**Interviewer:** Okay. Good morning, and thank you for joining me in this interview.

**Participant 18:** Yeah. A very good morning, top of the day.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for your time, and having gotten your consent to record the interview, the interview is being recorded so we are going to start right away. So before we start, I want to let you know that we have six sections in this interview. We start with the first section, section one. Section one is about demographic information. I'll just go to the questions right away. The first question is, can you share your age, gender and country of origin?

**Participant 18:** Yeah, I'm 56 years old. A male, a Nigerian born in West Africa.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you for sharing that. Next question is about your level of education. What is your highest level of education and what country did you obtain your degree from?

**Participant 18:** I have a double degree. I have a first degree and second degree in economics and business administration in Nigeria, in 2 different universities.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you, Sir. How long have you lived in the US, Maryland, specifically?

**Participant 18:** Emmm, put together, I used to come around here for holiday, but the time I genuinely started living here is going to about seven years now.

**Interview:** Okay. Seven years, now.

**Participant 18:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you. What is your current profession or job title?

**Participant 18:** I work with… I’m a community coach in a mental and disability health department. I coach people who have mental issues and general disabilities. So my title is community coach.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. We'll get to that later in the interview.

**Participant 18:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell us what your profession in Nigeria was before you migrated to the US?

**Participant 18:** I was a marketing and sales manager for a plastic company, one of the largest conglomerates in Africa. So one of its company that has a plastic division, that’s where I was a marketing manager.

**Interviewer:** Okay, we will go into that later, too. Thank you for sharing that. We'll go into section two. Section two, we will talk about push and pull factors. Push and pull factors are the factors that influence the decision why people leave from their country to go to another country. So here I have about, I think I have four questions under this section. I'm going to combine the first two questions. So question one is, what motivated your decision to migrate to the United States? Were there specific factors in Nigeria that pushed you to leave, e.g., economic, social, or political challenges?

**Participant 18:** Yes, basically it’s a personal, long assessment of stable economy, great opportunities and future advancement career in America, which surpasses African political economy and social life, and it's basically about the greener pastures and opportunities. As I said earlier, great opportunities and for future advancement in career, hopefully, that was my reason.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. Next question, will you be able to share with us what attracted you to the US and Maryland in particular? You could have lived in another state somewhere else.

**Participant 18:** Yeah, what attracts me to US, Maryland in particular is stable economy, great opportunities, advancement and mixture of culture. We have so many culture, we have people around, Indian, Chinese, aside the Africans, Pakistani, you know, so put together that flavor of mixture of…in Maryland was really a motivation for me. I don't know whether it exists in other states, but here in Maryland I felt much more comfortable with that.

**Interviewer:** Thank you, Ade (Not participant’s name, just an incomplete statement). The last question under this section is, what challenges have you encountered during the migration process?

**Participant 18:** Well, I have a couple of challenges, was quite unexpected, and firstly, perhaps because of my age, there was a settlement issue. You know, being somebody that have been in charge of marketing of organization, so when I came here, my belief was that I'm going to make use of…I'll just start getting the ladder from there.

**Interviewer:** Hmm!

**Participant 18:** But unfortunately, that wasn't the situation. I realized that my certificate wasn't really relevant so that threatened the settlement mostly. Then the social factors, the lifestyle here, I lost so many friends, so many family friends, colleagues, you know, childhood friends. So those are challenges, really. And you know, to even measure up with any profession here you have to get certification. So for my own major challenge was, you have to register. I registered with Maryland Board of Health Department to get certified medical technician and all that. So it was a big challenge, and it took so many months before I was able to acclimatize.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you. We'll get into a little more details about that later under cultural assimilation and social integration.

**Participant 18:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Let's quickly go to section three. We will talk about professional experiences. You mentioned earlier that you were a marketing manager in a plastic company in Nigeria, and you said, this company is one of the largest conglomerates in West Africa?

**Participant 18:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** So I want you to be a little bit more specific about your career growth in Nigeria. If you can share with me your career growth, the number of years you worked in Nigeria, how you moved from one role or one department or one company to the other. As concise, as brief as you can be, if you can just share with me your career growth in Nigeria before you moved to the US.

**Participant 18:** Yeah. Well, I joined the company…I've been working different companies, you know, before in Nigeria. I was in a petroleum oil company, but not, you know, as agency, not directly with NNPC. So I felt unsatisfied with that because it's not really…we were like a second class staff. So I now joined this company, which was called NAIPO, Nigerian plastics and I joined as a senior supervisor. They have supervisor, senior supervisor, so I was trained, and I started my career, moving around getting industrial markets customers. So, in no time they pushed me to assistant manager, sales, where I have so many companies, you know, industrial as I said, pharmaceutical, agriculture, you know, hospitality, because we are into different types of products – diothene, polyethylene, cellophane, then plastic wares you can think about. It was a very broad, We have very broad market products. I mean, what I mean by market product is technically is that each product we have, that is the market line is so wide, we have over 500 products, even more than that in different emmm… so we hold meetings, you know, with government - states, local and federal governments, getting contracts with drivers, so the connection was high, you know, and I was enjoying it, being a very young person. I connect so quickly with people, and you know, the energy was there. So that was the business in Nigeria, and the growth was much. But you know, you can ask me, then why do you have to leave such opportunity? But you see, in Nigeria there is no growth because of nepotism, and you know the instability in government and the policies. So the aim of this company was to help the local industry, that is, what we produce should serve as a raw material for other industry.

**Interviewer:** For other companies.

**Participant 18:** Yes, that was the aim then but unfortunately, the political issues, changing of government, you know, the politicians, you know, robbing you, taking the money from the company that you cannot even afford to buy raw materials. So some of these machine, of course, you know they produce, they cannot upgrade them. So at a point there was a problem of production, then the electricity, you know, so many factors that threaten, such that we get a contract, we won't be able to carry it out. At a time, I was in the court representing the company as a marketing manager for the lack of performance. You know, I had to witness that. A lot of radio programs invited me, why this, why that, you know, adulteration of products from criminals, you know so many… So, we don't have the government backing. All these put together, there were layoffs of staff around that time. Of course, we cannot meet the ends meet, we cannot break even, so things keep going down. So everybody was like, “oh, my God! Are we going to continue like this? I won't let this one catch me on, you know.” So majorly, problem of electricity, and we depend hugely on foreign raw material to produce and because the exchange rate was threatening, so the product cannot measure up with what people can afford. And the border was so open that even the foreign products were threatening the local products. So people don't really want to go with us again because of lack of standard.

**Interviewer:** So, your company was not getting emmm, you weren't getting customers anymore?

**Participant 18:** Anymore, because, you know, there were no checks and balances, in terms of the importation and all that. So, Nigeria was a dumping ground for the Chinese, and all these, and they can produce as fast as possible and cheap. So the local industry died prematurely, they die naturally, and of course, you know, the staff will be laid off, (laughs) not to talk of the senior staff. So at a point we were having a problem of paying the salaries, half salaries.

**Interviewer:** I was going to ask that. Did you experience lack of payment of salary for a long time?

**Participant 18:** Yes, so it was all these put together that brought the idea of relocation and all that.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you for sharing that. That's quite an interesting career experience. Before I move to the next question, I want you to tell me, how many years of experience did you have before you leave Nigeria? Total number of years of experience.

**Participant 18:** Yeah, after my graduation, I have about nine years’ experience, 9 years plus.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. Let's quickly move to your current career trajectory in the US. You already said you are a coach in a mental facility and disabilities center.

**Participant 18:** Yes

**Interviewer:** How would you describe your current career path in the US?

**Participant 18:** My current career.

**Interviewer:** Yes. Well, that trajectory. How you have been able to move around since you relocated to the US about seven years ago.

**Participant 18:** Yeah, well, I'll use this current job I'm having, although I've been around the same similar role, but different companies. But right now I'm still doing it. Well, for people who are…have a problem in… have a delay in learning, that is, the learning disability, or who have a challenging behavior, you know, autism, all these Asperger, bipolar, and all that.

**Interviewer:** Hmmm!

**Participant 18:** You know we have children among them, we have vulnerable adults among them, so I support them on deep programs where we have activities, taking them out, go through different activities in terms of fitness, bingo and, you know, depends on their lifestyle, you know individual differences, so that they can engage in regular life activities which you and I are benefiting. So, I serve as a coach with them but which is completely different from what I was doing in Nigeria.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I was going to ask a question based on your experience in Nigeria, and what you do at the moment. And that's the basis of the next question, so I can go to that next question now. And the question, yeah, I wanted to know, how well do you feel your skills and qualifications are being fully utilized in your current position now?

**Participant 18:** No, completely no, highly degrading and lower to the expectation. I used the word degrading, in terms of, it doesn't really connect at all. This I'm doing, anybody can do it. A high School young guy can do it if he’s trained, and it's not really a sound or challenging role, you know, it is not grounded with academics, it doesn't have a flavor of professionalism. It’s just a support work, I would have to tell you that. And you know, if I should put two together, it’s far from each other. I'm talking of from 1 to 5, which I'm doing, and from 1 to 90, they are far away from each other. So if I should put them together, I'm not…it's like I'm jettisoning the skill I have. I'm undervalued, underutilized, let me put it that way.

**Interviewer:** So, in other words, it's like your capacities…you have like ten skills, but what you're using on the current job is more or less like maybe one or two out of the ten.

**Participant 18:** It’s just like one out of ten.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yeah. Thank you for sharing that. I think a lot of people are in that kind of a situation.

**Participant 18:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Yes, let's go to the next question, real quick. What barriers have you faced in the professional landscape, such as licensing requirements, recognition of foreign qualifications or workplace discrimination, and what strategies have you used to manage or overcome these challenges? I know you've mentioned…I think you talked a little bit about this, maybe if you have something else to add to it.

**Participant 18:**  Yeah, career challenges at work…and you know, of course, because of the lower echelon we are, or I am, there’s little you can contribute even with the ideas, you can see some lapses. So in most cases, when you make a suggestion, and the company’s policy doesn't go in line with that, and you can see the problem coming with that but because of the lower situation we are or I am, I can't really…that is very challenging and very frustrating for people like me, who have been a manager of people before. Take for instance, you know, the issues of discrimination, institutional discrimination among African people, who are taking up a job that is lower. So, you just have to go by the rules if you still want that job, so in most cases you are being quieted, technically, you know, it might not be announced, but that is just it. So well, even with the certification, you know, the certification is not academics, so you just have to cope with it. And you know, because, you see the challenges I've mentioned back home and coming around here with this age and then…so you really require a technical knowledge to balance the two together and making sure that accumulated bills are met. So it's quite difficult, you know. So put the two together.

**Interviewer:** Hmmm! Yes (laughs), I understand that. Thank you for sharing that. Emmm, let's go to section four, cultural assimilation and social integration. You 've mentioned some of those challenges you faced when you came over to the US.

**Participant 18:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** But let me put it in another perspective now. How would you describe your experience of cultural assimilation in Maryland, here? Have you experienced any cultural or social challenges since you migrated, and how have you navigated these cultural differences both in your personal and professional life?

**Participant 18:** Yeah, cultural differences. Yes, of course, I said earlier. Let me use the professional first before my personal. Professional differences, you know, we have African American people around, who are black people like me, they are born here, so they have the way of life that’s peculiar to the lifestyle here, though I'm a similarly black person from Africa, which has a background of difference in terms of all things food, even, you know, dressing, then religious beliefs, you know, Christianity and all that, they don't believe much in that here, you know. So even at workplace, you can't bring your faith, you can't discuss about your religion, even your culture, you can't open it up unless you see the like people, you know, people that have similar…so that is the challenge on its own. And on a personal ground, you know, when it comes to the kind of…what we embrace as an African, social gathering, food, you know, celebrations and all that, they don't really fancy that here, you know. The highest thing here is, take somebody to the restaurants and eat, that is it, nothing…but in Africa, it's far more than that. We are constantly embedded, especially on religion, every Sunday you go to church. You have people that speak your language, you know, we have diverse languages in Nigeria, that you can go together and do things together as family. So all those take time before I was able to achieve that. You know, some by accident, you meet them, some at the workplace, and it's very skeletal to get people connected. So...

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that.

**Participant 18:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** The last question under this section is about the kind of support that people get when they move from Africa or Nigeria to the US. Emmm, this kind of support, are not just support from individuals or family members, I'm talking about the kind of support that you can get from organizations or a group of people or a community. So the question is, are there specific community networks or organizations that have supported your integration? How well have these organizations supported your career advancement?

**Participant 18:** There's no clear cut organization. That's unfortunate, very unfortunate, especially for Nigeria Africans. None, there’s none. It's completely zero. The only little one that should have been a catalyst, which unfortunately is not so, which is the church of God, where people gather on Sundays and all that, still the vibes is not there, that goes further than the church gathering. Once the sermon is given, everybody disperses, there's no…nothing like a connecting rod, that okay, let's organize this (inaudible). So there wasn't a…if you don't have any family member around here, it could be very difficult. It's not that you can run to Samaritan group of Africa or…there's none. And I think, I want to use this opportunity to, if there is a way this questionnaire can help to educate people that people, Africans should have a clique, an organization, a group that can help people who are just coming to say, okay, go to the MVA, this is where you go to MVA, this is somebody that can help you, a paralegal, who can help you to get this done, then you get the paper, then take to NTA, you get a State ID, then you go to this Maryland Board of Nursing, go and write an exam there, you know. So if these organizations are in existence, it will have been very, very good soft landing.

**Interviewer:** (inaudible)

**Participant 18:** …very soft landing, but it's unfortunate that apart from the family member or friend, there's nobody, absolutely zero to guide somebody that's just coming. So for me, it wasn't a very pleasant landing at all.

**Interviewer:** Experience, so.

**Participant 18:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. That is central to the core of this research. Let's move to section five.

**Participant 18:** Okay

**Interviewer:** Section five, we'll talk about dual cultural and economic challenges. The first question there is, do you feel torn between the cultural expectations of Nigeria and the United States? How do you navigate this?

**Participant 18:** Yeah, there's so much *torns* (there is no noun for being torn, here the speaker’s response was in the affirmative) you know. Let me be honest, I have lost so many friends, you know, good, genuine, loving friends that we do things together, that we go to school together, we were so connected, you know. When I relocated here, I lost so many of them. Well, we talk on phone, but it's not as expected, you know. Then families in terms of social gatherings and integration. So…but here…compare it to here, it's all about work and work and work and work here, nothing. You go to work, come back, you go to work, come back, if you look at it technically. If you don't do that, you won't be able to meet your ends meet, so it's all about a cycle of doing the same thing all through. So, but it wasn't like that in Nigeria, we have alumni, we have a church society, we have friends, you know, good friends, we have colleagues at work who are in the same, you know…I remember I belong to PCRC, that is, the Police Community Relations Committee, which I was representing my company then, because they pick people from each company, which we held, you know, back home. So this alone, we meet people of the same career, professionals, accountants, engineers, different companies from Nigerite, from Guinness, from Nigerian breweries, I'm representing my company. So this is a peace police community, so all those are not here (laughs), completely different. It's all about work, wake up in the morning, go to work, come back. If you are studying your, you know, the following morning you have to push yourself up to go to... It's about work and work and work, so there's no connection per se.

**Interviewer:** Hmm! Okay, yeah, thank you for sharing that, sir.

**Participant 18:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** The last question under this section is, have you encountered economic challenges related to remittances or supporting family members in Nigeria? What strategies have you used to balance this dual responsibility?

**Participant 18:**  Yeah, Ehhnn, exchange rates. Let me…at that point, I will use the issue of exchange rates, that is the currency exchange rate, that is naira and dollar. Well, we have a…myself, I have an advantage of having emmm…even despite that I’m in the lowest echelon, one of the lowest jobs here, but I still have an advantage because of the exchange rate. So after I meet my needs here, in terms of my bills, rents, insurance and all that, health, all those basic needs. So whatever that is, I can afford, that's the way I balance it, then it brings out huge value when you change the money, you know, we are talking about a hundred and 1,000, 1,200 or 1,400 naira to a dollar. So if you are changing $100, which is going to be a 1,400 naira, I know it might not be commanding so much, but still it's still relevant in that economy. So that's the way I balance it up on a monthly basis, helping people, you know, helping family members, and you know. So the comparative advantage, let me use that economic word, the comparative advantage in terms of exchange rates, helps people like me in diaspora, so I balance it off with the left out…let me say, a leftover of what I can afford. So the huge exchange rate serves with the threatening (threat of remittance) of remittance to Nigeria, you know, so…

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you. We are getting to the end of the interview. We're on the last section now. Under this section, we talked about recommendations. First of all, there are three questions under this section. The first question I want to ask is, having lived in Maryland here for seven years now and as someone who has had a considerable long years of experience, high academic qualifications, senior work position in Nigeria before you moved over, do you think there are policies or programs or things that…let me put it in two ways now, do you think there are policies or programs here that kind of help African immigrants, Nigerian immigrants to advance well in their career? And on the other side, do you also think there are policies and programs or things that hinder them from advancing well in their career when they moved over here?

**Participant 18:** There is twofold question. Firstly, I want to say that there's no clear plan program from government here. Take, for instance, we have certificates, we are professionals, you know, and we are not coming here to take advantage of that profession. It's just recently that the visa DHIH. H1B, or something like that.

**Interviewer:** Hmm!

**Participant 18:** H1B, that the government is just introducing, that if you are a professional and you have a professional connection or career in your country, you can come around here, but you know it's just a newly introduced… But for people like us that come around here, settle down, we can't make use of our certificates to work. You can't bring your certificate, for instance, you are an engineer or you are…and you know, they won't acclimatize your certificate to get you a job. So if there is a way government can help on that, that if you can prove that so so… if there are things you can, you have to do here. The highest people gain for now is just to change it, to study, for career development, that is, if you have a degree, then you want to study a master's, you can go into that and let me be honest with you, by the time you finish, they will only recognize your masters, they won't recognize that degree per se. Somebody who has a degree and a master's here can stand a better chance than you, so if there is a way that they can *connive* (meant convert or regnonize) that, that is our qualification back in Nigeria, so that even without going to school because people like me, who are you know of age 50 something and I have come around here, I have to pay for school fees, don't forget my challenges for coming, to get the masters so that I can measure up. So to put the two together is so hard, so what people are facing is that they have to settle down for a very long time, maybe four/five years, before they can even lay their hands on any academics. Then that's about that. Then, in the area where the government can help is that if people prove to have experience, they should be given the opportunity, not only on…opportunity for a vocational training. I'm using the word vocational training so that they can start from there, but that is not true here, you have to go and do some little certification that doesn't really connect to your profession. It's very, very hard. So if there's a way government can make a policy and change some trajectory problems that we are facing, the immigrants, in terms of settling down, that can help us to be a little bit elevated and to be… If you look at the broad base of African demography of job, mainly 70 or 75% are doing a menial job. That is the base list. Only a few who are able to push themselves up in terms of education are well paid, and it's only a few. Yes, for those Nigerians who are in position, these are people who have studied. I have so many people who have back home certificate, but they are not really making use, they can't be, you know, they can't blend them here and that is very frustrating.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that.Now, I wanted…my next question is,you having a good understanding of all these problems thatpeople that are highly educated and well experienced back in Africa, back in Nigeria face when they come here and having talked about what you think government can do,my next question is, are there changes or support system that you will suggestthat maybe people that are not government canput in place to help people that find themselves in this situation to do well in their career when they come over to the US here?

**Participant 18:** Yes, firstly, they should make education so affordable. Firstly, take for instance, you want to study, you are coming from Africa, you’re already here, maybe visa lottery, or whatever means you find yourself here legally, but they are not recognizing your certificate. Okay, haven't said that before, if education is affordable, even if they can extend the loan, student loan – I'm using that word student loan – to people who are ready to learn. Are you getting me? Because, it was a big challenge for me. I love studying and I really wanted to start, you know, although right now I'm doing some degree course, and all that, but I'm paying a fortune.

**Interview:** You're paying out of pocket?

**Participant 18:** Out of pocket, it’s very, very difficult and we are talking about dollars. The little amount I'm earning from a lower job I'm doing, I'm still paying. I would have to create time, and the more I create time for the education, the less I get from work because I'm losing hours. Do you understand what I'm saying?

**Interview:** Yes, I do.

**Participant 18:** So, if there is a way government can help us on that. That okay, if you can do this exam, and you pass it excellently, then we give you this loan, go and study in University of Maryland or whatever, number one. Number 2, they can extend all these social benefits to foreigners, as long as they are legal here, they come around here legally. Take for instance, all these food tickets, or what is it called? Emmm…

**Interviewer:** Food stamps.

**Participant 18:** Yeah, food stamps, you know. I know people who have children in school, sometimes they give them, but maybe they have stopped it. But if the full stamp can, say you pass this exam, you are studying, then you are qualified for full stamp. So all those little things can help, including even the bus pass. And you know, insurances and health…extension of health. Because let me be honest, not everybody you see around here, Africans, that have health insurance. You know, I'm…health insurance…some people are paying from the pockets, believe me. The Government might not know, they are paying from their pocket to get health insurance because of their situation. It takes time for them to really get, you know, the residency and citizenship that can qualify them for all this. So, some people are even treating themselves locally, they might not know. So those are the areas I can suggest that if government can help out, in academics, in health, in social, you know, all these I've just mentioned, it will help but if they have all the burden with them, you know, I can say they will continue to be in that position for many years, many decades, as maybe the assistant clerk, you know, health care assistant, hospital aide, you know, restaurants eehhn…so low that there's no development. And a huge number of foreigners are there, not only Africans, Indies, you know, so many. You can see them all around, hanging around. So there is no clear plan or policy from government that are helping these people. So, the *HB1* (H1B) which I mentioned before…(inaudible).

**Interviewer:** (inaudible)

**Participant 18:** Yeah, it is for people who have, like, for instance, before you can come around here as an accountant, you must be Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Nigeria with a double degree, even with PhD. You know, to attain that, maybe you are of age. By the time you come around, they are well, you have to change your certificate. So, but not everybody has that opportunity. Some people come around here, they file for them, yet but, their certificate is useless unless they go to school here, despite that they have the residence permit. If you are an accountant, for instance, or you are an engineer or a surveyor or regional town planning in Nigeria from University of so, so, so, and you come around and they file in for you, does not mean you have an automatic job here, you have to start the same level I am, unless that… So if there's a way government can help, that okay, you are coming legally, but this is a way we can help you out, not about you converting your certificate for study. That is the only way out, unless you want to go to…but to use that certificate at workplace. So how can you imagine a civil engineer in Nigeria that comes around with a residence and yet he’s doing a restaurant and working in McDonald’s. And you ask him, why are you here, why are you working in MacDonald’s, they say, well, I have so many exams. It's all about education. But if they can use this to get people the job, and integrate them into social life too. So those are my perspectives to them.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for sharing this perspective, and for taking time this early Sunday morning to be with me, to share your insight and experience. I do really appreciate it.

**Participant 18:** You’re welcome.

**Interviewer:** If you would like to have a copy of these research findings after I finish the research, I will send you a copy via email, if you would like to have a copy.

**Participant 18:** Okay, that sounds good. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. I will stop the…(inaudible).

**Participant 18:** Is there anything I need to sign? Okay, I've signed them all.

**Interviewer:** Yes, the consent form. You need to sign the consent form and send it back to me.

**Participant 18:** Okay. All right.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much.

**Participant 18:** You’re welcome. Have a great day.

**Interviewer:** And you too, bye.

**Participant 18:** Yeah bye…

**Interviewer:** I will stop the recording...