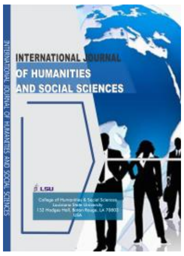
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Matters Arising in Nigeria



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Abstract
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013, has become a cornerstone of global infrastructure and economic connectivity. In Nigeria, BRI projects span transportation, energy, and telecommunications, offering transformative potential for national development. However, this study identifies significant challenges such as debt sustainability, limited technology transfer, environmental degradation, and governance concerns that undermine the expected outcomes. The research problem lies in the lack of transparency and strategic alignment between Chinese investments and Nigeria's developmental priorities. The objective is to examine the socio-economic and political implications of BRI in Nigeria, assessing both its opportunities and pitfalls. Using Dependency Theory and Neo-liberal Institutionalism as theoretical lenses, the study interrogates asymmetrical power relations and cooperative frameworks within BRI engagements. Findings reveal a paradox of progress, substantial infrastructural development but weak local capacity. The study concludes with strategic recommendations for transparent governance, balanced partnerships, and sustainable economic integration.

Keywords: *Belt and Road Initiative, Nigeria, Infrastructure, Dependency Theory, Sustainable Development.*

I. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, has emerged as one of the most ambitious international development frameworks of the 21st century. Envisioned as a transcontinental network promoting connectivity through infrastructure, trade, and investment, the BRI seeks to revive the ancient Silk Road while extending China's influence across Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and a pivotal player in the continent's development trajectory, occupies a strategic position within this initiative. The BRI's growing presence in Nigeria manifests through major infrastructure projects such as railways, seaports, highways, and power plants, all of which aim to enhance national productivity and regional integration.

The central problem underpinning Nigeria's participation in the BRI lies in the contradiction between promised economic transformation and actual developmental outcomes. While Chinese investments have accelerated infrastructure delivery, they have simultaneously generated concerns about debt dependency, opaque contractual terms, limited local content participation, and potential neocolonial influence. The situation mirrors broader anxieties across Africa, where the influx of Chinese capital raises questions about sovereignty, sustainability, and the long-term implications for domestic economies. Nigeria's case is particularly complex due to its history of governance inefficiencies, corruption, and weak institutional oversight, which often undermine foreign partnerships and developmental planning.

From a theoretical perspective, Nigeria's engagement with the BRI can be analyzed through the dual lenses of Dependency Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism. Dependency Theory exposes the asymmetrical power dynamics inherent in the Nigeria–China relationship, wherein the flow of capital and technology may reinforce rather than redress structural inequalities. Conversely, Neoliberal Institutionalism highlights the cooperative aspects of BRI, emphasizing the potential for mutual gain through institutionalized trade, investment, and multilateral frameworks. The tension between these perspectives encapsulates the broader debate on whether BRI represents a path to sustainable development or a new form of dependency in the Global South.

Despite the scale of Chinese investments in Nigeria, gaps remain in empirical and policy understanding of how these projects affect local economic structures, environmental sustainability, and national sovereignty. Existing literature often focuses on macroeconomic benefits without critically assessing governance frameworks, contract transparency, or the inclusiveness of development outcomes. Moreover, limited domestic policy capacity and the absence of strong monitoring institutions exacerbate the risks of external dependency and fiscal vulnerability.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to assess the implications of the BRI in Nigeria through an integrated lens that accounts for both opportunities and risks. It seeks to evaluate how the initiative influences Nigeria's infrastructure development, governance practices, and international relations. The justification for this research stems from the urgent need to formulate strategies that balance foreign engagement with national interests, ensuring that Nigeria benefits sustainably from global partnerships without compromising its economic sovereignty.

Ultimately, this paper argues that while the BRI has the potential to catalyze Nigeria's economic diversification and infrastructural renewal, it also demands critical policy introspection, transparency, and institutional reform. Understanding these complexities is crucial for redefining Nigeria's engagement within the evolving global economic order and ensuring that the BRI becomes a vehicle for inclusive, rather than extractive, development.

II. Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

A comprehensive understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Nigeria requires clear conceptual definitions and robust theoretical grounding. This section elucidates key concepts—Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructure-led development, and foreign direct investment (FDI)—and examines the theoretical lenses of Dependency Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism that guide the analysis. These conceptual and theoretical foundations provide the framework for interpreting the opportunities, risks, and strategic implications of BRI engagements in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The BRI is an expansive development strategy led by the People's Republic of China to enhance global connectivity through trade, investment, and infrastructure projects. The initiative comprises two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, linking China to Europe via Central Asia, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, connecting China to Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In practical terms, BRI projects include railways, ports, energy plants, highways, telecommunications networks, and industrial parks, with the objective of promoting economic integration, industrialization, and regional development.

In Nigeria, BRI engagement is evident in initiatives such as the Lagos–Kano railway project, the Lekki Deep Sea Port, and power sector investments. These projects aim to address chronic infrastructural deficits that have historically constrained Nigeria's economic growth, while integrating the country into regional and global trade networks.

Infrastructure-led Development

Infrastructure-led development posits that investment in physical and institutional infrastructure catalyzes economic growth. Roads, railways, ports, and energy facilities reduce transaction costs, facilitate market access, and attract private investment. In Nigeria, infrastructure gaps, including unreliable power supply, poor road networks, and limited port capacity have hindered industrialization and trade competitiveness. BRI projects promise to fill these gaps, providing the foundation for sustained economic growth and regional integration. However, concerns about debt sustainability, project ownership, and local participation complicate this optimistic projection.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

FDI refers to cross-border investments made by multinational entities or foreign states into domestic economies. It is widely recognized as a vehicle for technology transfer, employment creation, and industrial development. BRI investments in Nigeria constitute a form of state led FDI, where the Chinese government and state-owned enterprises fund large-scale projects. While FDI can accelerate development, it may also generate dependency if recipient countries lack adequate bargaining power, oversight mechanisms, or complementary domestic policies.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory

Dependency Theory, developed by scholars such as Andre Gunder Frank and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, provides a critical lens for examining global economic inequalities. The theory posits that developing nations remain structurally dependent on developed economies through trade, finance, and technology flows, which perpetuate underdevelopment. Applying this framework to Nigeria's engagement with the BRI highlights potential asymmetries: Chinese investments, while beneficial, may reinforce dependency through debt accumulation, foreign control of strategic infrastructure, and limited technology transfer.

Dependency Theory also underscores the power imbalance inherent in BRI projects. China, as the investing state, holds significant leverage in negotiating terms, influencing project design, and determining financial arrangements. For Nigeria, this raises concerns about sovereignty, long-term fiscal obligations, and the prioritization of national development goals. The theory thus helps explain why infrastructural and economic gains may coexist with strategic vulnerabilities.

Neoliberal Institutionalism

While Dependency Theory emphasizes structural inequalities, Neoliberal Institutionalism focuses on cooperation and institutional frameworks to achieve mutual benefits. This perspective argues that international institutions, treaties, and agreements can facilitate collaboration, reduce transaction costs, and foster trust among states. From this standpoint, the BRI is not merely a tool of dependency but a framework for coordinated development through bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

In Nigeria, this lens highlights the potential for mutually beneficial outcomes if BRI projects are governed by transparent contracts, robust regulatory frameworks, and inclusive development strategies. For instance, technology transfer, local employment, and knowledge sharing can be institutionalized through clear policy frameworks, ensuring that Nigerian stakeholders derive tangible benefits from Chinese investments. Neoliberal Institutionalism thus complements Dependency Theory by emphasizing governance mechanisms that can mitigate risks while maximizing developmental opportunities.

Justification for the Study

The interplay of dependency and cooperation in BRI engagements underscores the need for a nuanced assessment of Nigeria's experience. Existing literature often focuses on macroeconomic indicators, neglecting socio-political, governance, and sustainability considerations. This study addresses these gaps by providing an integrated analysis that accounts for structural risks and developmental potential, thereby informing policy strategies that align foreign investment with national priorities.

Conceptual Synthesis

By combining Dependency Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism, this study captures the dual nature of BRI in Nigeria: its potential to catalyze growth and regional integration, and its capacity to reinforce dependency if governance and policy frameworks are weak. This theoretical synergy enables a comprehensive understanding of the structural, political, and economic dimensions of BRI, guiding empirical inquiry and policy recommendations.

Historical and Contemporary Dynamics of BRI in Nigeria

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents a transformative approach to global infrastructure, trade, and investment, with Nigeria occupying a central position in China's engagement with Africa. Understanding Nigeria's participation in the BRI requires a review of historical interactions between China and Nigeria, the evolution of contemporary BRI projects, and the political, economic, and social factors shaping these engagements. This section examines the trajectory of Chinese–Nigerian relations and analyzes the scope, challenges, and opportunities of BRI investments.

Historical Foundations of China–Nigeria Relations

Nigeria and China have shared diplomatic and economic ties for over five decades. Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1971, and since then, the two nations have maintained a partnership grounded in mutual respect, non-interference, and economic cooperation (Onyeji, 2019).

Early engagements were largely limited to trade, technical assistance, and educational exchanges. China's infrastructural involvement in Nigeria gained prominence during the 1980s and 1990s, with projects such as the Abuja National Stadium, road networks, and technical training programs marking the initial stages of bilateral cooperation.

These early projects set the stage for deeper economic collaboration, demonstrating China's capacity to deliver large-scale infrastructure within tight timeframes and budget constraints. At the same time, Nigeria benefited from an alternative development partner outside Western spheres of influence, which provided leverage in negotiating aid, trade, and investment deals.

Entry of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria

China formally extended the BRI to Africa in 2013, signaling an unprecedented wave of infrastructural investment across the continent. Nigeria, with its strategic economic position, population size, and regional influence, became a natural partner. Key sectors targeted under the BRI include transportation, energy, telecommunications, and industrial zones.

Among the most notable projects is the Lagos–Kano Standard Gauge Railway, financed largely through Chinese concessional loans and executed by Chinese construction firms. This railway aims to enhance domestic connectivity, facilitate trade flows, and reduce logistical bottlenecks that have historically constrained Nigeria's internal commerce (Obi, 2021). Similarly, the Lekki Deep Sea Port project, a flagship BRI investment, seeks to increase Nigeria's port handling capacity, promote maritime trade, and integrate the country into global supply chains.

Energy infrastructure has also featured prominently in BRI projects. Power plants and transmission lines, particularly in Lagos and Ogun States, are intended to address chronic electricity shortages, a major impediment to industrialization. Chinese-led investments in telecommunications, including fiber-optic networks and 5G pilot projects, demonstrate an emphasis on technology and digital infrastructure, signaling a shift toward knowledge-based economic development.

Economic and Developmental Impacts

BRI projects in Nigeria have produced significant developmental gains. Infrastructure development has improved connectivity, reduced transportation costs, and enhanced access to markets. The construction of ports and railways has facilitated trade within Nigeria and with neighboring countries, potentially stimulating regional integration within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Moreover, Chinese investments have generated direct and indirect employment opportunities, strengthened local construction capacity, and contributed to skills transfer in engineering, project management, and logistics.

However, the economic benefits are accompanied by notable challenges. Debt accumulation poses a serious risk, as many BRI projects are financed through loans with long repayment periods. The concentration of Chinese firms in project execution limits local participation, constraining technology transfer and entrepreneurship development. Environmental concerns, particularly the impact of large-scale construction on ecosystems and communities, further complicate the sustainability of BRI initiatives.

Governance and Policy Challenges

Effective governance remains a central determinant of BRI outcomes. In Nigeria, weak institutional oversight, regulatory bottlenecks, and corruption have hindered project execution and transparency. Contractual terms are often opaque, with limited public scrutiny of loan agreements and project costs. These governance deficits increase vulnerability to fiscal stress and raise concerns about sovereignty, as external lenders may exert influence over strategic assets (Akinola, 2020).

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive domestic policies aligning BRI projects with national development priorities can result in misaligned investments. For example, while railway and port projects expand trade capacity, insufficient complementary industrial and manufacturing policies limit the potential for value addition within Nigeria. This underscores the need for coherent national strategies that integrate BRI investments into long-term development planning.

Contemporary Dynamics and Strategic Opportunities

Despite challenges, Nigeria's participation in the BRI presents strategic opportunities. Enhanced infrastructure can facilitate industrialization, regional trade, and export diversification. Chinese investments in renewable energy and digital infrastructure provide a platform for technological modernization and innovation. Moreover, Nigeria's active engagement in BRI forums and bilateral negotiations can strengthen diplomatic leverage, ensuring that projects align with national priorities.

Recent developments indicate an increased emphasis on partnership models that incorporate Nigerian firms, local content requirements, and joint ventures. If sustained, such approaches can mitigate dependency risks, enhance skills transfer, and promote inclusive economic development.

Historically, China–Nigeria relations laid the groundwork for a robust BRI presence, marked by infrastructure and technology investments. Contemporary BRI projects in Nigeria reflect a mix of opportunities and challenges: they enhance connectivity and economic potential but also raise issues of debt sustainability, governance, and limited local participation. Understanding these historical and contemporary dynamics is essential for evaluating Nigeria's strategic engagement in the BRI and informs the subsequent analysis of policy frameworks, impacts, and recommendations.

Impacts and Challenges of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers Nigeria an unprecedented opportunity for infrastructural expansion, economic growth, and regional integration. However, the initiative also presents complex challenges that affect governance, debt sustainability, environmental management, and domestic capacity building. This section critically examines both the positive impacts and the challenges associated with BRI projects in Nigeria, highlighting their implications for sustainable development and policy formulation.

Economic and Infrastructural Impacts

BRI projects in Nigeria have generated significant economic benefits. Investments in transport infrastructure, such as the Lagos–Kano Standard Gauge Railway and the Abuja–Kaduna railway, have enhanced domestic connectivity and reduced logistical bottlenecks, facilitating the movement of goods and people. Ports, including the Lekki Deep Sea Port, increase maritime trade capacity, positioning Nigeria as a regional trade hub within West Africa (Obi, 2021).

Energy sector projects, including power plants and transmission lines, address Nigeria's chronic electricity deficits, which historically limited industrial growth and foreign investment. Improved energy infrastructure enhances productivity, supports industrialization, and promotes private sector development. Telecommunications initiatives, particularly in fiber optics and digital networks, contribute to the country's technological advancement, fostering innovation, digital commerce, and knowledge-based economic activity.

Additionally, BRI projects create employment opportunities for Nigerian workers, contractors, and suppliers. Skill development through on-the-job training enhances domestic capacity, particularly in construction, project management, and engineering. These outcomes demonstrate the potential of BRI to stimulate inclusive growth and reduce infrastructural constraints that have historically impeded Nigeria's economic development.

Governance and Policy Challenges

Despite these gains, governance issues significantly affect the effectiveness of BRI projects. Weak institutional oversights, lack of transparency in contract negotiation, and limited public scrutiny have raised concerns about accountability and project sustainability. Many contracts favor Chinese firms, limiting local participation and technology transfer (Akinola, 2020).

Furthermore, misalignment between BRI projects and Nigeria's national development plans has led to uneven benefits. Infrastructure projects often focus on high-profile investments, such as ports and railways, while neglecting complementary sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture. Without integrated planning, the economic benefits of these projects may remain limited, constraining Nigeria's ability to leverage BRI for broader industrialization and regional development.

Debt Sustainability Concerns

Financial arrangements underpinning BRI projects raise concerns about Nigeria's debt sustainability. Many infrastructure projects are financed through Chinese concessional loans or state-backed credit facilities. While these arrangements enable large-scale investment, repayment obligations may create fiscal stress, particularly when project-generated revenue streams are delayed or underperform.

Excessive reliance on external financing could expose Nigeria to economic vulnerabilities, including increased foreign influence over strategic sectors. Cases across Africa illustrate how poorly structured loans can result in debt traps, where countries cede control of key assets to creditors. Consequently, Nigeria must carefully balance infrastructural ambitions with prudent debt management strategies to avoid long-term fiscal and sovereignty risks.

Social and Environmental Challenges

BRI projects also present social and environmental concerns. Large-scale construction can disrupt local communities, displace populations, and affect livelihoods, particularly in urban and coastal areas where infrastructure development is concentrated. Environmental degradation, including deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution, poses additional risks, challenging Nigeria's commitments to sustainable development and climate change mitigation.

Moreover, the social benefits of BRI projects are often unevenly distributed. While urban centers and commercial hubs gain access to modern infrastructure, rural areas may remain underserved. This spatial disparity can exacerbate existing inequalities and limit the inclusive impact of BRI projects.

Strategic and Institutional Limitations

Institutionally, Nigeria faces limitations in maximizing BRI opportunities. The absence of coordinated monitoring frameworks, weak regulatory mechanisms, and insufficient domestic policy capacity undermine the country's ability to negotiate favorable contracts and ensure compliance with environmental and labor standards. Strategic asymmetries within BRI engagements may also result in over-dependence on China for technical expertise and project execution, limiting the development of indigenous capacity and local innovation.

The lack of a clear long-term national strategy integrating BRI investments with Nigeria's industrialization, export diversification, and regional trade goals further constrains the potential benefits. Without strategic alignment, BRI risks becoming a series of isolated projects rather than a coherent platform for national development.

In summary, the analysis of BRI in Nigeria reveals a dual narrative: significant opportunities alongside substantial challenges. On the positive side, BRI investments enhance connectivity, energy supply, and digital infrastructure, contributing to economic growth and regional integration. They also provide employment and skills transfer opportunities, fostering domestic capacity development.

Conversely, governance weaknesses, debt sustainability concerns, environmental risks, and limited local participation constrain the initiative's developmental impact. To optimize the benefits of BRI, Nigeria must address these challenges through robust policy frameworks, transparent governance, and strategic alignment with national priorities.

Findings and Analytical Reflections

The examination of Nigeria's engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reveals a complex interplay between opportunity, risk, and strategic decision-making. Findings indicate that while BRI projects offer substantial benefits in infrastructure, trade, and technological capacity, they also pose challenges related to debt sustainability, governance, and long-term developmental impact. This section synthesizes key findings and provides analytical reflections on the implications for Nigeria's economic and strategic positioning.

Infrastructural and Economic Gains

BRI investments have significantly enhanced Nigeria's physical and technological infrastructure. Railways, ports, and energy projects have improved domestic connectivity, reduced logistics costs, and facilitated trade both within Nigeria and regionally. The Lekki Deep Sea Port and the Lagos–Kano Standard Gauge Railway illustrate the potential for industrial and commercial expansion, while energy and telecommunications projects enhance productivity and digital integration.

Employment generation and skills transfer emerge as additional benefits. Nigerian laborers, engineers, and contractors gain practical experience working alongside Chinese firms, which strengthens domestic capacity in construction, project management, and technical services. These gains reflect the developmental potential of BRI to support industrialization and modernization.

Debt and Fiscal Vulnerabilities

A major finding is the fiscal risk associated with BRI financing. Concessional loans and state-backed credit facilities provide the capital for large-scale projects but create long-term repayment obligations. Delays in project-generated revenue or cost overruns may exacerbate debt dependency, increasing Nigeria's vulnerability to external economic pressures. This confirms the predictions of Dependency Theory, where asymmetrical financial relations risk undermining sovereignty and reinforcing structural dependence on external powers.

Governance and Institutional Weaknesses

Findings also highlight challenges in policy alignment and governance. Weak institutional oversight, opaque contracts, and limited public scrutiny reduce the effectiveness of BRI projects and constrain the realization of national developmental goals. Local participation in project execution remains minimal, limiting technology transfer and domestic entrepreneurship. These governance deficits suggest that Nigeria has not fully leveraged the potential of BRI to enhance self-reliant growth or strengthen institutional capacity.

Environmental and Social Implications

Environmental and social considerations are central to understanding BRI's long-term impact. Large-scale infrastructure projects can disrupt ecosystems, displace communities, and exacerbate urban-rural inequalities. While BRI addresses Nigeria's infrastructural deficit, the lack of robust environmental safeguards and community engagement mechanisms raises questions about sustainability. These findings underscore the importance of integrating environmental and social impact assessments into project planning and execution.

Strategic and Policy Implications

Analytically, the duality of BRI in Nigeria, offering both developmental opportunities and structural risks, highlights the importance of strategic policy intervention. The initiative demonstrates the benefits of foreign partnerships in catalyzing growth, yet reveals the costs of weak governance, inadequate local participation, and over-reliance on external financing.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings confirm the relevance of both Dependency Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism. Dependency Theory explains the structural asymmetries in financial and technological arrangements, emphasizing the risks of over-dependence. Neoliberal Institutionalism highlights the potential for cooperative frameworks that maximize mutual benefits when guided by transparent policies, institutional mechanisms, and regulatory oversight.

In summary, Nigeria's BRI engagement reflects a paradoxical reality: while infrastructural modernization, employment generation, and technological development are evident, these gains coexist with risks of debt accumulation, governance deficits, environmental strain, and limited local capacity. Effective leveraging of BRI requires a strategic, coordinated, and transparent policy approach, aligning foreign investment with national development objectives, environmental sustainability, and socio-economic inclusiveness.

These reflections set the stage for the final section, which will offer conclusions and strategic recommendations to optimize the benefits of BRI while mitigating associated risks for Nigeria.

III. Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents a transformative yet complex avenue for Nigeria's economic and infrastructural development. Chinese investments under BRI have catalyzed significant improvements in transportation, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure, enhancing connectivity, industrial capacity, and regional integration. Railways such as the Lagos–Kano Standard

Gauge, the Lekki Deep Sea Port, and energy projects demonstrate the initiative's potential to bridge Nigeria's infrastructural deficits, stimulate trade, and foster employment generation. Moreover, the engagement has facilitated skills transfer, offering Nigerian workers and firms exposure to modern engineering, project management, and technological practices.

Despite these evident benefits, the study identifies critical challenges that constrain the full realization of BRI's developmental potential. Debt sustainability remains a pressing concern, as large-scale infrastructure projects rely heavily on concessional loans and state-backed credit facilities. Delays in revenue generation, cost overruns, or fiscal mismanagement may exacerbate Nigeria's external debt burden and increase dependence on China. Additionally, governance and institutional weaknesses, including opaque contracting, limited local participation, and misalignment with national development priorities, reduce the efficiency and inclusivity of these projects. Environmental and social concerns, such as ecosystem disruption, displacement, and urban-rural inequalities, further underscore the need for sustainable project planning and implementation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Dependency Theory, highlighting structural asymmetries in Nigeria–China relations that risk perpetuating economic dependency and limiting domestic agency. Simultaneously, Neoliberal Institutionalism offers a lens to identify pathways for maximizing mutual benefits through cooperative frameworks, transparent agreements, and effective institutional mechanisms. Together, these theories provide a balanced understanding of BRI's dual nature, offering transformative infrastructure and economic opportunities while posing risks related to sovereignty, sustainability, and long-term developmental alignment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigeria's participation in the BRI embodies a paradox of opportunity and vulnerability. While Chinese-led projects provide critical infrastructure, facilitate technological advancement, and promote regional trade, they also expose the country to fiscal, governance, and environmental challenges. The net benefit of BRI is contingent upon Nigeria's ability to integrate foreign investment with national development strategies, enforce transparency and accountability, and enhance local participation in project implementation. Achieving these objectives requires a strategically coordinated policy approach that balances external partnership with domestic capacity building, ensuring that Nigeria reaps sustainable socio-economic and developmental gains.

Strategic Recommendations

Strengthen Institutional Frameworks

Nigeria should establish a dedicated BRI oversight agency or coordinating body to monitor project execution, negotiate contracts, and ensure compliance with environmental, labor, and fiscal standards.

Promote Transparency and Accountability

All BRI-related contracts and financial agreements should be publicly accessible. Mechanisms for independent auditing and parliamentary oversight should be implemented to prevent mismanagement and corruption.

Align Projects with National Development Plans

BRI investments should be strategically integrated into Nigeria's National Development Plan and sectorial policies to ensure infrastructure supports industrialization, value addition, and regional trade goals.

Enhance Local Participation and Technology Transfer

Policies should require mandatory local content quotas and skills development programs to maximize domestic capacity, entrepreneurship, and long-term technological self-reliance.

Ensure Debt Sustainability

Nigeria should adopt prudent debt management strategies, including rigorous cost-benefit analysis of BRI projects, diversification of financing sources, and negotiation of favorable loan terms to prevent fiscal over-dependence.

Implement Environmental and Social Safeguards

Comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) must be mandatory for all BRI projects, with mitigation strategies to protect ecosystems, communities, and vulnerable populations.

Strengthen South–South Cooperation

Nigeria should leverage BRI to build regional linkages with other African nations, fostering knowledge exchange, trade, and joint industrial development initiatives that maximize collective benefits.

Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous impact assessment frameworks should be developed to track project outcomes, measure socio-economic benefits, and inform iterative policy adjustments.

Final Reflection

The Belt and Road Initiative offers Nigeria a strategic platform for accelerated development, yet its success depends on deliberate policy choices, institutional capacity, and governance reforms. By integrating infrastructure investment with national development objectives, promoting transparency, and prioritizing local empowerment, Nigeria can transform BRI engagements into a sustainable pathway for industrial growth, technological advancement, and regional integration. Conversely, failure to address debt, governance, and environmental challenges may undermine these gains and entrench dependency. Therefore, a strategic, coordinated, and proactive approach is essential to ensure that BRI serves as a vehicle for inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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