**Chapter One**

* 1. **Background to the study**

There are many related definitions of what diaspora means one of which is a diaspora is a regular migrant who for whatever reasons (social, economic, political and environmental) has left his country and is settled legitimately in another country for more than one year continuously and has a sustainable means of livelihood1. Diaspora means people living outside their home lands and as Nigerians they refer people participating in diaspora as “JAPA”, Nigeria is diaspora is referred to a Nigerian who has lived continuously for one year or more outside Nigeria legally and legitimately and has a sustainable means of livelihood and an address2 and it is a very important form that has permanently taken it place in Nigeria’s global system as it adds to national development home and abroad. The Nigeria Diaspora Commission was established in 2019 by the Nigerian National Assembly for the Federal republic of Nigeria which is under the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs through an initial bill spearheaded by Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa who serves as the Chairman and CEO of the commission due to the increase disperse, showing the active contributions of Nigerans abroad not just as a source of remittances but for others forms of developments such as technological transfers, investment, skill and knowledge exchange and most importantly global influence.

The concept of diaspora, traditionally defined as the dispersion of people from their homeland to other parts of the world, has evolved to represent as transnational community whose identity and loyalty are often tied to both host and origin countries3. Nigerians in diaspora were annually sending billions of dollars in remittances in forms of investments, for family care, for professional uses, houses for rents or personal use and many more that could not be properly managed by the governments who are not truly focused and trained to take charge on helping the remittances and other contributions of the Nigerians in diaspora. There was the development of Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) and the annual Diaspora Day celebrations due to the growing diaspora capital both financial and intellectual4.

**HISTORY OF MIGRATION AND EVOLUTION OF NIDCOM**

Dating back before diaspora came invoke in Nigeria, there was a word called MIGRATION that had occurred before the transatlantic slave trade, migration in what is now Nigeria was shaped by environmental changes, population growth, and the search for fertile land. Communities such as the Nok, Yoruba, and Hausa migrated and settled, forming early civilizations and trade networks long before European contact 5 which can be traced to the era of the slave trade, between 1400 and 1900. It is recorded that over 12million Africans were exported to Europe and America. Nigeria particularly lost about 2million forced labor migrants due to hardships that occurred during slave trade. Pre -colonial times migration in Nigeria has been driven by a combination of trade, warfare, religion, and ecological factors. Ethnics groups such as the Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe and Kanuri migrated across the savannahs, forests and river basins for purposes of settlements, conquest, or commerce6. Most ancient migration flows were through trade routes such as the Trans-Saharan trade and the Atlantic coastal trade which opened external influence even before colonization.

After Nigeria’s independence in 1960 migration increased due to educational opportunities abroad, political instability like the Biafran War that occurred 1967-1970 and the economic hardship which is still persistent till date. During 1970’s oil boom there was a form of improvement that reduced migration in Nigeria bringing about better economic opportunities prompting people to stay in Nigeria and come into Nigeria looking for job opportunities. The economy began declining by 1980’s and the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP)under the IMF led to a mass outbreak of migration especially among skilled professionals seeking better opportunities in developed countries 7, which is popularly referred to as Brain Drain. By the late 1990’s, the Nigerian government began to recognize the importance of the diaspora as partners in national development. Under President Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) was established in 2000 to create a platform for Nigerians abroad to contribute to national growth8.

In present times, the federal government has tried to engage Nigerians in the Diaspora in the policy and programs of the government, Nigerians are talented and the greatest asset is our human resources which we have a lot of them in Nigerians in Diaspora, the question is how can they work with the government at home? Thus, the establishment of a formal became necessary that is why we have the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM)9, though an Act was passed by the National Assembly in 2017, the commission was nationalized and properly established in 2019 under former president Muhammadu Buhari with Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa as its pioneer Chairman/CEO10. The establishment of NIDCOM signified a turning point in Nigeria’s diaspora policy framework. Unlike NIDO, which operated as a network of voluntary diaspora organizations, NIDCOM functions as a statutory body backed by law, with the mandate to coordinate and harmonize all diaspora- related activities across government ministries and agencies. This institutional shift reflects a broader governmental recognition of the diaspora as not just an economic force, but also a diplomatic and development partner and also her role that reflects the growing importance of inclusive and gender-sensitive leadership in international development and diplomacy11.

The effectiveness of NIDCOM in fulfilling its mandate and sustaining diaspora engagement remains a subject of debate. There is a need for scholarly assessment of the Commission’s impact between 2019-2025, particularly in the context of Abike Dabiri-Erewa’s leadership and the broader challenges facing Nigeria’s diaspora policy framework.

**1.2 Statement of the problem**

The Nigerian diaspora plays an important role in national development, yet efforts to fully engage them have often focused too much on remittances and not enough on real inclusion or long-term partnerships. NIDCOM was created in 2019 to bridge this gap, but many Nigerians abroad still feel left out of key decisions that affect them.

At the same time, the leadership of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa as the first woman to head a globally-facing institution like NIDCOM brings something new to Nigeria’s political space. However, little has been done to study how her role as a woman has influenced the way NIDCOM operates, connects with the diaspora, or represents Nigeria internationally. This study is interested in what has been missed, how NIDCOM is working, how it could do better, and what Abike Dabiri-Erewa’s leadership means for both diaspora engagement and women in diplomacy. There have been minimal academic engagements with how the change of government policies and government office occupants would affect the development of Nigerian in Diaspora Commission, which this study intends to fill.

**1.3 Research Questions**

1. What historical experiences of Nigerian migration led to the formation of diaspora institutions like NIDCOM?

2. How has NIDCOM engaged with the Nigerian diaspora between 2019 and 2025 in terms of policy, outreach, and development?

3. In what ways has Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa’s position as a woman shaped the Commission’s diplomatic and leadership approach?

4. How does her leadership reflect or challenge traditional views about women in international or foreign-facing government roles?

5. What lessons can be drawn from her tenure regarding institutional performance, gender representation, and the future of diaspora diplomacy in Nigeria?

**1.4 Aim and Objective of the study**

The aim of the study is to examine the role of he Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) in promoting diaspora engagement and national development, with a focus on the leadership of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa as a female figure in Nigeria’s international space.

1. Explore the historical development of Nigerian migration and the emergence of diaspora policies leading to the creation of NIDCOM.

2. Examine how NIDCOM has functioned as a state institution for engaging Nigerians in diaspora between 2019 and 2025.

3. To analyze the leadership style and diplomatic strategies of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa as a woman leading a globally-oriented diaspora institution.

4. To explore how gender and leadership intersect in reshaping perceptions of women in foreign policy and diaspora governance.

5. To evaluate the broader implications of Dabiri-Erewa’s leadership for institutional development, gender inclusion, and the future of Nigerian diaspora diplomacy.

**1.5 Scope and Limitations**

The study examines the role of the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) in promoting diaspora engagement and national development with a focus on the leadership of Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa as a female figure in Nigeria’s international space from 2019-2025, a time frame that captures the key moments from the time the NIDCOM was established under Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa shaping the Commissions developments and identity as a female leading Nigeria’s international space with those home and abroad. The starting point of this study which is 2019 signifies when the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) was established making Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa the Chairman and CEO of the commission from that time till date, the end of my time frame being 2025 is due to the commission being new and still ongoing with its developments showing how the commission has evolved, the programs and achievements it implemented, it effects on the Nigeria foreign policy, the partnerships and the challenges it could face due to change of government. It also examines the challenges the commission faced and Abike Dabiri-Erewa being a woman had faced heading the commission and how her influence with media and public service has contributed to the effectiveness as a female leader in a diplomatic role.

There are many limitations associated with a project like this. One of the limitations is that the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission is a new commission that has not been heavenly researched on leading to limited availability of existing books that majorly wrote on diaspora and the scarcity of documented materials on the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), particularly from 2019-2025. Another limitation is that there haven’t been scholarly research focusing on Abike Dabiri-Erewa’s role which made it challenging to source out materials. Another limitation faced was the conducting of interview with Abike Dabiri-Erewa who is the Chairman and CEO and also major personnel in the project.

**1.6 Significance and Justification of the study**

The significance of this study is that it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on diaspora engagement, public diplomacy, and gendered leadership within African governance systems. At a time when migration and diaspora relations are central to global development discussions, understanding the role of the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) under the leadership of Abike Dabiri-Erewa becomes crucial in assessing how Nigeria engages with its citizens abroad for national development**,** by focusing on the period between 2019 and 2025, the study captures a transformative phase in Nigeria’s diaspora policy framework, offering insights into institutional strategies, challenges, and progress. The research is particularly justified by the limited scholarly attention given to NIDCOM, despite its strategic role in linking the Nigerian government with its diaspora population. As such, this study fills an important gap in the literature by documenting and analyzing the commission’s activities and performance during this period. The study addresses the role of a female leader operating in an international and diplomatic space, thus drawing attention to gender dynamics within Nigerian public institutions. It provides a useful lens through which the impact of female leadership in foreign relations and diaspora management can be assessed. This makes the research relevant not only to academic discourse but also to policy formulation and implementation at both national and international levels.

**1.7 Methodology**

The historical descriptive method was used, both primary and secondary sources of data being adopted. The primary source includes oral interviews with officials of the NIDCOM and archival materials from the commission’s archives based in Lagos. The secondary sources include articles, books, official documents and newspapers. The data was analyzed accordingly.

**1.8 Literature Review**

William Safran, *in Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return (1991),* outlines the core characteristics of diaspora communities, such as a shared memory of the homeland, feelings of exclusion in host countries, and aspirations to return. His work provides a foundational understanding of how diaspora identity is constructed and maintained. For this study, Safran’s conceptual framework essential in defining the Nigerian diaspora and understanding the emotional, historical, and cultural bonds that Nigerians abroad maintain with their country12.

Robin Cohen, *in Global Diasporas: An Introduction (1997),* expands on the typology of diasporas, classifying them as victim, labor, trade, imperial, or cultural. He also stresses the historical roots and transformative potential of diaspora communities. Cohen's emphasis on diaspora agency helps situate the Nigerian diaspora not just as remitters but as potential policy influencers and nation-builders13.

Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, *in A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism (2013),* emphasize the dynamic nature of diasporic identities and the interaction between diasporas and home governments. Their interdisciplinary approach supports a multi-dimensional analysis of NIDCOM’s role and affirms that diaspora engagement must include political participation and cultural diplomacy14.

Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome, in *Nigerian Diasporic Engagements: Policy Gaps and the Potential of Formal Institutions (2020),* critiques Nigeria’s past failures in diaspora policy and argues for legally backed structures. Her work supports this study’s focus on NIDCOM as an institutional innovation that fills historical policy gaps15.

W.J. Tettey, in *Transnationalism, Diaspora, and the African Development Agenda (2005),* emphasizes that African governments must actively create opportunities for diaspora engagement. His analysis supports the core premise of NIDCOM as a platform for reversing brain drain and encouraging developmental ties16.

Yinka Akinbobola, in *Women in African Diplomacy: Rethinking Leadership in Foreign Affairs (2021*), provides a gendered lens for understanding leadership in diplomacy. Her argument that female diplomats adopt more people-centered and soft power approaches directly relates to Dabiri-Erewa’s style and influence at NIDCOM17.

Amina Mama and Josephine Ahikire, in their *feminist scholarship*, examine barriers to women's leadership in Africa. Their works offer important background for understanding the symbolic and practical significance of Dabiri-Erewa’s rise to power and how her gender may shape institutional behavior and perception18.

Eghosa E. Osaghae, *in Federalism and Political Accommodation in Africa (1998),* provides a framework for understanding inclusive governance in post-colonial states. His work contextualizes NIDCOM’s challenges within broader issues of national identity, state capacity, and citizen inclusion19.

**Endnotes**

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**Chapter two**

**The role of Abike Dabiri-Erewa in the Nigerian Diaspora Commission**

**2.1 Profile on Abike Dabiri-Erewa**

Abike Dabiri-Erewa is known as a very prominent woman in Nigeria who was born in Jos, Plateau on October 11th, 1962 presently 63 years old and was raised in Ikorodu, Lagos state. She is Yoruba. According to an interview she had in 2024, where she recalled being the sports perfects at ST. Teresea’s College and representing western state in major track events the 400m, 800m and one -mile races1 . This showed her drive for leadership and discipline from an early stage of her life. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English from the university of Ife which is ow known as Obafemi Awolowo University and later furthered a Postgraduate Diploma and a Master’s Degree in Mass Communication at the University of Lagos. She also furthered a degree in Public Administration program at Havard University’s Kennedy school of Government, which she later credited this global exposure as pivotal in preparing her for the transition from media to political life2 .

**Abike Dabiri and Journalism**

She gained her first national prominence through her role as a journalist with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) for 15 years, she began with NTA channel, *Tejuosho,* then worked hard gained a second report on network news, then got sent to the office of the first lady Mrs Mariam Babaginda which she covered for five years. She majorly focused on human interest stories, often spotlighting the neglected and vulnerable sectors of Nigerian society with a good teacher who is named Frank Olize. One of her most impactful investigations that brought her into a different limelight when she was a journalist was the story of “Mary the Miracle Baby”, a child born with a rare condition and abandoned at birth. She followed the case for eight years, personally contributing to Mary’s medical care, education and well-being even till date2 . This work earned her the Nigerian Media Merit Award for Best presenter of the Year and the UNICEF child- friendly Award, among others. Through investigative journalism, she brought attention to social injustices, particularly those affecting women and children, solidifying her reputation as the “Mother Teresa of the Tube”. Her style could be described as advocacy journalism in the sense that she did not give reports but also follow up on them, seeking solutions, mobilizing support and keeping the public engaged with ongoing stories. She was not just a journalist but a public advocate and humanitarian.

Her transition into politics was due to her knowledge in leadership from the leadership program at Harvard University’s Kennedy school of Government and encouragement from late Bishop Matthew Kukah and also some political leaders even including our present president Bola Ahmed Tinubu and his wife Remi Tinubu, her grassroots engagement in Ikorodu helped motivate her which led to her contesting for a seat in the House of Representatives in 2003, representing the Ikorodu Federal Constituency, that she got elected during these times she was married to Kola Dabiri with two sons which during this period also brought about her divorce with him, though she met Erewa who had two sons and eventually got married to him transitioning her into Abike Dabiri-Erewa with a beautiful blended family, her tenure was from 2003-2015 which she commented by saying ”Politics is dirty, but if you are not dirty, you don’t have to play dirty. You can stick to your principles and still make an impact”. She served as Chairperson of the House Committee on Media & Publicity and later the House Committee on Diaspora Affairs, where she became a strong voice for Nigerians abroad and also sponsored bills such as Freedom of Information (FOI), Violence Against Persons (Prohibition), Nigerians with Disabilities Bill, Nigerian Diaspora Commission Bill and others. She reflects a being of honor, dignity and discipline where she voluntarily stepped down after her 12years on seat3 . Then she was appointed as Senior Special Assistant to the President on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora (2016- 2018) and later got the position of the pioneer Chairman/CEO of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM).

**Religion and Family**

Abike Dabiri-Erewa is a devout Muslim born in Jos to Alhaji and Alhaja Ashfa Erogbogbo, her family name and title especially in Ikorodu reflects her strong Islamic background throughout her life. Though she is not overly vocal with her religion due to the position she occupies that requires her to be very diplomatic with every belief due to her public service.

She was married to Dr.kola Dabiri and had two sons with him that explains why she has two surnames attached to her name but due to some drifts they got a divorce where Abike Dabiri said and I quote in an interview that “The marriage didn’t end abruptly, it ended over time, as her ex moved abroad and never returned. She described it as painful, but she didn’t dwell on it, focusing on her children and career. Though they occasionally maintain communication when necessary4.

In 2007, she married Segun Erewa, they met two years earlier in south Africa. Bringing about the combination of the two surnames but she is still presently married to Erewa. He had two children from a previous relationship but Abike Dabiri-Erewa has no children with him but does not stop the family from being a beautiful blended family of four boys. The marriage has been described as harmonious and supportive, with Abike frequently expressing love and administration for her husband in public5. On Valentine’s Day she publicly showed affection towards her husband on her Instagram page with a Yoruba love song signifying their love. Her son Oladipupo, describes the marriage as exemplary, stating that his mother and stepfather showed that when two people genuinely care for one another, nothing can affect their union6.

**2.2 The Achievement of Abike Dabiri-Erewa**

Abike Dabiri-Erewa is a woman who has achieved a lot to relations of the world even before she got into politics in her early years. She was vocal in issues relating to child welfare, women’s rights, education and access to justice, she was referred to as the “voice of the voiceless” as she was also one of the voices in the early parliament pushing for stronger government action during the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in 20147. As a three-term member of the House of Representatives 2003-2015, she personally sponsored scholarships for indigent students in Ikorodu and other parts of Lagos state. These scholarships covered primary, secondary and tertiary education for hundreds of students, many of whom were first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2011, she launched a comprehensive education support program under the Abike Dabiri Foundation, through which students received tuition fees, books, school supplies and mentorship opportunities. She frequently emphasized that education was the best tool for empowerment, especially in underserved communities like rural parts of Ikorodu. She has also organized annual spelling bee competitions, book donations and essay contests in local schools to encourage literacy and academic excellence with winners often receiving prizes such as gadgets, cash and educational sponsorships. In her words she says” I grew up in Ikorodu and I know the challenges people here face. I want every child to know that no matter their background, they can rise and achieve something with the right help”8 . She also empowered women and youth, especially unemployed graduates and single mothers. Through her Youth and Women Empowerment Scheme (YWES), launched during her time in the National Assembly, she trained hundreds in vocational skills such as fashion design, catering, bead-making, ICT, and business development. Graduates of these programs often received start-up kits and micro-grants to begin their own businesses. This approach helped reduce unemployment among the youth in her constituency and promoted self-reliance among women. She also facilitated free computer training centers in Ikorodu and Surulere and donated sewing machines, grinding machines and other tools to local women’s cooperatives9.

She also supported healthcare centers to portray her humanitarian side. She regularly organized free medical outreach programs, where residents received free diagnosis, treatment, drugs, and even minor surgeries. These health camps were often run in collaboration with medical professionals and NGOs, serving thousands of constituents. In 2010, she partnered with Chevon Nigeria Ltd. and Medical Women Association of Nigeria (MWAN) to provide free breast and cervical cancer screenings in Ikorodu, raising awareness about women’s health issues. She also supported maternal care programs, including the donation of delivery kits and antenatal items to primary health centers10 . She played a key role in sponsoring the Freedom of Information Act, which gave citizens legal access to public records and promoted governmental transparency. She also sponsored the press and journalism council Bill sought to improve ethical standards in journalism while safeguarding the rights of media professionals11.

**2.3 Leadership style and political experience**

Abike Dabiri-Erewa is a woman whose leadership style portrays compassion in leadership in a way that carries everyone along. According to her Senior Special Assistant he says her form of leadership style is the one that motivates and encourages those around her to work hard, value knowledge, be diplomatic and empower people with leadership skills12. Her early years where she worked with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) paved a way to deal with social issues such as poverty, abuse and injustice in rural and urban communities across Nigeria. She became a member of Nigeria’s House of Representatives representing Ikorodu Constituency, which she used to promote social justice and protect human rights. She has sponsored or supported a range of human – centered bills, such as the freedom of Information Bill which advanced transparency and citizen empowerment, it was not just her that proposed the bill others such as Hon. Nduka Irabor, Senator Ayogu Eze and Abike Dabiri -Erewa but she was one of the strongest voices for the FOI Bill during her time in the National Assembly. She helped advocate and defend the bill, especially during its passage in the 7th Assembly from 1999 to 2011 signed by president Goodluck Jonathan becoming the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)13. She played a key role in sponsoring the Freedom of Information Act, which gave citizens legal access to public records and promoted governmental transparency. She also sponsored the press and journalism council Bill sought to improve ethical standards in journalism while safeguarding the rights of media professionals14. The Nigerian Diaspora Commission Bill was sponsored by her, which became the foundation of the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) though after several legislative delays, the bill was finally passed by the National Assembly and signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari in June 201715. The Anti-Stigma Bill for people living with HIV/AIDS, which aimed at ending workplace discrimination16.

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