating networks of kinship, friendship, and business affiliations to facilitate investments targeting community-based development projects in Igboland.

Over the past few years, technology has arguably become a key determinant of diaspora contribution towards development. Democracy, liberalization, and the use of new information and communication technology through social media help the Igbo people in the diaspora to keep abreast of their home front and to source funds for developmental projects. According to Okeke and Eme (2014), online crowdfunding platforms are common among the Igbo diaspora in as much as seeking to mobilize funds for the support of different community projects. It gets rid of the long corridors between the donors and the implementation organizations, thus granting a high level of accountability as increased diaspora contributions' trust.

Moreover, it has enhanced the diffusion of knowledge and skills from the diaspora to their place of origin. Mentoring, usually face-to-face and online, can enable persons in the Igbo diaspora to impart

skills they have in matters such as business management, health and teacher training, and so on, to fellow Igbos. This exchange of knowledge is especially valuable in the light of the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy, as from it the diaspora can contribute not only in the form of the capital but also by means of the knowledge to the development of the homeland. As pointed out by Udo (2010), diaspora, especially the Igbo, have been notable in the development of their homeland. For example, during the reconstruction in Nigeria after the civil war, many Igbos who were living abroad in the Western world were sending back remittances to help reconstruct their homesteads. This of course has persisted up to the present time, as the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy remains the foundation for many of the Igbo people living in the diaspora.

Remittances, which are a component of the diaspora engagement strategy, provide another significant theoretical aspect. Remittances, sometimes referred to as the money, products, and services that migrants send back to their home countries, are vital to many developing nations. Global projections for foreign migrant money to low- and middle-income countries in 2020 were \$540, above both FDI and ODAs, according to the World Bank (2020). These funds are utilized to support subsidized company and entrepreneurial development as well as community development initiatives including building roads, schools, and hospitals. The diasporic Igbo people's practice of the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy has been seen in the large remittances they have been providing, which have equally been very instrumental in the development of the Igbo economy. For instance, remittances can either enhance or inhibit poverty reduction and development, mainly in less developed countries (Adams & Page, 2005).

The role that diaspora communities play towards their countries of origin in matters of the economy is well known. Besides, through business investments, the diaspora also plays a significant role in the development of economic growth through entrepreneurship. Scholarly studies show that overseas investors especially invest in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) back home, with implications for employment generation and livelihood diversification (Riddle, Hrivnak, and Nielsen, 2010). These investments are most often motivated by the wish to contribute to their communities and to foster

economic development of the region. A lot of the Igbo people have relocated to various other parts of the world through the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy, and they have helped promote the spirit of entrepreneurship in Igboland, especially through the traditional way of training apprentices, which has greatly enhanced employment in various business establishments.

Besides, the diaspora communities are an economic boon and they also support the social development of the country. This study argues that diaspora engagement has benefited several sectors, including that of education. Diaspora also supports education by establishing schools, offering scholarships, and supporting other education-related programmes. These contributions play a role in increasing quality education standards in their home country (Brinkerhoff, 2008). Igbos who live in other countries through their remittance have built schools and provided scholarships to enable students in Igboland to have a better education (Ezeh, 2017).

In addition, the diaspora participates in charitable organizations that contribute to social services like feeding and clothing, among other essentials for the needy. These contributions assist in accomplishing social justice and quality in the general aspects of the culture in the home countries the volunteers come from (Newland & Patrick, 2004). Also on the social aspect, diaspora participation in cultural preservation and promotion has assisted in enhancing the cultural values of the communities to their original home countries, hence the issues of sociology.

Healthcare is one of the sectors where diaspora engagement plays a particularly instructive role. The diaspora communities have a role in enhancing access to healthcare services since they develop funding for the construction of health facilities, supply medical equipment and facilities, and support programmes in the Defender Health Related Programmes (Connell, 2010). On occasion, some of the local diaspora members in certain fields, such as medicine, have repatriated to their home countries and thus enhanced the kind of medical services offered to the locals. The diaspora contributions of the people of

Igbo land have contributed to the provision of healthcare facilities that enhance access to health services, especially in rural areas (Okonkwo & Obialor 2019).

Besides these material supports, the Igbo diaspora has also supported the entrepreneurial activities in their homeland in one way or another. The Igbo form of apprenticeship, which has benefited immensely from the Igbo diaspora investments, has over the years remained relevant in the promotion of small-scale businesses and employment of the youth in Igbo land (Odeh, et al., 2024). This entrepreneurial spirit is strongly associated with the *Aku Ruo Ulo* concept, as it is common for numerous Igbo businessmen living in the diaspora to consider it their responsibility to contribute to the economic boosting of the native communities.

Nonetheless, there are disadvantages to diaspora engagement, although the elites' contribution has been instrumental in enhancing this kind of development. For instance, Obunike (2016) has argued that the reliance on such inflows boosts call reliance on external funds, and this may slow down home innovations and self-sufficiency. Similarly raised is the problem of sustainability of diaspora projects, especially if these are not well established in the overarching local and national developmental frameworks.

Another challenge that may be viewed as being TFU-related concerns the problem of cooperation between the communities and local actors. In many situations, diaspora solutions are put within a single framework and without sufficient participation of the local population or association with the state agenda (Brinkerhoff, 2004). This situation results in duplication of efforts, and hence the project ends up being unsustainable due to inefficiencies.

Other factors that define diaspora engagement's challenges include trust and accountability. Sometimes, diaspora funds have been embezzled or even stolen, and as a result, their returns have been used in other ways that do not benefit the intended recipients; this has degenerated trust between the diaspora community and the rest of the community in the home country (Orozco & Rouse, 2019).

Additional challenges include legal and regulatory constraints posing a challenging factor to diaspora engagement in community enhancement. Policies that affect immigration and financial markets may hinder a diaspora member's capacity to participate in development projects in his/her home country (Agunias & Newland, 2012). To overcome these barriers, both home and host country governments need to take diligent actions that would help to foster diaspora engagement.

For the Igbo diaspora, here are some of the barriers that, if overcome, will ensure the optimal continuation of the *Aku Ruo Ulo* principle of enhancing community development. This study reveals that diaspora engagement may also be affected by the socio-political environment prevailing in the home country. Due to corruption, poor governance, and political instability, it can be argued that diaspora efforts can be severely hampered and reduced in capability to impact development (Mohamoud, 2005).

All the same, several factors must be considered to optimize diaspora contribution towards the growth of the community: This study has noted that for diaspora funds to benefit the communities of origin as much as they benefit the recipient country, it is imperative that there be transparency and accountability to the funds for the diaspora communities to continue donating or investing. This is especially important in light of the Igbo diaspora, in which the longevity of the diaspora-led projects is usually an issue. Therefore, there is a need to create a favourable and secure environment that would provide for the voluntary participation of the diaspora in development. In Igboland, there is a need to appraise the above socio-political issues to improve on the sustenance of the gains of the *Aku Ruo Ulo* philosophy.

### **3. Methodology**

By adapting transnationalism theory, this study examined the complex, multidirectional social processes of the Igbo diaspora with their homeland. Transnationalism made visible the constant circulation of people, ideas, goods, and capital through transnational spaces, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the diaspora effects on both their immigrant communities as well as those they emigrated from.

The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to increase the strength of findings and illuminate the complexity of diaspora engagement and the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative. The economic contributions and trends of the diaspora to Igboland over time are quantified from secondary statistical data on remittance flows and investment records, respectively. Thorough case studies of the diasporic enterprises and community projects supported by the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative aim to demonstrate how investments made by these diaspora everyday beneficiaries effectively impact their local communities.

The qualitative data were systematically analyzed through content analysis, producing themes related to diaspora activities and community development. Alongside this, we complemented the study with some thematic analysis to provide a systematic assessment of the qualitative evidence emerging from diaspora engagement challenges and benefits.

In a Creswell-Baldwin ex-post facto design, the study achieved this by evaluating ongoing results of diaspora investments over time. By fusing theory with methods-focused approaches, the study offered an enhanced conceptualization of the role of the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative in shaping economic and community development.

#### **4. Transnationalism and the Aku Ruo Ulo Philosophy**

Transnationalism theory is a theoretical construct that is used to explain the complex and diverse social relationships that migrants are involved in across borders in terms of social, economic, and cultural aspects. This theory is of special importance to the case of diaspora engagement in community development, as it offers the spectrum through which the bi-directional and cyclical movement of people, resources, knowledge, goods, investment, and capital between the home and host country take place. In this regard, the Aku Ruo Ulo, or wealth, should reach home initiative is a clear example of how this obverse is played out in the context of Igboland, where the Igbo diaspora are urged to support their community's development by investing in the homeland.

The transnationalism that has been described by such writers as Glick Schiller, Basch, and others maintains the idea that the borders are open and that the migration networks are linked in the global societies (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Contrary to this assertion, people, when turning into migrants, do not sever their relations with their country of origin; rather, they enjoy a variety of social, economical, and cultural connectivity between the two countries. The first of these connections are captured by a construct that Glick Schiller has labeled transnational social fields, which encompasses all lapin: international social networks, institutions and establishments, associations, and groups that are active in more than one country. As for the case of the 'Igbo diaspora', it is through such transnational social fields they are in a position to maintain a strong bond with their origination, the Igboland, where values, remittances, investments, and knowledge can always be transmitted back to the source country.

Thus, the Aku Ruo Ulo initiative could also have been understood in the aforementioned theoretical framework because it was a process undertaken to reignite economic, social, and cultural relations with Igboland. The programme has a clear and powerful message that it would like all diaspora members to start investing in the homeland to build the economy. Connecting these investments to the fact that the diaspora continuously maintains its bond with the home country by investment, through the application of the transnationalism theory, one is well placed to grasp the impact of the investments on the progress of the Igbo community. The theory captures a way the home and host countries as receivers and also as senders of the ongoing economic, social, and cultural development and integration processes (Sassen, 2001).

Transnationalism is also defined by the porosity of national frontiers, as Basch et al. (1994) stress. On transnationalism, they define it as a concept, and disassembling the conventional theory on borders is defined as fixed structures between nations. This perspective is especially pragmatic to the study of the Igbo diaspora's involvement in community development because it assists in explaining the result of the transactions made by the Igbo diaspora on the economic development of Igboland. This is

transnationalism in as much as the diaspora investment within a country, which is evident from the concept of *Aku Ruo Ulo* as it somehow, promotes the economic development of the country as well as ensures the cultural practices of the people are maintained.

Basch and Sassen have also incorporated his/her idea into transnationalism, the process by which the immigrants keep their ties with their homeland while integrating the new society (Basch et al., 1994; Sassen, 2001). This double commitment is however necessary to analyze the processes of influence of the diaspora in the construction of the community. For instance, the tangible economic capital whereby the Igbo diaspora investment in Igboland includes the actual transfer of capital needed for the economic capital, such as knowledge, skills, and other cultural practices that are central to the process of development. In such regard, the *Aku Ruo Ulo* has the essence of identifying the fundamental aspect of transnationalism because those kinds of continuous connections are very important for the pursuit of the development of the community.

The result of transnational activities, according to Durand and Massey (1999), is associated with changes affecting the migrants and the country of origin, though these changes are mostly in the economic and social realms. Their work also defines how transnationalism fosters the flow of remittances, investments, and other development resource transfers for augmenting the impacts in the homeland. Regarding Igboland, the *Aku Ruo Ulo* could be understood in connection with such flows since this campaign encourages the Igbo diaspora to invest in their fellow Igbo people. The transnationalism theory supplies meaning and explanation on how these financial resources - the investment, therefore - are not only flows but are rather co-defined by the home and host countries and therefore qualifies the context of the following options as adorn to the development landscape in Igboland.

Oppositely, the *Aku Ruo Ulo* initiative can also be aligned with the general principles of transnationalism theory, as the latter provides a comprehensive view of the diaspora's existence. This is because this social perspective helps to shed light on the complexity of the diaspora in terms of its

contributions to the development of Igboland's society. As a result, the study about economic, social, and cultural activities of the Igbo diaspora demonstrates how the transnationalism theory facilitates the understanding of activities' interconnection across the borders and their contribution toward homeland development.

Another policy implication based on the transnationalism theory is the ideas on the use of diaspora engagement towards the enhancement of development. Due to this aspect, this theoretical framework enables the identification of the process through which diaspora investments and contributions can be mobilized to benefit the home and host countries, as proposed by Sassen (2001). For instance, while the contours of economic investment as advocated under the *Aku Ruo Ulo* programme make passing references to Igboland, drawing from the tenets of transnationalism theory makes it possible to appreciate the dynamic and mutually beneficial pattern of these investments. It is thus helpful for establishing policies that will foster engagement of the diaspora and ensure that the efforts made by them are most beneficial to the societies.

As discussed in this study, transnationalism and the *Aku Ruo Ulo* perspective together provide a means of deconstructing the manner in which the Igbo diaspora's permanent linkages to the homeland affect emerging economic investments and constitutions of communities. It is for this reason that this theoretical approach embraces the dynamics and the interconnectivity of these investments with regard to the *Aku Ruo Ulo* endeavour. Through using the transnationalism approach, it would be easier to understand the contribution of the Igbo people in the development of the economy of Igboland and how the transnational activities being experienced by the Igbos benefit the development of this community.

## **5. *Aku Ruo Ulo* Initiative and Economic Investment in the Igboland Community**

The phrase *Aku Ruo Ulo* translates to "let the wealth return home." It is a socio-economic concept designed to encourage Igbo people, especially those in the diaspora, to reinvest wealth in their Igbo homeland located in Southeast Nigeria. Historically rooted in Igbo culture, *Aku Ruo Ulo* reflects the

expectation for successful individuals to contribute to their communities through investments in local businesses, infrastructure, and development projects. While colonialism, the Nigerian Civil War, and the marginalization of the Southeast have often deterred diaspora Igbo from investing back home, Aku Ruo Ulo seeks to renew and structure these efforts to bridge the gap between diaspora-generated wealth and local development (Nworah, 2022; Obunike, 2016).

A major objective of the initiative is to drive economic development by addressing unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and limited capital for entrepreneurs. By channeling resources and expertise from the diaspora and local investors, Aku Ruo Ulo aims to create multiplier effects that boost job creation, living standards, and economic diversification (Eze, 2018). The initiative encourages remittances as an investment vehicle, leveraging the entrepreneurial success of the Igbo diaspora. Remittances, as noted by the World Bank (2020), can be transformative when directed toward infrastructure and local businesses. For example, Okafor (2019) highlights the impact of remittances on building schools, hospitals, and roads, with diaspora investments in agriculture, manufacturing, and real estate fostering regional growth. Additionally, the Igbo Apprenticeship System aligns with Aku Ruo Ulo by facilitating mentorship and entrepreneurship among younger generations, contributing to the self-reliance and resilience of local economies (Odeh et al., 2024; Obunike, 2016).

Infrastructure investment is a vital part of the Aku Ruo Ulo initiative. Many members of the Igbo diaspora have invested in critical projects that include roads, schools, and hospitals aimed at enhancing people's living standards and promoting economic activities within the communities (Okeke & Eme, 2014). These projects reflect one of the traits of Igbo culture: communalism, in which personal success goes hand in hand with the community's well-being (Igbo History, 2022). Focusing on infrastructure development, Aku Ruo Ulo tackles capital flight, which has been an integral issue facing Igbo since a substantial portion of wealth generated outside fails to reinvest itself within the region, thus stopping its movement forward. Through local reinvestment, Aku Rao Ulo establishes parameters for wealth retention

that would reduce dependence on foreign income and provide sustainable economic growth instead (Ratha, Mohapatra, & Scheja, 2011).

While promising, Aku Ruo Ulo has challenges. Political instability and insecurity in the Southeast, coupled with the shortcomings of infrastructure and bureaucratic hurdles, have discouraged potential investors (Chukwuemeka & Chikezie, 2020). Only enhanced security assurances, simplification of regulatory processes and incentive provisions for local as well as diasporic investors will make an environment conducive to development. The government, together with community organizations, can also play a role in ensuring just benefit distribution and encourage actively local participation in these investments (Nwaokoro, 2011).

The Aku Ruo Ulo initiative has enormous potential for driving sustainable economic investment and development in Igboland. Igbo diaspora members reinvest in their homeland, so they become important catalysts for business development, job creation, and infrastructure that eventually leads to greater self-sufficiency. Indeed, the challenges, notwithstanding the strengths of Aku Ruo Ulo, simply reaffirm its relevance as a community-oriented development approach. Discouraged communities can make Igboland sustainable in economic growth and resilience with strategic partnerships with local stakeholders and government. The actual tabular content of diaspora engagement, as it concerns the community of Igboland to the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative and economic investment, is present below.

**Table 1:** Impact of Igbo Diaspora Engagement and Economic Investment in Igboland

Date	Place	Aspect	Description	Beneficiaries	Additional Notes	Sources
2000-present	Major towns in Igboland (for example Enugu, Aba, Onitsha)	Remittance Flow	Financial support sent from the Igbo diaspora to family, businesses, and community projects.	Families, local businesses, community schools, and healthcare centers.	Used household consumption, education, healthcare, and small business capital.	World Bank Remittance Data (2022); Chukwuemeka (2021)
2010-present	Various towns and villages in Igboland	Investment	Direct investment in businesses, real estate, infrastructure, and agriculture by Igbo diaspora.	Community members, local workers, small businesses.	Includes projects like building shopping complexes, transportation hubs, and agribusiness initiatives	Ekezie (2020)
2015-present	Workshops in Enugu, Awka, Umuahia	Knowledge Transfer	Diaspora professionals sharing skills in sectors like healthcare, technology, and education.	Local professional, students, educators	Includes partnerships for training local professionals and implementing best practices in various fields.	Onyema (2019)
Annually	Anambra, Abia, Imo	Cultural Exchange	Annually cultural festivals supported by diaspora groups, showcasing Igbo culture, dance, and cuisine.	Local residents, tourists, students.	Fosters cultural preservation and identity reinforcement through language, arts and traditional events.	Igbo Cultural Organization (2021); Okoye (2023)
2018-present	Onitsha, Aba, Nsukka	Youth Empowerment	Programmes for skills acquisition and vocational training funded by diaspora groups.	Youth and unemployed graduates	Vocational centers focus on entrepreneurship, information technology, and other high-demand skills.	Onwuka (2022)
2012-present	Primary health centers rural communities	Healthcare Initiatives	Medical missions and funding for local health facilities, often led by diaspora doctors.	Rural communities, women, children	Includes medical outreach programmes, donation of equipment, and establishment of health facilities.	Nwankwo (2020)
2005-present	Various secondary and tertiary institutions	Scholarships	Educational scholarships offered by diaspora individuals and organizations for youth in Igboland.	Students, especially from low-income families	Financial aid for higher education particularly for students excelling academically or facing financial challenges.	Diaspora Education Fund Annual Report (2022); Adichi (2021)
2010-	Selected rural	Infrastructure	Community-funded road	Entire community	Increases accessibility	Igbo Development

present	communities	Development	construction, electricity, and water projects		and improves living conditions, with many projects completed by collective remittance.	council Reports (2023); Eze (2021)
2020-present	Regional centers in Igboland	Entrepreneurial support	Establishment of SME incubators and funding for startups.	Young entrepreneurs, startups	Diaspora backed funds provide seed capital and mentorship helping to grow local economy sustainably	Igbo Business Incubation Programme Report (2023); Orji (2022)

**Sources:** Compiled by the authors from various independence sources

Table 1 above offers evidence of specific avenues through which diaspora Igbo engage and invest their resources into the community sphere (loosely defined as the initiative *Aku Ruo Ulo*). The areas of impact embodied in each aspect reflect a more all-embracing form of sustainable development in Igboland. It exposes the Igbo diaspora's community development as multi-pronged. This wide variety of resources – remittances, investments, knowledge transfer, cultural exchange, youth empowerment, healthcare initiatives, scholarships, infrastructure development, and entrepreneurial support – illustrates the prosperity contributing to Igbo societal life.

The financial remittances from the diaspora into Igboland continue to significantly contribute to household sustenance and support local businesses. Still, the World Bank (2022) reports that Nigeria ranks as one of the highest remittance-receiving countries in Africa, and a huge chunk of these cash flows are used by Igbo communities to fund education, health, and general living costs (Chukwuemeka, 2021). On the other hand, remittances play an important role in household sustenance and emergency needs while lowering poverty rates and indirectly stimulating local economies (Onwuka, 2022).

Diaspora investments in Igboland go beyond just financial investments to business, real estate infrastructure projects, and job creation, which facilitate economic development. As noted by Ekezie (2020), more Igbo diaspora are investing in agribusiness and real estate in cities such as Enugu and Aba, which improves the economic status of the community while creating jobs and increasing regional GDP.

Localized professionals have been strengthened and the service forged by the interplay of knowledge transfer, particularly in healthcare and technology. Diaspora professionals often organize workshops in Igboland to share know-how and best practices (Onyeama, 2019). As a consequence of this, numerous advancements have been made, including ones in medical practice because Igbo stationed abroad are training their ethnic brethren on contemporary methods and equipment by conducting both formal and informal medical missions (Nwankwo, 2020).

Such support for yearly festivals as well as cultural events by the Igbo diaspora is vital to their preservation. Such festivals are intended to showcase traditional Igbo culture, music, and dance in ways that contribute to cultural identity among residents and returning members of the diaspora (Okoye, 2023). Such an activity can strengthen community ties and pride in the culture, especially among children who may not have this exposure otherwise. The theme of youth employment, which is one of the problems debilitating Igboland (Onwuka, 2022), is also addressed through direct investment in skills development and vocational training by many Igbo diaspora organizations.

They equip local youth with trade-specific information technology and engineering skills required in the market, thereby increasing employability levels as well as helping reduce dependence on remittances. Youth empowerment projects help in creating a much more sustainable economic model in the region because of self-sufficiency.

Funded by diasporas, these healthcare initiatives - such as local health facility improvements plus medical outreach programmes - are playing a critical role in improving rural health. According to Nwankwo (2020), these programmes are often geared towards the underserved community, giving them much-needed services and infrastructure like primary health centers. It minimizes the mortality rates and increases the quality of life, mostly among women but also children, who are certainly extremely affected by this.

Diaspora-centered scholarships have created opportunities for numerous young Igbo students from indigent families to obtain a secondary and higher education. Such scholarships are necessary to support academically promising students unable to gain access to higher education and develop a skilled labour force (Adichie 2021).

Infrastructure projects funded by the diaspora - be it roads, electricity, or clean water facilities - improve accessibility and quality of life in Igbo land. For these projects, fund-raising is often carried out by community associations in order to provide many rural areas derived from this (Eze, 2021). Better

infrastructure attracts more diaspora investment and makes rural areas more attractive, which reduces urban migration.

This new strategy is geared towards sustainable development by means of entrepreneurship support initiatives, like SME incubators and funding opportunities for local start-ups. Such incubators provide capital, mentorship, and networking opportunities, which can help young entrepreneurs flourish and, in turn, bolster the local economy (Orji 2022). Such programmes diversify the economy of Igboland further and reduce dependence on imports by encouraging small businesses.

As the table shows, the Igbo diaspora's commitment to community development through the "Aku Ruo Ulo" philosophy goes beyond simple financial remittances. Rather, it reflects an integrated set of activities - investment, cultural preservation, capacity-building, and infrastructure development - that underpin sustainable intervention. Such diaspora involvement also befits issues of socio-economic development in Igboland, a long-neglected region by Nigeria since independence, and as such, engenders local self-sufficiency and sustainability.

The case studies below reveal the various forms of economic investment and community development from around Igboland that have been made by the Igbo diaspora via the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative.

**Table 2:** Selected Examples of Igbo Diaspora Economic Investment and Community Development Activities in Igboland

Case Study	Location	Year Established/Launched	Beneficiaries	Objectives	Implementation	Outcome	Sources
Omenuko Agribusiness Cooperative	Enugu State	2018	Local farmers, youth entrepreneurs	-Enhance agricultural productivity -Create job opportunities -Promote sustainable practices	-Training programmes on modern techniques -Funding for seeds, fertilizers, and equipment -Partnerships with experts	-Increased crop yields by 40% -Created over 50 jobs for youth -Established a community market	Eze (2023)
Umu Igbo Community Health Initiative	Anambra State	2019	Local families, healthcare providers	-Enhance healthcare delivery -Reduce maternal and infant mortality rates -Promote health education	-Construction of a health center -Funding for medical supplies -Training for healthcare workers	-Improved access for over 1,000 families -Reduce maternal and infant mortality rates -Increased health awareness	Okafor (2021)
Nkwor Market Revitalization Project	Imo	2020	Local vendors, consumer	-Improve market infrastructure -Enhance trading conditions -Boost local commerce	-Renovation of market stalls -Installation of sanitation facilities -Training for vendors	-Increased market foot traffic by 60% -Enhanced vendor satisfaction -Boosted local commerce	Nwankwo (2022)
Igbo Diaspora Education Fund	Ebonyi State	2021	Students, and local schools	-Increase access to quality education -Reduce dropout rates -Provide educational resources	-Scholarships for over 100 students -Renovation of school buildings -Provision of educational materials	-Increased enrollment by 30% -Enhanced learning conditions -Empower students for higher education	Uche (2023)

**Sources:** Author's compilation from different independent sources (Eze, 2023; Okafor, 2021; Nwankwo, 2022 and Uche, 2023)

As shown in Table 2, the Igbo diaspora has played a significant role through the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative towards the economic investment and sustainable development of Igbos living in the diaspora. Identifying pillars of growth including agriculture, healthcare, market recovery, and education, the diaspora has supported local groups and changed the fortunes of many communities on a sustainable basis to improve lives.

## **6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

Based on the understanding that diaspora communities have immensely impacted community development, the following policy imperatives and recommendations can help the efficient engagement of the diaspora. It is suggested that the home country government should remove legal restrictions, offer incentives to encourage diaspora direct investment, and promote regional accountability and transparency of diaspora funds. In addition, there are lots of challenges that puzzle the diaspora communities, local actors, and national governments and are therefore subject to enhancement of cooperation. These can be done by creating diaspora engagement forums that would enhance dialogue and coordination between the source country and the foreign-based diaspora and their projects with the developmental objectives of the source country (Ionescu, 2006).

For diaspora development initiatives to be more relevant, sustainable and productive, local communities should be included in their design and execution, according to the stakeholders directly involved in diaspora-driven development. Additionally, it is important to support efforts to increase the diaspora's ability to engage in developmental treatments. Building the capacity of diaspora-based organizations, exchanging information, and creating technology and knowledge-based initiatives that make use of the expertise and experience of the diaspora are all included in this.

Lastly, therefore, based on the analysis of the Igbo Aku Ruo Ulo philosophy, it can be concluded that diaspora engagement is capable of being a force for change in the process of change in the social unit. Capital advancements can be produced by diaspora investment in ways such as charity, investment,

knowledge transfer, and remittances. The study reveals that successful diaspora participation has enhanced community results, and the Aku Ruo Ulo programme has generated economic investment in Igboland. As highlighted above, there is an urgent need to name and address some of the emergent challenges to diaspora engagement, such as coordination, issues of trust, legal and regulatory mechanisms, as well as the problem of socio-political instability. In this case, governments and relevant development partners should facilitate diaspora engagement and partnership, as well as enhance the capacity for diaspora's engagement in development endeavours for sustainable and inclusive development. Thus, we recommend that programmes be scaled up, diaspora-community links be strengthened, and development hurdles related to infrastructure and culture be addressed.

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