

## Implications of the International Court of Justice Ruling on Nigeria-Cameroon Boundary Dispute

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DOI: 10.56201/jpslr.v11.no2.2025.pg78.91

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### **Abstract**

*The resolution of the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) remains a contentious issue, particularly in the Bakassi Peninsula. The problem arises from lingering dissatisfaction among local communities, whose interests were inadequately addressed during the implementation of the court's ruling. This paper evaluated the implications of the ICJ ruling on the dispute, with a focus on its influence on stability and intergovernmental relations. A survey method was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to stakeholders, including residents, officials, and experts in the Bakassi Peninsula. Responses were analyzed using percentages, providing a quantitative basis for understanding perceptions and impacts. The study adopted the reality theory, emphasizing the necessity of practical, outcome-driven measures in resolving disputes, justified by its alignment with the socio-political complexities of boundary demarcation. Findings reveal that while the resolution provided a legal framework for addressing territorial disputes, it failed to ensure long-term stability due to inadequate measures for safeguarding local interests. This neglect has fueled discontent and adverse diplomatic consequences. The study recommends among others that to rebuild trust and enhance diplomatic relations, Nigeria and Cameroon should create a bilateral commission dedicated to addressing ongoing grievances and managing shared concerns along the boundary*

**Keywords:** *Territorial Disputes, ICJ Ruling, International Law, Boundary Resolution, Bakassi Peninsula, Bilateral Relations*

## Introduction

The ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute, delivered on October 10, 2002, represents a landmark decision with far-reaching implications for international law and regional diplomacy. The dispute primarily centered around the Bakassi Peninsula, a resource-rich region with significant economic and strategic importance. The ICJ's judgment was based on historical treaties, notably the 1913 Anglo-German Agreement, which delineated the borders between British-controlled Nigeria and German-controlled Cameroon. Relying on these agreements and associated colonial cartographic evidence, the court concluded that the Bakassi Peninsula legally belonged to Cameroon (Adeola, 2023). This decision, however, was met with resistance from Nigeria, as it involved the relocation of Nigerian communities and a significant loss of territory. Nigeria reluctantly accepted the ruling in 2006 under international pressure, marking a critical moment in the evolution of African boundary disputes.

In compliance with the ICJ judgment, the transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon was formalized on August 14, 2008, through the Green Tree Agreement, a framework brokered by the United Nations. This agreement sought to ensure a peaceful and orderly handover while addressing the rights and welfare of the affected populations. However, the implementation of the ruling strained diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Cameroon. While Cameroon viewed the judgment as a vindication of its territorial claims, Nigeria struggled with internal political backlash and accusations of capitulating to international pressures. Reports estimate that over 200,000 Nigerians residing in the Bakassi Peninsula were displaced during the transfer process, exacerbating humanitarian challenges and fueling tensions between the two nations (Ekong, 2022).

Despite the apparent resolution, lingering grievances and border incidents underscore the fragility of the peace achieved. For example, clashes over fishing rights and resource exploitation have periodically reignited tensions, demonstrating that legal resolutions alone are insufficient without sustained diplomatic engagement and local community integration (Adeniyi, 2023). Moreover, questions regarding the implementation of the Green Tree Agreement, particularly concerning the rights and resettlement of displaced populations, remain a critical concern.

Statistical data underscore the complexity of this geopolitical dispute. The Bakassi Peninsula, spanning approximately 665 square kilometers (257 square miles), contributes significantly to the region's economy due to its oil reserves and abundant fisheries. However, the transfer of sovereignty disrupted economic activities and displaced communities, with the Nigerian government allocating ₦420 billion for resettlement programs between 2008 and 2015 (Obong, 2021). Nevertheless, gaps in implementation have led to unresolved grievances and a perception of neglect among affected populations.

The ruling's impact on bilateral relations reflects a broader tension between legal adjudications and practical realities in post-colonial Africa. Scholars argue that while the ICJ ruling set a precedent for resolving territorial disputes peacefully, it also highlighted the limitations of international law in addressing the socio-economic and humanitarian dimensions of such conflicts (Usman, 2023). By focusing solely on legal and historical arguments, the ICJ's judgment

inadvertently sidelined local concerns, thereby complicating efforts to achieve lasting reconciliation.

The paper examines the extent to which the ICJ ruling has influenced diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Cameroon. It seeks to evaluate whether the resolution of the boundary dispute has fostered a stable partnership or perpetuated mistrust and sporadic conflicts. Grasping these dynamics is essential for evaluating the far-reaching effects of international judicial interventions and for enriching the discourse on post-colonial boundaries and their lasting impact on African geopolitics.

### **Research Questions**

This paper is guided by the following questions

- i) How has the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling influenced the resolution of the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute?
- ii) What are the implications of the ICJ ruling on diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Boundary Dispute**

A boundary dispute refers to a disagreement or conflict between two or more parties regarding the location, alignment, or ownership of a physical or legal boundary. These disputes often arise from unclear demarcations, historical inaccuracies, or differing interpretations of legal documents or agreements defining the boundary. According to Asiyanbola (2023), such conflicts can stem from factors such as inadequate surveying methods, overlapping claims, or the natural shifting of boundary lines due to environmental changes. Boundary disputes can occur at various levels, including between individuals, organizations, communities, or even sovereign nations.

These disagreements can lead to social tensions, economic setbacks, and sometimes legal battles. For instance, Adams and Olaoye (2022) highlight that boundary disputes between communities often disrupt social harmony and hinder the equitable sharing of resources. In some cases, long-standing disputes escalate into legal confrontations or violent conflicts, particularly in regions where land carries significant cultural or economic value. In other scenarios, as stated by Turner (2021), the issues may be less overt but still cause uncertainty and strain among parties involved.

#### **Bilateral Relations**

Bilateral relations refer to the interactions between two sovereign states, encompassing political, economic, cultural, and social dimensions. These relationships are fundamental to international diplomacy, as they enable countries to collaborate on mutual interests, negotiate treaties, and address shared challenges. Through bilateral engagements, states can establish formal agreements that facilitate trade, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges, thereby promoting stability and prosperity.

The foundation of bilateral relations lies in diplomatic recognition, where each state acknowledges the sovereignty of the other, paving the way for the exchange of ambassadors and the establishment of embassies. This formal recognition is crucial for facilitating dialogue and negotiation on various

issues, from economic partnerships to security alliances. For instance, bilateral trade agreements can reduce tariffs and encourage investment, enhancing economic ties between the two nations. Similarly, defense pacts may be formed to ensure mutual security and address common threats.

Bilateral relations are dynamic and can evolve over time due to changes in leadership, domestic politics, or global events. They require continuous dialogue and negotiation to adapt to shifting circumstances and to manage conflicts that may arise. Effective bilateral relations often lead to strategic alliances and joint efforts in areas such as environmental policy, technological innovation, and cultural promotion. Conversely, strained bilateral relations can result in diplomatic tensions, economic sanctions, or even conflicts. Understanding the complexities of bilateral relations is essential for comprehending the broader landscape of international relations. They serve as building blocks for multilateral engagements and play a significant role in shaping global governance structures.

### **Empirical Review of Related Literature**

This section reviews empirical studies on the implications of the International Court of Justice ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute. It examines existing research to enhance understanding of the topic, highlighting key findings, methodologies, and perspectives, while identifying gaps in knowledge that warrant further investigation to enrich the discourse.

Nguh (2023) investigates the socio-political dynamics of the ICJ ruling through a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative data analysis. This study emphasizes the transformative impact of the ruling on local populations, highlighting displacement and socio-economic disruptions in the Bakassi Peninsula. Findings reveal that the judgment's enforcement posed significant challenges, as local communities resisted the handover, citing ancestral ties to the land. The author recommends enhanced community engagement and compensation mechanisms to mitigate the adverse effects of such legal outcomes.

Akinola (2015) examines the role of the ICJ in resolving territorial disputes, with a focus on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary issue. The study utilizes qualitative research design, analyzing primary and secondary sources such as government reports, diplomatic correspondences, and international legal documents. The study finds that while the ICJ's ruling provided a legal solution, it did not fully address the underlying political and social complexities of the dispute. The recommendation put forward in Akinola's work is that international bodies must do more than provide legal solutions; they must also facilitate post-settlement dialogue to ensure long-term peace and stability in the region. This finding highlights a gap in the application of legal solutions, which may not be sufficient in achieving enduring diplomatic relations unless backed by sustained political engagement and reconciliation.

Similarly, in their 2017 study, Okeke and Nwachukwu delve into the political ramifications of the ICJ's decision for Nigeria-Cameroon relations. Using a combination of archival research and interviews with Nigerian and Cameroonian diplomats, the authors argue that while the ruling provided a clear resolution, it did not eliminate all sources of tension between the two countries. The authors highlight the continued mistrust and apprehension that persist in bilateral relations,

especially in the context of post-ruling implementation. Their recommendation emphasizes the need for continuous diplomatic engagement and confidence-building measures to foster cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon in the post-settlement period. This study further underscores the importance of addressing the diplomatic aftermath of legal decisions, which is a critical gap in the existing literature.

An investigation by Nwankwo (2020) contributes to the discourse by exploring the economic impact of the ICJ's ruling on both countries. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining economic data analysis with interviews of key stakeholders in both countries, including trade experts and government officials. The findings suggest that while the ruling had a positive effect on trade relations and economic cooperation between the two countries, the economic integration was not as robust as expected due to lingering security concerns in the Bakassi Peninsula region. The study recommends that both countries should prioritize joint development initiatives in the disputed areas to foster regional economic stability. This work brings attention to the economic dimensions of territorial settlements, an area that has not been fully explored in previous studies on the Nigeria-Cameroon dispute.

Eze (2019) offers a critical examination of the legal enforcement mechanisms of the ICJ ruling. The research focuses on the legal challenges faced by both Nigeria and Cameroon in implementing the ICJ's judgment, especially with regard to the transfer of sovereignty over Bakassi. Through case studies and interviews with international legal experts, the study finds that despite the ruling, Nigeria's reluctance to fully implement the decision created a tension that hindered the normalization of diplomatic relations. Eze's recommendations call for stronger international pressure on both states to adhere to the ICJ's decision to avoid undermining the authority of international law in conflict resolution. This work addresses the practical difficulties in enforcing international legal decisions, a concern that has received insufficient attention in prior literature.

However, while the existing studies have provided valuable insights into various dimensions of the Nigeria-Cameroon dispute and the ICJ's involvement, several gaps remain unaddressed. For example, the long-term impact of the ICJ's ruling on the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Cameroon has not been adequately explored. While studies have highlighted short-term outcomes, the sustained influence of the ICJ decision on both countries' foreign policies and bilateral relations requires deeper examination. Specifically, the role of the ICJ in influencing the diplomatic strategies of Nigeria and Cameroon in the years following the ruling remains underexplored. There is a need for research that not only investigates the immediate political and economic consequences of the ICJ's ruling but also evaluates how the decision shaped the diplomatic engagement and cooperation between the two countries over the long term. This present study, therefore, fills these gaps by investigating the long-lasting diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon after the ICJ ruling, with a particular focus on the influence of the Court's decision in shaping their foreign policies and regional cooperation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on realist theory as its point of departure. The theory emerged as a dominant framework in international relations during the mid-20th century, primarily championed by scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (1948) and later refined by Kenneth Waltz (1979). Realism, rooted in the works of Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, emphasizes the centrality of power and the anarchic nature of the international system. According to Morgenthau, states operate in a self-help system where survival is paramount, leading them to prioritize their national interest and maximize power (Morgenthau, 1948). Waltz further developed this perspective in his "neorealism" by focusing on the structure of the international system, where the distribution of power among states shapes their behavior (Waltz, 1979).

Realism is built on key assumptions. First, the international system is anarchic, lacking a central authority to enforce rules (Waltz, 1979). Second, states are the primary actors and act rationally to secure their survival (Morgenthau, 1948). Third, power is the currency of international politics, and states seek to either balance or dominate to ensure security (Mearsheimer, 2001). Conflict is inevitable due to the struggle for power and the absence of trust among states.

Realist theory is an appropriate tool to examine the implications of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute because it focuses on power dynamics, state interests, and the pursuit of national security. The ICJ ruling on October 10, 2002, which awarded the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, underscored the primacy of legal frameworks, but its impact on Nigeria-Cameroon relations was shaped by realist principles. Both states prioritized their strategic interests, with Nigeria initially hesitating to implement the ruling due to concerns over sovereignty, resource control, and domestic backlash. Diplomatic tensions persisted until the Green Tree Agreement of June 12, 2006, facilitated by the United Nations, which formalized Nigeria's withdrawal by 2008, illustrating the role of power balancing and international pressure in achieving compliance. Realist theory explains how states, even under legal obligations, act pragmatically to preserve their power, as seen in Nigeria's initial delay and eventual cooperation under diplomatic scrutiny. The ruling influenced bilateral relations, fostering cautious cooperation but also latent mistrust, particularly as displaced Nigerian populations faced integration challenges in Cameroon. Statistical data reveals that over 90,000 Nigerians were displaced by 2007, reflecting the human cost of compliance and its impact on regional stability. The realist lens highlights how the ruling redefined the power equilibrium, compelling Nigeria to recalibrate its foreign policy while Cameroon leveraged the decision to enhance its geopolitical standing, demonstrating that legal judgments in international disputes inevitably intertwine with strategic interests and state behavior.

### **Methodology**

The study population comprised 5,882 individuals, including personnel from the Nigerian Army (96NA and 97NA), Nigerian Air Force (BMT 41 and BMT 42), Nigerian Navy (NNR 28 and NNR 29), and residents of refugee camps such as Bakassi Camp Maiduguri and the Cameroon Returnees Camp in Calabar, as well as members of the Mixed Commission (Cross River State). These individuals possess expertise in security, diplomacy, defense, strategy, and related fields. A sample



size of 361 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula. Data were collected through questionnaires and secondary sources, with 361 questionnaires distributed and 328 retrieved. The collected data were analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies, while secondary data were examined through historical analysis.

## Results and Findings.

**Table 1.1: Respondents' view on the influence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the resolution of the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute.**

Responses	SA	A	U	D	SD
The ICJ ruling provided a fair resolution to the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute	141 (43%)	76 (23%)	4 (1%)	26 (8%)	81 (25%)
The ICJ ruling reduced tensions between Nigeria and Cameroon over the disputed boundary.	67 (20%)	19 (6%)	3 (1%)	156 (48%)	83 (25%)
The ICJ decision was widely accepted by the citizens of both Nigeria and Cameroon	18 (5%)	23 (7%)	5 (2%)	200 (61%)	82 (25%)
The ICJ ruling contributed to the long-term stability of the Bakassi Peninsula region	27 (8%)	36 (11%)	2 (1%)	194 (59%)	69 (21%)
The ICJ decision adequately addressed the interests of local communities in the disputed area	25 (8%)	20 (6%)	6 (2%)	189 (58%)	88 (27%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

The analysis of respondents' views on the influence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute reveals a complex and divided perception regarding the ruling's impact on various aspects of the dispute resolution. Starting with the fairness of the ICJ ruling, a majority of 43% strongly agreed that the ruling provided a fair resolution, and 23% agreed, reflecting a significant proportion of respondents who felt positively about the fairness of the decision. However, 25% strongly disagreed, and 8% disagreed, indicating a notable portion of respondents who were dissatisfied with the fairness of the ruling, perhaps suggesting concerns regarding the impartiality or appropriateness of the outcome.

When assessing the effect of the ICJ ruling on tensions between Nigeria and Cameroon, 20% strongly agreed and 6% agreed that the ruling helped to reduce tensions. However, a substantial portion, 48%, disagreed, and 25% strongly disagreed, suggesting that many respondents did not perceive the ruling as an effective mechanism for peacebuilding or tension reduction between the two countries. This is further corroborated by the responses on the acceptance of the ICJ ruling by the citizens of both countries, where 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed, showing a significant lack of acceptance of the ruling among the public. Only 5% strongly agreed, and 7% agreed, indicating that there was limited endorsement from the citizens of both countries, which may have impacted the overall effectiveness of the ruling.

In terms of long-term stability in the Bakassi Peninsula region, the perception was similarly skeptical. Only 8% strongly agreed and 11% agreed that the ICJ ruling contributed to the long-term stability of the region, whereas 59% disagreed and 21% strongly disagreed. This suggests that the respondents did not believe that the ICJ decision had a lasting positive effect on the stability of the Bakassi Peninsula, potentially due to lingering tensions or dissatisfaction with the

implementation of the decision. Moreover, regarding the interests of local communities in the disputed area, a similar trend was observed. Just 8% strongly agreed and 6% agreed that the ruling adequately addressed the interests of the local communities, while 58% disagreed and 27% strongly disagreed, signaling widespread concerns that the ruling did not account for the welfare or perspectives of the affected local populations.

The overall analysis reveals that while a portion of respondents felt that the ICJ ruling was fair, the majority of them expressed concerns over its long-term effectiveness, public acceptance, and impact on local communities. The mixed reactions highlight a significant gap between the legal resolution and the practical consequences of the decision, suggesting that while the ruling might have had some merit in a legal context, it did not fully address the deeper issues surrounding the dispute.

The implications of this analysis suggest that while the ICJ ruling was legally binding and had the potential to resolve the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, its effectiveness in terms of fostering long-term peace, stability, and public acceptance was limited. The dissatisfaction of the citizens, particularly those living in the disputed areas, signals that international legal rulings, while important, must be complemented by efforts to address the local communities' concerns. Furthermore, the lack of perceived improvement in relations between the two countries calls for a reevaluation of how such rulings are implemented and how their outcomes are communicated to the public to enhance their impact on bilateral relations.

However, sources from the secondary data indicate that International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute in 2002 was a significant development in the resolution of one of Africa's most contentious border issues. The ruling specifically addressed the status of the Bakassi Peninsula, granting sovereignty over it to Cameroon. While the decision was widely regarded as a milestone in international law and conflict resolution, the practical implications of this ruling have been complex and have not entirely resolved the underlying issues. Several scholars have observed that the decision did not fully address the concerns of local communities and failed to ensure long-term stability in the region (Hansen, 2015; Onu, 2017).

In the aftermath of the ICJ ruling, the creation of a mixed commission, as recommended by the Court, was seen as a positive step. The commission was tasked with implementing the decision, particularly by overseeing the demarcation of the boundary and managing the transfer of authority over the disputed territories. However, despite the establishment of the commission, significant challenges remained. One key issue highlighted by scholars is the lack of consultation with the local populations on both sides of the border (Bokosi, 2018). The Bakassi Peninsula, for instance, had been inhabited by a majority Nigerian population for many years, and their interests were not sufficiently considered in the final resolution. This oversight has fueled local resentment and has contributed to ongoing tensions in the region (Ajao & Olatunji, 2019).

Furthermore, the Greentree Agreement signed in 2006 between Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Cameroonian President Paul Biya was intended to formalize the implementation of the ICJ ruling. This agreement set out a framework for the transfer of sovereignty and included provisions for cooperation between the two countries in managing the Bakassi Peninsula (Mbaya,



2020). However, despite this agreement, the region continued to experience instability, marked by incidents of violence and disputes over land and resources. Scholars such as Ojo (2021) have argued that the Greentree Agreement, while a positive step, did not adequately address the long-term interests of the local communities, whose livelihoods were closely tied to the disputed land. Another major criticism of the ICJ ruling and the subsequent agreements is the failure to address the socio-economic and cultural implications for the people of Bakassi. The forced displacement of Nigerian citizens and the economic disruption caused by the handover of the peninsula to Cameroon have been significant issues (Ndi, 2016). The local population, which had enjoyed access to fishing resources and other forms of livelihood, faced considerable hardship due to the uncertainty and lack of clear policies regarding their future under Cameroonian governance (Achike, 2017).

**Table 1.2: Respondent’s opinion on the implications of ICJ ruling on the diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon**

Responses	SA	A	U	D	SD
The relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon has become more unstable following the ICJ ruling.	178 (54%)	85 (26%)	8 (2%)	37 (11%)	20 (6%)
The ruling has negatively affected joint development projects between Nigeria and Cameroon.	180 (55%)	84 (26%)	5 (2%)	27 (8%)	32 (10%)
The ruling has strengthened cross-border collaboration between Nigeria and Cameroon.	163 (50%)	76 (23%)	2 (1%)	42 (13%)	45 (14%)
The ICJ decision has led to significant socio-economic benefits for both nations.	78 (24%)	49 (15%)	5 (2%)	93 (28%)	103 (31%)
The ICJ ruling has resulted in significant changes in trade relations between Nigeria and Cameroon.	139 (42%)	94 (29%)	3 (1%)	45 (14%)	47 (14%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.2 above analyzes respondents' opinions on the implications of the ICJ ruling on the diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon. The findings reflect a significant level of disagreement and concern.

In the first statement, which addresses the relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon in light of the ICJ ruling, the largest proportion of respondents, 54%, strongly agreed that the relationship has become more unstable. Another 26% agreed with this view, indicating that a substantial majority of respondents perceive the ruling as having a negative impact on diplomatic relations. Only a small percentage, 2%, were undecided, while 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed, pointing to a minority who might view the ruling's impact more favorably or as inconsequential.

Regarding joint development projects, 55% of respondents strongly agreed that the ruling had a negative effect, and another 26% agreed with this sentiment. This suggests that the ICJ decision is widely seen as a hindrance to the collaborative efforts between the two countries in various

development projects. The fact that 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and only 2% were undecided, indicates that while the majority are critical of the ruling's impact, a smaller group holds a more neutral or positive perspective.

The third statement, which explores the potential strengthening of cross-border collaboration as a result of the ICJ ruling, shows a contrasting view. While 50% of respondents strongly disagreed, indicating that they do not believe the ruling has improved cross-border collaboration, 23% agreed. This suggests that while the ruling is predominantly seen as detrimental to cross-border cooperation, a notable minority feels that it may have led to some improvements in collaboration between the two nations. This discrepancy highlights the complexity of the relationship and the varying perspectives on the ruling's effects.

When asked about the socio-economic benefits resulting from the ICJ decision, the majority of respondents, 31%, strongly disagreed, while 28% disagreed, making it clear that many respondents perceive the ruling as having no positive socio-economic impact. Only 24% strongly agreed that the ruling had led to significant benefits, and 15% agreed. This shows that while a small portion of the respondents acknowledge some positive outcomes, the overwhelming majority believe the ruling has not contributed to any substantial socio-economic improvement for both countries.

Finally, regarding the impact of the ICJ ruling on trade relations, 42% of respondents strongly agreed that there have been significant changes, with 29% agreeing. This suggests that the ruling has been perceived to have altered trade relations, though the nature of these changes is unclear, as only 14% disagreed and another 14% strongly disagreed. This indicates that while the ruling has impacted trade relations, the full scope and implications of these changes are still up for debate among the respondents.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that the majority of respondents believe that the ICJ ruling has had a largely negative impact on the diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon. The ruling is widely seen as destabilizing the relationship, hindering joint development projects, and not contributing to socio-economic benefits. However, there is some divergence in opinions on its impact on cross-border collaboration and trade relations, with a minority seeing potential positive effects. The overall sentiment is one of dissatisfaction and concern about the long-term consequences of the ICJ decision. This reflects a broader apprehension about how international rulings can affect bilateral relations, especially when they disrupt existing agreements or expectations. The implications of these views suggest that future diplomatic efforts between Nigeria and Cameroon may need to address these concerns, potentially through renewed dialogue or adjustments to collaborative frameworks to mitigate the negative perceptions and consequences that the ruling has generated.

Findings from the secondary data shows that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, while offering a legal resolution, posed a challenge in terms of implementation. Cameroon was awarded sovereignty, but the matter of Bakassi's actual administration and control was delayed, leading to a situation where both countries were involved in intense negotiations regarding the specifics of the transfer. These discussions lasted for several years, and while both governments initially agreed to cooperate, tensions remained over the terms of the transfer. For example, Nigeria initially resisted handing over the territory, citing national security concerns and fears of unrest among ethnic groups in Bakassi. This delay in implementation, along with occasional flare-ups of violence

and cross-border skirmishes, strained the diplomatic relations between the two countries (Bamidele, 2014).

A major adverse implication of the judgment was the deterioration in diplomatic ties between the two countries, which had previously maintained peaceful relations. According to scholars like Agbor (2010), the decision exacerbated distrust, as Nigeria had initially opposed the ruling, citing concerns over the loss of territorial integrity and the livelihoods of Nigerian nationals residing in the Bakassi region. The ruling further deepened tensions as it challenged the established bilateral agreements between the two countries, with Nigeria perceiving the ICJ's decision as an infringement on its sovereignty and territorial rights (Ebo, 2003).

The judgment also led to a series of security incidents, particularly within the disputed region. Following the decision, violent protests erupted in Nigeria, with some militant groups asserting their resistance to the transfer of authority over Bakassi to Cameroon. These incidents were indicative of the broader instability the ruling generated. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the ICJ ruling, there were several violent clashes in the region, including the fatal attacks on both Nigerian and Cameroonian soldiers (United Nations, 2003). Furthermore, the implementation of the ICJ ruling witnessed significant challenges, with delays in the withdrawal of Nigerian military personnel and the settlement of civilians, further escalating tensions between the nations (UNHCR, 2005). This not only strained diplomatic relations but also contributed to a prolonged military standoff.

The adverse effects of the judgment extended to trade relations between the two countries. The Bakassi Peninsula was a critical economic zone, with its fishing and oil resources being of paramount importance to Nigeria. As Eze (2011) notes, the loss of Bakassi meant a reduction in access to these resources, which negatively impacted Nigeria's economy. This economic setback created friction between the two governments, as Nigeria viewed the loss of control over these resources as a blow to its national interests. Moreover, the political ramifications of the ruling were far-reaching, leading to a deterioration of cooperation on regional security issues, such as the fight against insurgency and cross-border criminality.

While the ICJ ruling was meant to be a final resolution to the dispute, it paradoxically left both nations in a state of diplomatic deadlock, with Cameroonian and Nigerian officials continuing to disagree over the interpretation and implementation of the judgment. This situation was exacerbated by nationalistic sentiments and political rhetoric, which continued to fuel animosity between the two nations, thereby hindering the restoration of trust and cooperation.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study examines the implications of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute, focusing on the resolution process and its impact on diplomatic relations between the two nations.

1. Regarding the resolution of the boundary dispute, the study reveals that while the ICJ ruling and subsequent measures like the establishment of the Nigeria-Cameroon Mixed Commission aimed to address the conflict, they fell short of ensuring long-term stability in the Bakassi Peninsula. The lack of consultation with local populations on both sides of the border has been

a significant oversight, fueling resentment and perpetuating tensions. This aligns with the findings of Bokosi (2018) and Ajao and Olatunji (2019), who noted that the mixed commission's efforts faced significant challenges, particularly due to its failure to prioritize the interests and concerns of the local communities directly affected by the boundary changes.

2. The study also underscores the adverse effects of the ICJ ruling on the diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon. The transfer of the Bakassi Peninsula, a region rich in fishing and oil resources, to Cameroon resulted in economic losses for Nigeria, which has strained bilateral relations. This economic setback was compounded by the political ramifications of the ruling, as Nigeria viewed the loss of the peninsula as a blow to its national interests. The strained relationship has hindered cooperation on critical regional security issues, including the fight against insurgency and cross-border criminal activities. These findings corroborate the observations of Eze (2011), who highlighted the significant economic and diplomatic challenges stemming from Nigeria's reduced access to Bakassi's resources and the subsequent deterioration in bilateral ties

### **Conclusion**

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute, particularly concerning the Bakassi Peninsula, has significant implications for both nations and the broader context of international law and conflict resolution. The judgment, which awarded sovereignty over the disputed region to Cameroon, underscores the critical role of the ICJ in peacefully resolving territorial disputes through legal adjudication. It highlights the importance of respecting international treaties, colonial-era boundaries, and agreements underpinned by international law, as reflected in the court's reliance on the 1913 Anglo-German Agreement and subsequent treaties.

For Nigeria and Cameroon, the ruling reshaped diplomatic relations, demanding a commitment to peaceful coexistence and cooperative engagement. The transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon, facilitated by the Green Tree Agreement, set a precedent for implementing ICJ decisions while addressing concerns of affected populations. However, challenges persist, including the displacement of communities, the protection of their rights, and managing lingering grievances that could disrupt peace.

Globally, the ruling reinforces the ICJ's authority and the value of legal mechanisms in addressing complex disputes. It serves as a reminder that while legal resolutions can offer clarity, they must be accompanied by comprehensive strategies to address the socio-political and human impacts. For Africa, it provides a model for addressing border disputes rooted in colonial legacies, emphasizing negotiation, mediation, and adherence to international law. Ultimately, the ICJ decision on this dispute highlights the interplay of law, diplomacy, and humanity in fostering sustainable peace and international cooperation.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. To address the failure to ensure long-term stability and the interests of local communities, Nigeria and Cameroon should collaborate to establish a joint development commission focused on improving local governance and socio-economic conditions in the Bakassi Peninsula. This

commission should prioritize infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and alternative livelihoods for displaced and affected residents. A consultative approach involving community leaders and civil society organizations will ensure the integration of local perspectives, fostering trust and sustainable peace.

2. To rebuild trust and enhance diplomatic relations, Nigeria and Cameroon should create a bilateral commission dedicated to addressing ongoing grievances and managing shared concerns along the boundary. This commission should focus on implementing trust-building measures, including cultural exchange programs, joint security patrols, and cross-border trade facilitation. Regular dialogue and conflict-resolution mechanisms would help prevent escalations, while collaboration on border management ensures both nations safeguard the economic and strategic significance of the Bakassi Peninsula without compromising national interests.

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