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Recreating the Village Abroad: The Role of Diasporic Networks fostering Entrepreneurship in Chicago and Paris among West African Populations

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Abstract

This thesis explores how diaspora networks foster entrepreneurship and community development among Nigerian migrants in Chicago and Senegalese migrants in Paris, with the goal of identifying policy interventions that can replicate these networks to better support West African entrepreneurs. Using a qualitative, interview-based, and comparative approach, the research analyzes how barriers, such as limited access to cultural organizations, inadequate training resources, and complex bureaucratic systems, can impact entrepreneurial success. Despite their different urban contexts, both groups rely heavily on social networks and cultural ties to overcome these challenges. The study offers adaptable policy recommendations that prioritize inclusion, visibility, and institutional support. Guided by the ethos that “it takes a village,” this research highlights how cities can create more equitable and inclusive environments for migrants by centering the lived experiences of West African communities.

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Introduction

"It takes a village." This was an all-too familiar phrase I heard in my Nigerian household concerning what it was like for my parents to be integrated into American culture. They immigrated to the United States just over two decades ago, yet becoming part of American society has been an ongoing process. It was far from easy, if anything, it was very challenging doing so. aFrom navigating unfamiliar employment systems to figuring out the right schools for their children, the path was filled with uncertainty. They were also concerned about assimilating into American culture without neglecting their Nigerian values as well as cultural norms. Integration became a balancing act of preserving their original cultural identity while still adapting to a completely new social landscape. At times, the identities of the two cultures would clash, making it difficult for my parents to blend into the American cultural identity and feel alone at times. However, through the support of family and friends who had immigrated before them, they were able to "find their village," their community, that made the United States feel like home.

This is my parents' personal story but it is one of many other immigrants placed in similar positions. In an increasingly globalized world, maintaining one's cultural heritage in a completely new environment is a struggle that is becoming more and more apparent in immigrant communities, especially in similar West African ones like my parents' experience. With a common motivation of West Africans moving to foreign countries being financial stability (Migration Data Portal, 2023), it begs the question of how they are able to do so while navigating a completely new culture that may make such a task daunting. As someone who is interested in the intersection of community and business development, I became curious to the means that West African individuals, specifically entrepreneurs can achieve such financial

ambitions and how they were able to do so while also trying to be a support system for others. Thus, my initial research question was born: What is the role of diaspora networks in fostering entrepreneurship and community development among Nigerians in Chicago and Senegalese in Paris?

For this thesis, I wanted to explore one or two cities that I felt would help exemplify the diversity of opinion that I was looking for. The first two that came to mind were Chicago and Paris. Both Chicago and Paris are celebrated for their multiculturalism, but the ways they embody diversity differ profoundly. Paris, guided by the principle of universalism, embraces the notion that individuals are defined by their shared humanity rather than their racial or ethnic identities. While this perspective aims to promote inclusion, it often overlooks the importance of cultural distinctiveness, leaving diasporic identities underrepresented in the public discourse. In contrast, Chicago's approach openly acknowledges and celebrates its multicultural fabric, with neighborhoods serving as cultural enclaves for different ethnic groups. However, this celebration of diversity coexists with a history of segregation, which has created physical and social boundaries between communities. These differences raise critical questions about how diaspora networks function in each context, shaping pathways for integration, entrepreneurship, and community development. Finally, the West African diaspora is broad and so many different cultures exist that may ease, or hinder, integration with a prominent factor being language. Thus, I wanted to diversify the type of Western cities that would be the center of my research, leading me to focus on a city in an anglophone country (Chicago) and the other in a francophone one (Paris).

The West African diaspora is both diverse and expansive, carrying with it deep-rooted traditions of collectivism, cultural exchange, and entrepreneurial resilience. As members of this

diaspora settle in new environments, they adapt these traditions to the distinct urban landscapes of cities like Chicago and Paris. Given the complexity of West African identity, this study focuses on two nations—Nigeria and Senegal—both of which have significant diasporic communities in the respective cities of focus.

Nigeria and Senegal were not only chosen because they represent two of the largest sources of African immigration to the United States and France, respectively (American Immigration Council, 2012; Rouhban, 2024) but also because they embody the linguistic and cultural duality of the West African diaspora. Nigeria, an anglophone country, and Senegal, a francophone nation, reflect the broader divide between English-speaking and French-speaking West African communities. Since these linguistic and cultural spheres encompass the majority of the West African diaspora, centering the study on Nigerian and Senegalese entrepreneurs provides a representative lens through which to examine the experiences of West African migrant business owners. Thus, by taking into account their respective cultural norms and efforts when integrating into their host countries, personal entrepreneurial journeys, as well as transnational ties back to their home country, this research seeks to uncover how their economic empowerment intersects with their local community development as migrants.

The guiding principle of this research, it takes a village to grow a community, calls upon the community oriented cultural values that are deeply embedded in West African societies. This idea resonates with the networks that diasporic communities build to sustain themselves economically and socially. The concept of the "village" extends beyond familial ties, taking into account other kinship systems such as street markets among community members, religious institutions, and support systems from family as well as friends abroad that bind individuals to their cultural identity. By exploring how these "villages" manifest in the urban contexts of

Chicago and Paris, the research aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which diaspora networks contribute to business growth, innovation, and community cohesion.

This study goes beyond merely documenting the experiences of Nigerian and Senegalese populations in Chicago and Paris. It aims to uncover the broader implications of cultural exchange and diaspora networks for urban development and policy-making. Key objectives include:

- Examining the role of cultural exchange: Investigating how West African traditions, values, and practices are adapted and shared within their host cities, contributing to both community resilience and broader cultural landscapes.
- Exploring diaspora-driven entrepreneurship: Analyzing how entrepreneurial ventures within these communities leverage transnational ties and cultural heritage to overcome barriers and create opportunities.
- Understanding community development mechanisms: Identifying the structures and practices that enable these diasporas to build cohesive communities despite socio-political challenges in their host cities.

By addressing these objectives, this research seeks to fill significant gaps in the literature. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the economic and social contributions of diasporic communities, they often overlook the connection between cultural exchange and entrepreneurship as drivers of community development. Moreover, comparative analyses of diaspora experiences in different urban contexts remain scarce, limiting our understanding of how local policies and cultural attitudes shape the trajectories of migrant populations.

Ultimately, this paper aims to inform policy-oriented strategies for fostering inclusive business development, where diasporic communities are not only integrated but also empowered to contribute to the cultural and economic vibrancy of their host cities. Just as my parents were able to “find their village” in the United States, are migrants, especially those of the West African diaspora, should be able to do so as well regardless if they have personal support systems to lean on or not. My parents were fortunate to have a network of friends and family to come to their aid, but for many immigrants who may not, ensuring that their new host city is able to do so can help ensure that no one gets neglected. Through its focus on Nigerian and Senegalese populations in Chicago and Paris, respectively, the research highlights the potential of diaspora networks to serve as models for sustainable development in an increasingly interconnected world.

Background

The history and context of Chicago’s Nigerian population and Paris with its Senegalese is important to break down to understand the deep-rooted historical, economic, and social ties that motivated these diasporas to migrate in the first place. As migration has long shaped the cultural as well as economic landscapes of cities all around the world, a thorough examination of such landscape would help shed light on the dynamic relationships these immigrant communities have with their home and host countries. With this understanding of their cultural and migration history, we can then explore how they navigate these contexts through entrepreneurship.

Nigerians Navigating The United States and Chicago

United States and Chicago Overview

The United States has been always known for being a melting pot of cultures as well as migrant populations, welcoming roughly 1.2 million immigrants in 2023 alone (Migration Data Portal, 2024). Among these, African populations, especially from West Africa have been among some of the largest populations immigrating to the United States.

Nigerians have steadily been the largest group of African immigrants into the country for a variety of reasons, such as large country population, less language barriers, and strong family ties to those who reside in the United States. As of 2024, there are roughly 581,853 Nigerians in the United States, and even with such a large number it doesn't account for the offspring of such Nigerian populations (World Population Review, 2024). Texas has the largest Nigerian population of any U.S. state, with an estimated 113,765 Nigerians. It is followed by Maryland, California, New York, Georgia, New Jersey, Illinois, Florida, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, rounding out the top 10 states with the highest Nigerian populations in that order (World Population Review, 2024).

Despite the easy accessibility that the city of Chicago provides as a case study for this research as a University of Chicago student, Chicago will also be a city of focus due to the multicultural scene that exists in this city that can be hard to find in other major U.S. cities. As the third largest city in the United States with roughly 2.7 million people in nearly 100 different neighborhoods and the largest one in Illinois, Chicago has not just been a major hub for Nigerian immigration but home to migrants from all over the world. In fact, Chicago is oftentimes seen as a city where you can eat a dish from every country in the world without leaving the city borders

(Borrelli, 2023), thus presenting such high ethnic diversity that can shed light how the Nigerian diaspora may interact with other West Africans or migrants in general. This city is often seen as one of the most welcoming city for immigrants as it has a long history of immigrant populations building the city it what it is today all the way from the 1800s and 1900s where Polish, Italian, and Jewish populations took up roots in the Windy City up until the later 1900s to early 2000s were Latin American immigrants made their way up to Chicago through the southern border (McDaniel, 2018). In fact, as of August 2024, Chicago had welcomed 46,000 immigrants to Chicago in the last 2 years, with most of these being individuals from Venezuela as well as other spanish speaking countries, bussed up from Texas to Chicago (Bellware et al,. 2024).

Concerning the African immigrant population, it is estimated that in Illinois alone there are 83,866 members of the African population with Nigerians the largest nationality at 17,420 individuals (American Community Survey, 2015-2019). From the same survey, it is believed that the African population in Chicago is about 47,277 residents, making it the largest African population in any Illinois city. The neighborhoods that the African populations tend to be in is Rogers Park, West Ridge, and Uptown with noticeable African populations in Albany Park, Irving Park, Near West Side, Douglas, Chatham, South Shore, and South Chicago (Paral, 2022; Malagón and Nabong, 2022)

History of Nigerian Immigration

The history of Nigerian immigration is a long, complex story but it is what led to such a large Nigerian population in the United States and especially in Chicago. It began when Nigeria gained independence from the British Empire in 1960. After gaining independence, many wealthy Nigerians moved to the United States as well as the United Kingdom due to colonial legacies, pursuing higher education, and employment opportunities (Mberu and Pongou, 2010).

with a smaller number migrating over the ocean for employment opportunities. Independence further encouraged more highly skilled migration to the United Kingdom, with a growing percentage of Nigerians moving to the United States for higher education, business opportunities, and work.

Despite this growing immigration to the western world, there was an expectation for Nigerians to use the skills that they have gained abroad back to the homeland to encourage further development. However, due to heightened political tensions such as the Biafra Civil War and a stagnated Nigerian economy in the late 1970s and 1980s, immigration increased but the return rates to Nigeria severely decreased with some migrants never returning back to their home country (Adepoju, 1984).

Thus, migration patterns out of Nigeria for more professional opportunity not just arose but became more normalized. By 1978, it was estimated that 30.000 Nigerian graduates from the United Kingdom higher institutions were no longer living on the African continent, and 2,000 of them were residing in the United States (Ajoseh, 2024). This number rose to 10,000 people in the United States by 1984, with more Nigerians becoming highly skilled (Mberu and Pongou, 2010).

Back in Nigeria, the already stagnated economy became worse as the government took part in the Structural Adjustment Program, measures that they agreed to as part of the condition for the loan they received from the International Monetary Fund in the mid 1980s to try to uplift their economy. However, that meant that the national currency, Naira, was devalued which led to lower wages for working professionals and labor conditions worsened (Mberu and Pongou, 2010).

Thus, emigration streams that were mainly centered around highly skilled workers or individuals seeking higher education opportunities, less educated young people started to

emigrate outside of the country more. More Nigerian migrants have gone over to continental European countries, yet, on average, have been less skilled, so have entered industries such as informal service, trade, and agriculture. Yet, the United Kingdom and, even more so, the United States remain the main countries that attract Nigerian migrants, skewing towards more higher skilled workers. As of 2024, the United States is the country with the largest number of Nigerian immigrants (Sunday, 2024).

Nigerian Culture

When examining the dynamics of entrepreneurship among Nigerian populations, it is also important to have a better understanding of Nigerian culture in the first place. As one of the most well-educated immigrant groups in the country, there is a strong cultural value of achieving higher levels of education (Casimer, 2008). As compared to other Illinois residents, African immigrants are more likely to be participating in the Labor force at 72 percent as compared to 65 percent of other Illinosans (Paral, 2022). Additionally, Africans are more likely to be self-employed as about 8 percent are expected to be so as compared with 6 percent of other Illinois residents.

Additionally, Nigerians are very religious with most of them being of Chrisitan and Muslim faiths, leading to religious institutions having a large influence in their daily lives. Places of workshops such as churches or mosques are not only seen as places of worship, but also areas where Nigerians can congregate and interact with each other (El Ouassif and Newman, 2024).

Remittances are essential to supplementing the incomes and economic development of Nigeria. In 2024 alone, it is expected that the fourth-quarter 2024 figures are going to have roughly $21 billion (USD) in diaspora remittances (Chiejina, 2025). Thus, despite being

thousands of miles away, there is always a strong connection to the homeland among Nigerian immigrants.

Senegalese Navigating France and Paris

France and Paris Overview

France has long been a hub for immigration, with its colonial history and economic opportunities attracting people from around the world. In recent decades, immigrants from West Africa, particularly Senegal, have formed one of the most significant African communities in the country. Due to historical ties, linguistic advantages, and established family networks, Senegalese migration to France has remained strong. As of 2020, there are approximately 160,000 Senegalese living in France, not including second and third-generation descendants who continue to contribute to the country's cultural landscape as well as how much the population has probably grown since then (Vassoille, 2023).

Île-de-France, home to Paris, has the largest Senegalese population in France. Other regions with notable Senegalese populations include Rhône-Alpes (particularly Lyon), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (especially Marseille), and Hauts-de-France (notably Lille). These areas have historically attracted Senegalese migrants due to employment opportunities, educational institutions, and established social networks (Jules-Rosette, 1998).

Paris, the capital of France, is home to approximately 2.1 million residents as of 2023, spread across its 20 administrative districts known as arrondissements (Statista 2025). This cultural hub is also a world-renowned culinary hub with over 100 Michelin-starred restaurants as of 2024, reflecting its exceptional gastronomic wealth (Michelin 2019). Additionally, Paris hosts numerous festivals, parades, and events throughout the year to celebrate its diverse immigrant

communities. With approximately 21% of the city's population being immigrants and another 28% having at least one immigrant parent, nearly 49% of Parisians have direct ties to immigration, highlighting the city's deeply rooted multicultural identity (Insee, 2023).

Paris' diverse neighborhoods, including historically African and immigrant communities, contribute to its status as a melting pot of cultures. Areas like the Goutte d'Or in the 18th arrondissement are known for their vibrant African markets and cultural festivals, in addition to being a major neighborhood of Senegalese businesses (Archiving the Inner City, 2024). Additionally, Château Rouge in the 18th arrondissement is home to many African populations including Senegalese individuals (Chabrol and Waine, 2013).

History of Senegalese Immigration

France had begun to be a place for economic migrants from modern-day Senegal since the late 1800s when Senegal was still under French colonial rule (Moser, 2018). For instance, during both world wars West Africans under French colonial rule would remain in France after fighting rather than returning back to their home countries, including Senegalese individuals. Another instance of economic migrants from West African colonies was after World War II in which migrants were recruited to help reconstruct the country and work in the nation's factories (Timéra, 1996). Thus, more economic opportunities arose for Senegalese populations in which they often worked in blue-collar jobs such as factories, constitution, or sanitation. However, despite these seemingly low paying careers, the salaries were greater than what they were in Senegal, thus leading to an increase of financial remittances to help families and friends obtain more resources and technology such as refrigerators, televisions, and cell phones (Bollard, McKenzie, and Morten, 2010.

This also led to creation of hometown associations (HTAs) which were (in)formal organizations of migrants aht were oftentimes from the same region or ethnic group of their home country living abroad, or France more specifically in this case (L'Ifan, 2014). They would not only organize cultural activities and foster solidarity among fellow immigrants, but they would also engage in financial development projects in their own homelands. Senegalese HTAs have been essential to fostering such growth in their own home country and still constitute to be such a major aspect of the immigration story of Senegalese migrants.

Senegalese migration to France became more apparent in the mid-sixties due to the active recruitment of workers initiatives by the French automobile industry (Cohen, Hill, and Pison, 1997; Robin and Lalou, 2000). Additionally, the Oil crisis in 1974 brought new restrictions on workers immigration in France, and stricter immigration laws were passed through the 1980's. The figure of people leaving the country increased largely in the 1980's notably due to increasing economic difficulties in Senegal (Bruzzone, 2006; Cheikh, 2008). However, during the 1980s and 1990s, there were a series of laws such as the Bonnet and Pasqua laws that made it difficult to enter France and obtain naturalization among immigrants, just to name a few hindrances. These provisions were later abolished but forever made it difficult for West Africans, especially Senegalese individuals, to obtain citizenship. This moment accompanied by multiple bilateral accords between France and Senegal years later also led to a shift from promoting low-skilled economic immigration to satisfy labor shortages to now advocating more high-skilled, temporary immigrants such as students pursuing higher education (Dieng, 2002).

There are now current European efforts such as the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) that are trying to incorporate more development support into partnership

with countries, such as Senegal, to try to further mitigate migration to be not only inclusive and fair but not as overwhelming to the nations opening their borders (Vigneswaran, 2024).

Senegalese Culture

In Senegal, Islam is by far the most prominent religion with over 94 percent of the population being muslim (Dieckhoff and Portier, 2017). Islam in Senegal is seen as more of a brotherhood as it is this brotherhood that brings together the nation through their religion. Thus, there is a major part of the culture that is centered on socialization, especially through religion regardless of one's tribe in Senegal. It is especially important to note that this bonding through religion is not necessarily among all those who follow Islam as, sometimes, other countries who are also predominantly Muslim believe that Senegalese Islam is a more dilute form of their own perception of Islam. Thus, while bonds perhaps through other Islamic ethnicities may not be the strongest at times, the reliance upon other Senegalese individuals is very high. Various cultural associations, such as HTAs, help reinforce this mutual support and solidarity.

Remittances are a crucial source of economic support for families in Senegal, with Senegalese immigrants in France contributing significantly to the 10.5% of Senegal's GDP that comes from remittances. These funds help sustain households, support education, and drive local investments, reinforcing a strong connection between the diaspora and the homeland (Trading Economics, 2025).

Literature review

The West African diaspora has become an influential force in shaping cultural, economic, and social landscapes in global cities such as Chicago and Paris. This literature review explores the complex intersection between cultural exchange, transnational networks, community development, and entrepreneurship within these diasporas. By analyzing the interconnected themes of transnationalism and cultural exchange, diasporic entrepreneurship, community development in diaspora contexts, and urban dynamics of West African communities, this review contextualizes the research question: What is the role of cultural exchange and diaspora networks in fostering entrepreneurship and community development for Nigerians in Chicago and Senegalese in Paris?

Transnationalism in Diasporic Networks

Diasporic networks are able to exist not only due to the domestic presence of a diaspora, but also the connections that still remain to the homeland no matter how far it is, leading into the concept of transnationalism. Transnationalism can be defined as the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders, and provides a theoretical framework for understanding diaspora networks (Vertovec, 1999). Ethnic diasporas are pillars of how transnationalism arise as they exist in a triadic relationship in between being 1) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups, 2) the territorial contexts the groups reside in, and 3) the homeland states and contexts where their ancestors came in (Kachig Tololyan, 1991). With this framework, there are multifaceted affiliations that diasporic communities navigate, balancing integration within host societies while maintaining connections to their ancestral homelands.

Transnationalism is built on six key theoretical principles (Vertovec, 2009). First, social morphology refers to the cross-border networks that connect people and communities. Second, the type of consciousness captures the multiple identities and sense of belonging that migrants develop. Third, mode of cultural reproduction highlights the blending and hybridization of different cultural traditions. Fourth, the avenue of capital focuses on the role of transnational corporations in shaping economic activities across nations. Fifth, the site of political engagement examines how technology enables cross-border political participation and organization. Finally, (re)construction of "place" or locality explores how migrants create new social spaces that transcend national boundaries. In examining the entrepreneurial activities of West Africans across different cities, all six principles of transnationalism are relevant to understanding their experiences. However, the most crucial is the creation of new social spaces that transcend national boundaries. This aspect is at the heart of this study, as it remains largely understudied yet holds significant implications such as strengthening West African communities and local enterprises that tend to be overlooked. By exploring how these social spaces form , this research can help inform policies that not only recognize their existence but also help various West African entrepreneurs thrive.

The need for transnationalism arises for a multitude of reasons. To begin, as explored by researchers Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton in their paper, "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration," living in a globalized capitalist society has led to economic forces structuring the flows of international migration. Some of the economic forces in discussion include the expansion of large-scale agribusiness, the rise of transnational corporations investing in export-processing industries and tourism, and the decline of well-paying, unionized jobs in many U.S. cities—replaced by low-wage service and clerical work

with little to no benefits—have all contributed to major economic shifts. These changes have led to widespread underemployment and labor displacement in developing countries, pushing many workers to seek better-paying opportunities abroad. As a result, countries like the United States, which faced a growing demand for labor, became key destinations for migrants from lower-income nations looking for economic stability (Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1992). These changes in economic conditions can also act as an inspiration to pursue entrepreneurship, especially in more developed nations in which there could be more reward in doing so, thus further emphasizing the importance and necessity of understanding the presence of transnationalism.

When navigating the dynamics of transnationalism, the role of transnational social fields comes into play. Transnational social fields is the notion to describe the various different yet overlapping networks of interpersonal, social relationships in which information, ideas, and even physical goods can be unequally exchanged (Levitt and Schiller, 2004). These fields facilitate the development of dual or multiple identities, as individuals navigate and integrate cultural norms from both their countries of origin and settlement. This duality reflects a "bifocality" that allows migrants to interpret and respond to events in diverse cultural contexts (Rouse, 1992; Guarnizo, 1997). Thus, study of transnationalism challenges the traditional "methodological nationalist" framework, which confines analysis within nation-state boundaries (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002; Lubbers, Verdery, and Molina, 2020). By adopting a transnational perspective, one can better understand the complex social phenomena that arise from cross-border activities and relationships, providing a more nuanced analysis of migrant experiences. Additionally, more and more scholars acknowledge that migrants and non-migrants are located on a continuum of transnationality in which there are cross-border activities and relationships (Faist, Fauser, and

Reisenauer 2013). Yet the need still exists for studying the different social structures that aid in the success of migrants abroad- a gap that this paper hopes to fulfill but understand the social dynamics of entrepreneurial experiences of different West African immigrants can exist in new country boundaries.

A majority of scholars recognize that transnationalism is a fundamentally people-driven process, shaped by both formal and informal activities within civil society. Rather than being solely dictated by state policies or economic structures, transnationalism emerges from the ways individuals and communities leverage global opportunities while navigating the constraints of nationalist policies (Tedeschi, Vorobeva, Jauhiainen, 2020). Thus, this can lead into the exchange of market-favored competencies in which a system of resource interdependence is created, where two or more companies share knowledge, technology, or services. This collaboration enables each business to specialize further, leading to increased efficiency and long-term benefits for all involved (Stoyanov, Woodward, and Stoyanova, 2017). For Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago and Senegalese business owners in Paris, diasporic networks may provide more than just cultural connections; they may create economic interdependence. Through these networks, individuals can exchange market-relevant skills, resources, and knowledge, forming business collaborations that increase long-term individual and collective economic growth. By exploring these patterns, this research aims to uncover how transnational social ties directly contribute to economic mobility and community development for Nigerians in Chicago and Senegalese in Paris. Understanding these dynamics not only sheds light on the lived experiences of transnational entrepreneurs but also offers insights into how policymakers and institutions can better support and strengthen these vital networks.

Entrepreneurship within (West African) diasporas

With a better understanding of the transnational connections that are essential to enhance the diasporic network, there is a need to understand the other major component of this research paper: entrepreneurship. As explored by Jones, Coviello, and Tang in their 2010 paper, "International Entrepreneurship research (1989–2009): A domain ontology and thematic analysis," there are a variety of means of how international entrepreneurship literature has been examined in the past. After a review of 323 articles of international entrepreneurship, the three main types of international entrepreneurship frameworks were entrepreneurial internationalization, international comparison of entrepreneurship, and comparative entrepreneurial internationalization (Jones, Coviello, and Tang, 2010). Entrepreneurial internationalization primarily refers to research examining innovative and risk seeking activities across national borders (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000). International comparison of entrepreneurship is centered on comparing entrepreneurial activities, ecosystems, and policies across different countries or regions. It works to understand how a country's institutional differences, cultural considerations, and personal characteristics can affect the role of entrepreneurs in their respective countries' economies (Lerner and Schoar, 2010).

Finally, comparative entrepreneurial internationalization, also known as the comparative international entrepreneurship (CIE) framework, is examining the similarities and differences of entrepreneurial internationalization outside of a singular nation's context (Terjesen, Hessels, and Li, 2013). With this framework, one is examining the institutional (macro level), cultural (meso level), and the individual (micro level) factors that ultimately shape the entrepreneurial motivations and behaviors across different national contexts (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, 2020)

For this research, the framework that would be most relevant would be comparative entrepreneurial internationalization for a variety of reasons. To begin, the research question at hand compares how diaspora entrepreneurship manifests in two different countries, the United States as compared to France through an examination of institutional, cultural, and economic factors that shape entrepreneurial opportunities for different West African groups. Additionally, as I am seeking to understand the diasporic networks and transnational ties of Nigerian and Senegalese communities leverage social capital, remittances, and business networks to foster entrepreneurship and community development, I am looking at two different countries of origins when working to understand the role of cultural exchange when navigating entrepreneurship. Finally, I am investigating what support networks and means of expandsation Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago and Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris use to grow, thus there's a need to consider who the home-country ties influence business decisions and market access. These qualities best align with the comparative entrepreneurial internationalization framework, thus that will be my perspective of analysis.

Operating under the framework of comparative entrepreneurial internationalization, there are many reasons to account for why migrants, or specifically Nigerian and Senegalese migrants, are engaging in entrepreneurship. One of the primary reasons is social capital. There is the strong presence of social capital that is deeply embodied in relationships both within and outside of immigrant communities such as kinship, ethnic, and non-ethnic ties. It's important to take into account that social capital is gained through interpersonal exchanges overtime, and is oftentimes reflected in sentiments of obligation and solidarity. Immigrants new to their respective countries rely on social capital in order to have the most inexpensive means of settling into a new nation,

thus relying on their family members as well as those from their ethnic group to provide them information on how to navigate the new landscape (Nee and Sanders).

There are also institutional factors that can affect migrants to pursue entrepreneurship (Urbano et al., 2019). There are a variety of factors concerning the economic and political landscape that affect entrepreneurship such as government intervention, how free the markets and politics are, trust with institutions, and different means of regulation (Nguyen, 2019; Sendra-Pons, Comeig, and Mas-Tur, 2021;). There are five main characteristics to examine the institution variables into five different dimensions for examining entrepreneurship development: government policies and procedures, social and economic factors, financial assistance, non-financial assistance, entrepreneurial and business skills (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994). For this research, this will primarily be focussed on examining the institutional factor of government policies and procedures as that is most relevant to the research question at hand that seeks to understand what policy support systems may be in place for various West African aspiring entrepreneurs.

While individual agency plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial success, group-level choices also significantly shape the types of businesses established within diasporic communities. Research suggests that immigrant groups, particularly those that are smaller or more isolated, often gravitate toward specific industries, creating niche markets where they can leverage shared knowledge, community trust, and established consumer bases (Light & Gold, 2000). For example, the Gujarati Indian community in the United States has become strongly associated with motel ownership, while Vietnamese entrepreneurs dominate the nail salon industry (Light, Bhachu, & Karageorgis, 1993; Kerr and Mandorf, 2016). These patterns emerge due to several reinforcing factors: limited access to mainstream employment, social capital

within the ethnic community, and the ability to transfer industry-specific knowledge across generations and networks (Kibler et al., 2019).

While there are not many case studies done on the motivations of West African populations, let alone Nigerian and Senegalese individuals, engaging in entrepreneurship abroad, there is an interesting case study done by Marieme S. Lo which provides insights into West Africans' motivation for entrepreneurship. Lo centers her work on understanding Senegalese female entrepreneurs in New York City, and finds that there are many reasons they engage in entrepreneurship. One of the major reasons is that there is a growing trend for mobility and a greater sense of interdependence shared by female entrepreneurs as well as migrant communities that is parallel with the need of emotive belonging and nostalgia for the country of origins (Lo, 2014). Especially in the sphere of restaurants, people crave for home-based food in conjunction with the American diet. Additionally, there is a need for ingenuity and innovation among illiterate women who do not have the same resources to get a conventional job, thus establishing and utilizing informal networks as well as adaptive mechanisms can help stimulate their economic activities within diaspora markets. Informal channels are powerful drivers for female entrepreneurs' transnational endeavors (Lo, 2014).

The various motivations of Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago and Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris are not completely known yet. However, by understanding what influences them to engage in entrepreneurship and encourages them to sustain this path will be the key to know how to ensure they face less difficulties when doing so.

Community Development through Diasporic Entrepreneurship

The last part of necessary contextualization is the effects of entrepreneurship in the diaspora both in the newly migrated country as well as the homeland abroad. One of the biggest effects, as well as a potential motivator for entrepreneurship is social and financial remittances.

Social remittances are centered on the idea of migration being the circulation of ideas, practices, skills, identities, and social capital between sending and receiving communities (Bahar and Rapoport, 2016; Lacroix, Levitt, and Vari-Lavoisier, 2016). With social remittances is the closely associated knowledge transfer that tends to manifest as brain gain. Brain gain refers to the linkage migrants have between their home country that results in a productive re-circulation of knowledge, ideas, and finance; this means of knowledge transfer can aid in the socioeconomic development of their home countries (Hunger, 2002). Immigrants are still able to aid their homelands from abroad by creating positive knowledge spillovers. For instance, Immigrant inventors and innovators often engage in knowledge transfer in which they import knowledge to their home country from their host nation (Morrison and Miguealez, 2022). In fact, more high-skilled immigrant inventors or innovators are more likely to engage with the foreign world stage, which increases the positive externalities of diffusing ideas across borders (Bernstein et al., 2022).

Social remittances work directly alongside financial remittances which refers to the money and goods migrants send from their host country to their home country to aid in development back in their native nations (Cavachevici, Havranek, and Horvath, 2020; Bettin, Massidda, and Piras, 2024). For instance, the Senegalese economy has become more increasingly dependent on migrant's remittance, with some official figures estimating that economic remittances account for 13% of Senegalese GDP in 2016 alone (Vari-Lavoisier, 2016).

Sometimes, financial remittances are among the main sources of external funding for developing countries, alongside foreign direct investment (OECD 2005). A study by Schrieder and Knerr (2000), examined financial remittances of Cameroon families from a household survey between 1991-1992 in two specific regions that were suffering from poverty as well as severe food insecurity. In this study, it was found that 26% of per capita income among the roughly 140 households examined were accounted for through financial remittances (Schrieder and Knerr, 2000). However, these remittances occurred at an irregular rate as they were highly seasonal, emphasizing that while remittances can aid in the economic development of the migrant's home countries, it isn't quite the perfect support system (Schrieder and Knerr, 2000). Another study that was focused on rural households in Kenya saw that the nation was especially aided during the 1984 famine by financial remittances from friends and family who migrated abroad, especially those from urban areas (Drèze and Sen 1989).

Immigrant enterprises can help foster community development such as revitalizing local economies as well as provide more jobs as they engage in entrepreneurship (Fortunato and Alter, 2015; Kosten, 2018;). The linkage between entrepreneurship and community development is not necessarily novel but has been emerging more in recent years (Lyons et al., 2012; Lyons 2015). The collaborative nature of both community development and entrepreneurship parallel so strongly that it is almost difficult to discern from the other. Time and time again we see how economic action and proactiveness is strongly affected by societal and political dynamics, and to understand this intersection leads to a large impact on entrepreneurship success as well as attitudes (Granovetter, 1985; Dana and Dana, 2005). Thus, supporting small businesses run by migrants at the policy level can be key to promoting local economic growth (McFarland and McConnell, 2012). As put forth by McFarland and McConnnel, there are a variety of different

small business policies to put explore when aiding the support of migrant entrepreneurs with the four principle types being: regulatory assistance, capital access, management and skills development, and how supportive the local government is (McFarland and McConnell, 2012). For the sake of the exploratory nature of this thesis, it will be interesting to understand the experiences of Nigerian and Senegalese entrepreneurs of how supportive they believe the local government is, as their own testimonial experience is under explored.

Methodology/limitations

Summary of Research Design:

This study primarily focuses on a qualitative approach, combining both the usage of direct interviews as well as secondary research analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of how cultural exchange and diaspora networks impact entrepreneurship and community development among West African populations in Chicago and Paris. On the qualitative side, I primarily relied on interviews to capture the nuances of personal experiences and perceptions. Additionally, as some of the interviews were not recorded or the most exhaustive, I incorporated the use of other research papers as well as historical accounts that could further substantiate the claims made by the interviewees in their testimonials. This was especially helpful among the Senegalese interviewees in Paris who were uncomfortable being recorded or provide limited responses, thus their claims were able to be further contextualized through the usage of secondary resources. personal op-eds or other written pieces online that would add more substance to the interviews at hand. The study is framed within a comparative case study design, where the experiences of West African communities in the two distinct urban settings of Chicago and Paris will be examined and contrasted. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how cultural exchange and diaspora networks function differently in the two cities, taking into account their unique sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

Participant Selection

The study focused on primarily interviewing Nigerian and Senegalese entrepreneurs in Chicago and Paris, respectively. West African business owners from small to medium-sized

businesses in both cities were central to the research. These businesses served as key examples of entrepreneurial activity within the diaspora and provided valuable information on the challenges and successes of West African entrepreneurship. In conjunction with these West African business owners, community leaders, including West African community leaders, activists, and social entrepreneurs in both Chicago and Paris, were interviewed.

For the interviewees in Chicago, I was able to find them online, searching up keywords such as “African business,” “African restaurant,” “African hair stylist,” and “African grocery.” I would use the word “African” to broaden the search of the businesses at my disposal, but would individually go through each of the enterprises webpage that originally appeared to see if they were Nigerian owned enterprises. However, concerning Senegalese businesses in Paris, I had to use a completely different approach. Originally, I would visit different Senegalese businesses that I saw online in person when I was in Paris during the summer of 2024 as I didn’t have the most success when trying to reach out to them online like I did with the Nigerian enterprises in Chicago. However, I was only able to reach one interviewee through this means, and thus had to rely on my own personal networks for obtaining participants. Through some of my friends who were Senegalese, I was able to reach out to a family member of theirs in Paris who ran their own enterprise. This family member of theirs was then able to get me virtually connected with a few other interviewees for my project, thus rounding out my participant selection.

With this process in mind, I was able to conduct nine different interviews, with five of them centered with Nigerian businesses in Chicago and four with Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris. There was a wealth of information and personal experiences shared among these participants, but, due to a low number of interviewees as well as some limited responses, there is room for this study to be more representative than its current state. For it to be more

representative, it would have been great to have had more interviewees with these entrepreneurs as well as a more diverse array of countries represented, such as more anglophone West African countries like Ghana or more Francophone countries like Mali. Additionally, as the responses were skewed towards individuals who felt more comfortable speaking to me, this participant selection is more centered on those who may have had more positive experiences that they feel comfortable sharing. It is for this reason that further contextualization through secondary sources, such as online articles of entrepreneur profiles or similar research case studies, help bolster the testimonials of these entrepreneurs, providing value of understanding the general role of diasporic networks in supporting entrepreneurship ventures.

Finally, all the interviews in Chicago were conducted in English (Appendix 1 for English interview questions). However, with the Parisian entrepreneurs, two of the interviews were conducted solely in French, one interview was conducted with a mixture of French and English (i.e. the Interviewee strove to speak in English but for some of the responses were more comfortable speaking in French), and one interview as completely in English (Appendix 2 for French interview questions). For my Chicago interviews, I tried to prioritize individuals who had higher English proficiency, but it ultimately wasn't a requirement which presented a language barrier for some of the interviewees. For instance, one of the Nigerian interviewees had difficulty understanding my American accent and would be confused by some of the questions, thus rephrasing was needed. For the interviews with Senegalese entrepreneurs, as I have a relatively strong proficiency in French, it wasn't a necessary requirement to speak English, however, for each of my understanding, I still tried to prioritize interviewees who were able to speak English. Most of the interviewees did converse in French, thus the language barrier came more from my side of being able to fully understand their experiences, especially since many were not open to

being recorded thus it was hard to double-check what was said. To overcome this obstacle, for two of the interviews completely in French, I would double check with the participant during the interviews of whether the main points I was taking in were completely right, continuously re-checking that I was understanding what was being shared.

These individuals were deeply involved in both business and community development efforts, and their insights helped shed light on the role of cultural exchange and diaspora networks in fostering economic and social progress. Together, these two groups provided a well-rounded view of how cultural exchange, community networks, and entrepreneurship intersected within the West African diaspora in both cities.

Data Collection Methods

The study utilized a range of data collection methods to capture both qualitative and quantitative insights into the role of cultural exchange and diaspora networks in fostering entrepreneurship and community development among West African populations in Chicago and Paris. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, business owners, and general community members to gather in-depth qualitative data on their experiences. These interviews focused on several key areas, including cultural exchange and transnationalism in diasporic networks, social cohesion within the community, networks of support for entrepreneurs (such as family, community, and diaspora connections), experiences with cultural exchange (particularly how cultural traditions, practices, and values influenced entrepreneurship), and the challenges and opportunities for business development in each city.

It is important to take into account that the interviews were recorded differently between Nigerians in Chicago and Senegalese individuals in Paris. In Chicago, all the interviewees were

open to be recorded, leading to direct quotes of their experiences. However, with the exception of one interview, all the interviews taken with Parisian entrepreneurs were not recorded at the behest of the interviewees. This seemed to have occurred for a variety of reasons, the most common being a general discomfort with being recorded in the sense that their information may be too revealing and they didn't want it to be cemented anywhere. This reason was closely coupled with concerns that some of their businesses, which occurred through unofficial means, may potentially get them into some legal trouble. Thus, for most of the interviewees in Paris, I paraphrased the main gist of what the interviewees were describing, trying to write down as many direct quotes as possible, albeit in my own words throughout the interview.

The study also incorporated secondary data analysis to complement the primary data collection. This involved examining civic organizations and public-sponsored resources available for small businesses, with a particular focus on those aimed at supporting immigrant or minority entrepreneurship. The analysis sought to assess whether these programs effectively addressed the unique challenges faced by West African entrepreneurs. Additionally, the examination of other case studies and supplementary resources were gathered to further contextualize the experiences of the interviewees as well as provide more guidance on what potential policy recommendations and considerations could be.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both qualitative and quantitative methods to interpret the collected information and address the research questions. For qualitative data analysis of the interview transcripts, thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns related

to the role of cultural exchange and diaspora networks in business development and community cohesion. Special attention was given to recurring mentions of community connection, business development barriers or restraints, and institutional support. To organize and interpret the data, a coding scheme was developed based on interview responses. This scheme categorized the data into relevant themes, such as “connection,” “community support,” “cultural exchange,” and "institutions.”

I also engaged in a comparative analysis that compared the experiences of both sets of West African entrepreneurs in the two cities examined. This involved incorporating the CIE framework and grouping the findings by common themes that occurred on the macro, meso, and micro level of entrepreneurial experiences. reviewing government programs, subsidies, and policies designed to support minority-owned businesses. The analysis identified any gaps in which potential policy oriented interventions could occur in order to foster a more conducive environment for entrepreneurship within the West African diaspora.

Ethical considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. Cultural sensitivity was prioritized by respecting cultural nuances and ensuring that interview questions and survey content were culturally appropriate for West African communities. Additionally, data security measures were implemented to protect participant information, with secure storage practices maintained to ensure confidentiality throughout the research process.

The study also acknowledged several limitations. Sampling bias was a potential concern, as the research was dependent on the availability and willingness of business owners to participate, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives. For instance, regardless of the issues that the entrepreneurs have faced in my interviews, they all ended on a more positive note of how proud they are of how successful their enterprise has become or at least the growth it has experienced. Many entrepreneurs fail with their first five years of business (McMillan, 2024), thus this skewed positive representation of entrepreneurial experiences among West Africans that may not be true for everyone. Geographical limitations also affected the study, as it focused specifically on West African communities in Chicago and Paris, which may not have fully represented the experiences of all West African diaspora groups in these cities or in other urban settings. Lastly, challenges in accessing up-to-date data on government funding programs and business trends may have constrained the depth of the policy impact analysis.

There were also specific limitations that emerged in the Senegalese interviews which were not present in the Chicago-based ones. One of the most significant challenges was the language barrier. While I have a strong proficiency in French, and two of the four interviews were conducted entirely in French, there were moments during the conversations where I may not have fully grasped the nuance or exact meaning of what was being communicated. This linguistic gap may have impacted the depth and accuracy of some interpretations. In addition, three out of the four Senegalese interviewees declined to be recorded, which meant I had to rely on handwritten notes and paraphrasing during the interviews. This introduced another layer of interpretation, where my voice and understanding may be more present than intended, potentially altering the original tone or intent of the participants' responses—especially in comparison to the Nigerian interviews, which were all recorded and could be transcribed verbatim. Further

complicating the issue, all quotes included from the Paris-based interviews are based on my own translations from French to English. While I made every effort to preserve the original meaning and sentiment, this translation process inevitably risks diminishing the interviewee's authentic voice.

To mitigate these limitations, I was intentional about writing as objectively as possible—avoiding my own interpretations and focusing on conveying the interviewee's perspective faithfully. Still, despite these efforts, some degree of unintended bias may persist and influence how the testimonials are ultimately represented.

Findings

Over the course of this project, I have been able to conduct 6 interviews so far: 1 Senegalese enterprise in Paris and 5 Nigerian businesses in Chicago. To protect the anonymity of each interviewee as it was requested, each interviewee was given a pseudonym. However, gender was taken into account as there are some traditional gender roles that tend to exist in Nigerian and Senegalese cultures that may affect the experiences and testimonials of such business owners (Marshall, 2017; Olonade et al., 2021). The profiles of the interviewees so far are summarised as follows:

Pseudonym	Location	Gender	Nationality	Business Type
Entrepreneur A	Chicago	Male	Nigerian	Restaurant
Entrepreneur B	Chicago	Male	Nigerian	Restaurant
Entrepreneur C	Chicago	Female	Nigerian	Restaurant, Catering, Food Store
Entrepreneur D	Chicago	Male	Nigerian	Restaurant
Entrepreneur E	Chicago	Female	Nigerian	Hair Stylist
Entrepreneur F	Paris	Female	Senegalese	Hair Stylist
Entrepreneur G	Paris	Female	Senegalese	Hair Stylist, Fashion Designer
Entrepreneur H	Paris	Female	Senegalese	Catering Service
Entrepreneur I	Paris	Male	Senegalese	Produce and Meal Grocery Store

Most of the entrepreneurs interviewed were restaurant owners, which reflects broader trends observed in the interviews. Catering, in particular, emerged as one of the more accessible

entry points into entrepreneurship. This was largely due to two key factors: (1) the strong support networks provided by friends and family in host countries who craved familiar cultural foods, and (2) the relatively low barriers to entry compared to other industries. As a result, a significant portion of the interviewees operate in the restaurant industry.

Notably, with the exception of Entrepreneur F, all of these business owners initially started in fields with similarly low barriers to entry before transitioning into their current ventures. For example, Entrepreneurs A started off his career working at a reception desk in a hotel, Entrepreneurs B and D began in sales, and Entrepreneurs C and E worked in nursing before shifting to their enterprises on a full- or part-time basis. This pattern emphasizes the importance of accessibility in driving entrepreneurial decisions, often taking precedence over technical innovation. Furthermore, this trend suggests that many entrepreneurs in similar circumstances may enter business ownership without extensive technical expertise—an issue explicitly mentioned in some interviews. This insight highlights a potential area for policy intervention, where support structures could be designed to bridge skill gaps and provide resources tailored to the needs of these entrepreneurs.

Chicago Findings

The findings concerning the analysis here in Chicago can be boiled down to three main themes:

- **Cultural connection and integration:** The interviews reveal that migration to Chicago for Nigerians was often motivated by witnessing family members who are already in the United States, educational opportunities, and the pursuit of better economic prospects. Respondents emphasize the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage despite being geographically removed from Nigeria. Many actively seek cultural connections through social networks, businesses, and community gatherings such as religious spaces.

- **Business development and institutional support:** Entrepreneurship has been a key avenue for cultural preservation and economic empowerment within the Nigerian community in Chicago. Business initiatives often emerge from identified gaps in representation and service provision.
- **Future impact and community development:** Despite individual successes, respondents recognize broader challenges facing the Nigerian community in Chicago, including a lack of centralized community spaces for Nigerian populations as well as the lack of governmental support that mainstreams Nigerian entrepreneurship.

Cultural Connection and Integration

I had initially thought that as immigrant integrating into a completely new culture, it may have been easier for these entrepreneurs to integrate through cultural participation such as attending social clubs or cultural events in which they could attend to connect with other Nigerians for support as seen in literature (Martinez-Damia et al., 2023). However, as especially emphasized by Entrepreneur A, that was not necessarily the case.

"You know, when I launched, certainly, friends who are **fellow Nigerians [and] West Africans helped**, they helped me. Here they were set up in the kitchen- they were the first." - Entrepreneur A

As highlighted by his experience, and mentioned in other interviews, Entrepreneur A had an initial focus on survival and day-to-day operations take precedence, getting to know other Nigerians through his family members and friends who were already in Chicago. Thus, there was little room for active cultural participation to engage with other Nigerian community members outside of these family ties. However, as the business owners become more established, they often find themselves engaging more with Chicago's diverse cultural scene. Many noted that

Chicago, particularly in the summer, offers a wealth of cultural events, providing opportunities for interaction and exchange with people from different backgrounds. This has been a strength for the city of Chicago as it is home to some of the most festivals in the world, with, in just the span of 5 months, over 400 different festivals occurring (Victory and Ramos, 2024). Thus, this exposure to not only integrate into the cultural scene more easily seems to be an aid with integration.

A key aspect of cultural exchange for Nigerian entrepreneurs has been the role of food in bridging gaps between communities. Several business owners highlighted how they use food as an entry point for sharing Nigerian culture. For instance, Entrepreneur B mentioned providing jollof rice as a means of introducing people to Nigerian cuisine and fostering greater appreciation for West African hospitality.

"We **brought and connected folks from Chicago Medical District, Urban League**, right? We connected them, we hosted them, and did like **a cultural exchange from the first symbol of hospitality in West Africa**. We showcased the cola…showcased a little bit of our culture, and then [they] indulged. That was well received." - Entrepreneur B

Others emphasized the organic nature of their cultural interactions—connecting with fellow Nigerians in familiar spaces while also engaging with the broader community through shared experiences, such as incubator programs and commissary kitchens. For instance, Entrepreneur C emphasized that she felt that she was able to become a pillar for fostering connection through her space.

"**[My business] is a pillar in [the] community**. That's what we do in our community. We have [a] society. We go to meetings once a month. People come to visit us, we do picnic[s] and we invite [others] and they join us. " - Entrepreneur C

Even more so, each of the interviewees' personal journeys have been closely tied to spaces that facilitate cultural exchange with a commonality being that all the spaces had a strong religious connection primarily existing as churches. For many business owners, diaspora networks acted as both their initial customer base and a form of social capital. Some businesses thrived because Nigerian and other African immigrants went out of their way to support them, alongside their church communities, as highlighted by the experiences of Entrepreneurs B and E:

"**Our church was very, very, very instrumental**. They were very supportive. And, our pastor was very supportive. I mean, basically **if it wasn't for them there wouldn't be a restauran**t, and because there were other churches around where we live [and] not even where we live- people used to drive…We live in North Chicago, and someone drove [to our restaurant] from Indiance…**our base was our church. They were always there, they were always there for us for support**." - Entrepreneur B

"There are a lot [of African people] in Chicago every day. [When] you go to [an African] store, you meet a lot of Africans, when you go to church, there's African churches. I [started] doing braids at Church, **I [learned] about Style Seat (a hair services online platform) through Church and now that is where most of my business is from**." - Entrepreneur E

The experiences of Entrepreneurs B and E illustrate the profound role that faith-based institutions, particularly churches, play in the success and sustainability of Nigerian businesses in Chicago. Churches serve as more than just places of worship; they function as economic and social anchors for many in the Nigerian immigrant community. These institutions provide critical support networks that assist entrepreneurs in launching, sustaining, and growing their businesses. For Entrepreneur B, the church was not just a spiritual refuge but also a primary support system that enabled the restaurant's survival and success. Similarly, Entrepreneur E's experience shows how churches not only provide a customer base but also serve as hubs for professional networking and skill development. The church environment became a space where Entrepreneur E was able to launch and grow their hair braiding business, eventually leveraging technology like

Style Seat to expand. Both accounts reinforce the idea that for many Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago, faith-based communities act as informal business incubators. Beyond spiritual guidance, they provide mentorship and networking opportunities that are essential in overcoming barriers to entry in the business world.

Similarly, Entrepreneur A was able to have a very beneficial experience as well and even now his restaurant operates through a ghost kitchen on the South Side of Chicago. Through these operations, he has been able to spearhead efforts that not only aid with his own business growth but integration into his local community.

"I operate from a Commissary Kitchen in Woodlawn at the First Presbyterian Church. And I don't know if you know the space, if it's the first church that was organized in this city, or a historical church. It felt super familiar for me, because the first place I worked in the city was a historical Hotel…besides having access to a Commissary Kitchen, it allowed me to also see how I can contribute to the church's revival..[There's] an art program. It has spaces that the community can share. **My being there allows me to then connect with the churches we need to serve them while serving my audience, wherever they may be**." - Entrepreneur A

Working out of a commissary kitchen in a church was another example of how Nigerian entrepreneurs have built bridges with local communities, contributing to church programs and forming connections with new social circles. I was aware of how large of an influence the church has in Nigerian culture, but seeing that bleed into entrepreneurial activities was an aspect I had not quite thought about. Especially as such a central space of not just collaboration but dissemination of information, religious institutions arise as a principal avenue of providing any sort of policy or civic support.

Considering that the government cannot be so directly intertwined with religious institutions, perhaps civic organizations that can act as bridges can be influential for providing necessary support for Nigerian entrepreneurs. Some churches already engage in such services as Holy Name Cathedral, a church in Downtown Chicago, that provides Volunteer Income Tax

Assistance (VITA)- a program in which volunteers help prepare taxes for clients with certain incomes that are determined by a specific threshold as determined by the IRS (Holy Name Cathedral, 2025). Expanding programming like this can provide technical support for West African migrants, like Nigerians, who are in need of it and already get a lot of their information from religious institutions.

There is also the dynamics of Americans trying to expand their taste palates through Nigerian cuisine. In the early stages, most customers were already familiar with Nigerian cuisine, being Nigerian themselves or from a similar culture, providing a strong foundation for the business. However, attracting new customers unfamiliar with the food required additional effort. In recent years, social media—particularly TikTok—has emerged as a powerful tool in bridging this gap. Several entrepreneurs noted that while their initial customer base primarily consisted of those who already had a connection to Nigerian cuisine, online exposure has sparked curiosity among a wider audience. Entrepreneur D emphasized how platforms like TikTok have introduced their business to individuals who may not have otherwise sought out Nigerian food:

"**Americans are still experimenting with our food**, even today you have a fufu challenge. Everybody's eating fufu…it got a lot more popular video that went viral, but back then, it was still something that people don't know anything about, 'Like, I haven't had this before,' even if [only happening] today. **Some people haven't had [Nigerian food] before, but at least they're willing to give it a try, because of Tiktok**." - Entrepreneur D

This shift suggests that digital marketing and social media engagement could be a key tool in helping Nigerian entrepreneurs reach a wider demographic beyond their immediate networks. This is a means where policy support can play a role in which partnerships highlighting these enterprises or evil marketing training workshops could be helpful to highlight.

Navigating Cultural Misconceptions and Educating the Local Population

Although integrating into American and Chicago culture can be easier at times, there are also many challenges that keep on occurring. The principal challenge identified in interviews was the need to correct misconceptions about African culture, particularly among Americans who often have limited and skewed understandings of the continent. Many Nigerian entrepreneurs noted that the media and charity organizations tend to portray Africa primarily through narratives of poverty and hardship, overshadowing the diversity, vibrancy, and economic dynamism of many African nations, as highlighted by Entrepreneur B:

"**There's always this misconception about the African culture**, or the Nigerian culture [to be] specific, especially what people get from the news media or from digital media…When you talk to an American who hasn't been to Africa, who hasn't been out of this country at all about Africa, and they're like, 'Oh, I never knew [it] was like [that],' because what **they've always seen the hungry kid, this starving kids. It doesn't help that you have**…charity organizations, or fundraising organizations, who always use those pictures to show your narrative about Africa. 'Oh, can you send money, your 50 cents a day? Can you help this starving kid in Africa?' You know, it doesn't help, because that's all they see." - Entrepreneur B

Entrepreneur B is not alone in this sentiment. Entrepreneur C also had similar issues, feeling as if many Americans take what they see on television at face value, rarely questioning the narratives presented to them, however there has been more of an openness at times of Americans trying to learn more about the Nigerian experience as highlighted by Entrepreneur C:

"**Americans are inquisitive**… Even American people said they are trying. They want us to mix with us. They want us to teach them. They will answer that. What is the meaning of good morning [in your language]? So you tell them that 'e kaaro.' **They like to learn our language, whether Igbo or Yoruba. They like to learn it. Even they like our food**."- Entrepreneur C

As a result, Nigerian entrepreneurs often find themselves acting as informal educators, working to challenge misconceptions and broaden public understanding of their culture through direct engagement. Many have taken the initiative to create opportunities for cultural exchange by hosting business-related events, such as community gatherings where Americans and

Nigerians come together to share experiences and traditions. These events help foster mutual understanding, but they also tend to attract individuals who are already open to cultural learning, leaving those who are less inclined to engage untouched by these efforts.

Moreover, these Nigerian-owned businesses, though growing, remain primarily small, local enterprises. Their success depends not only on community support but also on broader awareness and reduced cultural ignorance. Increased visibility and engagement from a wider audience are critical to sustaining their growth. However, the burden of cultural education should not fall solely on these small businesses, which must also focus on their financial and operational stability.

This highlights a clear opportunity for city-sponsored initiatives that connect the wider West African diaspora—including, but not limited to, Nigerian entrepreneurs—with the general public. By organizing large-scale, inclusive cultural events, the city could take a more active role in promoting awareness and appreciation of African cultures, rather than leaving the responsibility to individual business owners. Such policy-driven efforts would help expand exposure for these businesses while alleviating the pressure on them to serve as primary educators, allowing them to focus on scaling their enterprises.

Business Development and Institutional Support

Institutional Support and Policy Challenges

While some Nigerian business owners have benefited from Chicago's small business programs, their interactions with city institutions have been mixed. Some entrepreneurs, such as Entrepreneur A had some positive experience working in city-led events or other sort of

community engagement initiatives which helped them make connections and secure catering opportunities for public events:

"We have the best engagement sometimes. And I think then through that, customers who are extremely, I would say loyal, **connected to the brand because they identify with the why and the how**. When I observe that, then I challenge myself to, you know, how can I capture this in a way for… anyone that would [want] us to do it, that would listen to us at once we have the experience. We've done [Lunch and Learns] for like, grade school kids, high school, colleges. We've done it for corporate clients… We do it for seniors at the Senior Center. **They loved it. It was amazing. We brought together, you know, Nigerians, non Nigerians**." - Entrepreneur A

This experience truly highlights the importance of being able to highlight one's enterprise in the efforts of not just providing business growth but more connection with the businesses' culture of origin which in this case is Nigerian. In fact, more city-sponsored programming such as this could go a long way in not just correcting misconceptions of cultures like Nigeria but easing future Nigerian business owner's integration into the American landscapes.

However, when it came to policy and bureaucratic support, many faced significant obstacles. One major pain point was the complexity of city regulations, particularly for businesses operating food trucks, such as Entrepreneur B:

"I had a situation where I needed to renew my license…I could renew seven years ago, eight years ago online, why can't I renew in 2024 online? Everything should be going online. Why do I have to come in person, which I did so [until] the whole financial side was done…It just shows you that if **that kind of initial roadblock, it could throw someone off…Because it threw me off**. I know I can still go and get my license. It's **just a little more work and more focused on getting it done**." - Entrepreneur B

As highlighted by Entrepreneur B, there were so many inefficiencies they experienced that can oftentimes create unnecessary barriers for small business owners, especially those who operate as sole proprietors and cannot afford to take time away from their work to deal with

bureaucratic roadblocks. While bureaucracy is an age-old problem that cannot necessarily be solved in one fell swoop, having clear guidelines could potentially be helpful when trying to make it easier for those trying to navigate this system.

There was also a sense that other minority groups had stronger representation in city council and policy discussions compared to the Nigerian or broader West African business community. Entrepreneur A, among others, emphasized that some other ethnic groups' had more representation or more mainstream conceptions than Nigerian enterprise, despite a growing Nigerian population:

"We need much [unification]. **We need institutions that help right, uplift our community**. We don't have a bank [to support us]... [We don't] have a community space where you can come for whatever, right? So I see it in other neighborhoods…there's a community center for Vietnamese communities. They can call for all sorts of things, martial arts, you know, counseling, you know, whatever, like, you can go there for all various reasons. **I don't know yet if we have that.**"

While there are various programs designed to support minority entrepreneurs, some Nigerian business owners felt that the needs of African immigrants were not as well represented in decision-making spaces. This lack of representation contributes to structural challenges, such as language barriers and a lack of targeted business resources. It is important to note that Nigerians are coming from an Anglophone country where most of them do speak as English is the official language of Nigeria (Akinyemi, 2022). However, there are different dialects of English that make it harder for Nigerians to understand American terminology let alone legal and marketing language (Kperogi, 2010). In fact, in some of my interviews, specifically with Entrepreneurs C and E, I had to slow down how I was speaking or use simpler words due to my American accent and the unfamiliarity with American terminology. Thus, this highlights the

importance of not just disseminating information but the ways it is being shared as well, to make it as accessible and understandable as possible.

Challenges of Integration in Chicago's Business Landscape

Additionally, integration in terms of support for Nigerian business varied widely. Entrepreneur D highlighted that transitioning into the Chicago landscape was relatively smooth due to support from other Nigerians:

"Once you come to Chicago, **you're bound to see your folks, see your culture**. So at first, when we moved we stayed up north, because that's where almost all the Nigerians are. So at least **you want to stay where you're comfortable**, at least to see someone speaking your language that makes you feel a little better, **feel a little at home**." - Entrepreneur D

As highlighted by Entrepreneur D, for those similar to his situation, integration was not a significant struggle, as they were able to build connections within existing networks and find opportunities within spaces where they felt comfortable. There is not too much of an issue when you are around people who look like you, but in Chicago that may not necessarily always be the case. Although Nigerians are the largest group of African immigrants in the city, there are still roughly less than 20,000 of them in a city that has over 2.6 million individuals (Rob Paral, 2022). So, what happens when you aren't going to be in a region where there is a large community coming from your country of origin?

That is why for others, such as Entrepreneur A, integrations presented some notable challenges. Entrepreneur A, who launched his business with very little capital, found it particularly difficult to establish himself in the early stages:

"Pretty much it's not easy to launch and restaurants are difficult… It hasn't been easy, and particularly for us, because **I launched this with very little capital**, but…I felt like it was necessary to do that at that time, COVID was raging. **We didn't know what tomorrow held**." - Entrepreneur A

Financial constraints, a common theme, can make it difficult for some entrepreneurs to break into the industry. Access to microloans and financial capital remains a key area for improvement as a means to overcome the main financing constraints that small businesses have to deal with (Kerr and Nanda, 2009). While some entrepreneurs have found ways to self-finance their businesses through community networks, others expressed the need for more accessible funding options. In addition, the important of advertising and marketing needs to not just to attract Nigerian customers but to connect with broad public was a support systems some of the entrepreneurs found lacking, as highlighted by Entrepreneur C:

"I want to see my business get better. [They] can **help me to make advertisements** and make sure [to] **help me to upgrade my business, to borrow me money** [to] help me make advertisements. That's the only way." - Entrepreneur C

Ultimately it seems that improved visibility through city-supported initiatives, grants for immigrant-owned businesses, and better access to business development resources could help level the playing field for Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago.

Beyond their individual business success, Nigerian entrepreneurs contribute significantly to Chicago's local economy and community development. As exemplified in his testimonials, Entrepreneur A emphasized the importance of perseverance, explaining that showing up consistently within the community at hand—even when it was difficult—was crucial to his business's survival and growth. For instance, he still tries to give back to his community by combating issues like food insecurity:

"**We have to show up**. I don't know. I think it's important to show up when it's not easy, right? So it certainly wasn't easy. You know, **everyone needs food in an economic pandemic, whether they're looking for West African cuisine or not**. You know, I came out to do what I've been doing. But funny enough, we found that we had to like it so we were helping to feed those [who have] no access to foods…**We show up in spaces where people are food insecure**, you know, support their needs with our kids and talents." - Entrepreneur A

Like Entrepreneur A, many Nigerian business owners found ways to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. There is this dual role that exists, balancing business operations with social impact, which demonstrates the resilience and community-oriented mindset that many Nigerian entrepreneurs bring to their work. This coincides with the values behind remittances as explored in the literature review in which it seems to be almost baked into these entrepreneurs' business models to still have a social impact, an aspect that may not be fully considered on the policy level. There are means to do tax credits for social impact-minded activities at the policy level (De Vita and Twombly, 2004). However, there may be a lack of awareness among West African business individuals, such as the Nigerian ones in question, that aren't as fully aware of it. Thus, ensuring that that information is disseminated as efficiently as possible to aid not only the growth of these enterprises but encourage their community support is of the utmost importance.

Future Impact and Community Development

The Role of Nigerian Businesses in Chicago's Cultural Landscape

Nigerian businesses in Chicago, particularly within the food sector, have been key players in introducing Nigerian culture to the broader public. Despite being a relatively new presence compared to other immigrant businesses, these Nigerian-owned establishments have significantly contributed to both economic development and cultural exchange. One of the

biggest ways in which this has been done is entrepreneurship has enabled them to support their family and friends back in their home countries, while also help provide better livelihoods for their children here, as highlighted by Entrepreneur B:

"Now that I have children of my own…it's very important [for the kids to know my Nigerian heritage] because even though my kids are American, **I still want them to understand the culture, experience the culture, and know the culture**. So far, [I'm] doing my **best to educate them, and help them assimilate properly**. But I still want them to know both cultures. " - Entrepreneur B

Entrepreneurship is a means of empowerment and financial independence for Entrepreneurs like Entrepreneur B. In this case, entrepreneurship is intertwined with the responsibility of ensuring that future generations maintain a connection to their Nigerian heritage while also integrating into American society. For first-generation immigrants, entrepreneurship is often a necessity due to barriers in the job market, but it also provides autonomy and stability that traditional employment may not offer. By establishing businesses, Nigerian entrepreneurs can create environments where cultural values and traditions are not only maintained but also celebrated and shared with the larger community.

Through different services, such as culinary offerings, some of the Entrepreneurs I have been able to meet have not only provided an avenue for cultural sharing but also created an essential bridge for Americans to connect with Nigerian traditions. Many customers view their experiences at Nigerian restaurants as an introduction to a new, vibrant culture, often making these restaurants a unique and memorable part of their culinary exploration.

While the novelty of West African cuisine attracts initial interest, it is the cultural significance behind the dishes that fosters deeper connections with regular customers. For many entrepreneurs, their food represents more than just a business—it is an homage to their cultural

heritage, often evoking nostalgia for traditional meals passed down through generations as eloquently put by Entrepreneur A:

"**This is our food, this is [a reminder] of Nigeria**. It doesn't matter if I am in Chicago, New York, LA…this is the jollof [rice] my grandmother taught me and my sisters, and it is t**he jollof I share with Americans, the rest of Chicago**." - Entrepreneur A

The success of these businesses highlights a growing demand for Nigerian cuisine, with many customers expressing a desire for even more representation of African culture across Chicago. As Nigerian entrepreneurs continue to gain traction in the Chicago market, they are also contributing to broader social goals such as food security, community building, and cultural preservation. Events like Sunday Rise, which focus on food security and community engagement, exemplify how Nigerian businesses can have a positive impact on both local and global issues. These initiatives allow Nigerian entrepreneurs to not only showcase their culinary expertise but also address critical social needs by providing resources and support to marginalized populations.

These community-driven efforts, along with the continued expansion of cultural exchange programs, have the potential to transform how Nigerian businesses are perceived and integrated into the fabric of Chicago's economy and social landscape. By ensuring that Nigerian entrepreneurs have the institutional support they need, the city can help nurture a thriving, vibrant community of business owners who contribute to both cultural understanding and economic development.

Ultimately, Nigerian businesses in Chicago are uniquely positioned to create lasting change, both within their communities and across the city as a whole. With the right policy support and community resources, they have the potential to expand their influence, contributing

not only to Chicago's economic growth but also to the cultural enrichment of its diverse population.

Paris Findings

The findings concerning the analysis in Paris can be boiled down to three main themes:

- **Diasporic Belonging and Transnational Connectivity:** Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris build strong networks of belonging through shared cultural and religious diaspora. These relationships foster mutual support while also connecting them to broader African and immigrant communities for business growth. Their entrepreneurial efforts are deeply transnational as there is remittance to their homelands while also supporting community members in their host countries.
- **Systemic Exclusion:** Facing systemic discrimination in the French job market, whether due to islamophobic instances or rather citizenship barriers, many Senegalese immigrants turn to entrepreneurship out of necessity. Others are motivated by the desire for autonomy, inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit they observed growing up in Senegal.
- **Cyclicality of Support and Remittances:** Rather than relying on formal institutions, Senegalese entrepreneurs operate within tightly woven community-based support systems. These include religious groups, regional associations, and extended family structures that provide initial start up support through both financial and non-financial means. These networks function on a logic of reciprocity and solidarity, mimicking the communal economic practices of Senegal. They are connected to their home countries and everything they do is to help strengthen their hometowns/family abroad.

Diasporic Belonging and Transnational Connectivity

Local Diasporic Belonging as a Foundation for Entrepreneurial Infrastructure

In conversations with Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris, a recurring theme that emerged was how community networks served not only as cultural lifelines for these individuals who were away from their home countries but also acted as crucial, informal business infrastructure. For many interviewees, such as Entrepreneur F, these networks helped ease the overwhelming transition into navigating Parisian social norms and culture.

"Paris is a very, very, very busy city that is too big…**[My cousin] had to show me** where to buy fish, get chicken, who is a good shopkeeper and who just wants to talk too much…the metro is very different [from Senegal] and **can take you anywhere but only if you, I mean, know where you need to go**." – Entrepreneur F

As highlighted by this experience, Entrepreneur F was reliant on her extended family members to guide her to places to shop for necessities or food, making the hectic scenery of Paris much more manageable for her. Her family acted as a cultural anchor that grounded her in a foreign land.

These cultural connections also played a foundational role in the entrepreneurs' business journeys. Across the interviews, all the entrepreneurs were able to use their social networks with their family members or family friends to actually begin their enterprises. Not only did most of the enterprises begin through familial networks, but all of them started off through some sort of informal or underground economy. Entrepreneur F, for example, launched her hairstyling career by doing braids and African hairstyles for her nieces and cousins:

"**I did hair for everybody**, from my little girls [referring to nieces] to my aunties, my sister wanted her hair done too for a party and would do it for her. People liked the hair I did and

I keep on getting more and more customers who want to have their hair done by me…and now **I have my own shop with 4 [hair]dressers**." – Entrepreneur F

Through word of mouth, she was eventually able to start doing hair, unofficially I must add, at a family friend's salon. From there, she was able to transition to owning a formal business location where she has her own team of stylists. This experience is not just unique to Entrepreneur F. Entrepreneur G, a fellow hair stylist, would initially braid her for her relatives and friends as well as tailor African dresses. She also gained more popularity through word of mouth, and began sewing as well as designing her own African clothes that led to her launching her own fashion line. She still continues to offer hair services to family and friends on the side, not forgetting her roots, as it was her community that got her to where she is now. Crucially, the role of community did not end at business inception. These relationships with the Senegalese community remained instrumental in the growth and sustainability of their ventures.

Moreover, these close-knit networks created safe spaces to experiment with and refine business ideas. Entrepreneur H, who runs a Senegalese food catering business, initially relied on feedback from friends, family, and even strangers within the Senegalese community to fine-tune her recipes and offerings. From the feedback to various food tastings among Senegalese community members, she was able to launch her business and create a whole catering line due to the support she had from her familial and community networks.

These examples illustrate how Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris draw support, knowledge, and opportunity from a deeply rooted sense of local diasporic belonging. By operating within tight-knit familial and community networks, they establish a strong foundation for launching and sustaining their businesses over the long term. All of the entrepreneurs discussed here relied on Senegalese cultural networks that supported their success through non-financial means—highlighting how powerful social capital can be in navigating

entrepreneurship. This raises important questions about how migrants without access to such networks might fare. It suggests that formal support from governmental institutions—especially for those who lack these built-in community ties—could be invaluable. Such support doesn't have to be purely financial; even educational resources that help newcomers understand and navigate the local business environment could make a significant difference.

Cross-Diasporic Collaboration

While connections within the Senegalese community remain central to their entrepreneurial journeys, many Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris also engage with other immigrant and diasporic groups, forming cross-diasporic networks that exist in an interdependent dynamic of resources.

During visits to the Goutte d'Or neighborhood, home to a larger population of Senegalese as well as other African immigrants, it became clear that the area functions as a melting pot of the wider African diaspora rather than just solely Senegalese or West African diaspora members. As Entrepreneur I, a grocery store owner, pointed out, working exclusively with other Senegalese, or even just West Africans, is simply not feasible as so many other individuals who are North African or even Middle Eastern enter his shop on a daily basis. He shared how his everyday operations rely on exchanges with neighboring businesses, such as trading produce with a nearby Maghrebi (North African) for Halal meat cuts or African cloths. These exchanges were not just convenient but integral to sustaining his business and household as, for example, his wife would use the bartered cloth for tailoring dresses. This kind of mutual exchange represents the localized, informal economy that seems to exist among Senegalese entrepreneurs and other migrant businesses, emphasizing that, in Paris, there is already some sort of system in place of mutual support among entrepreneurs.

What was even more intriguing was how the stronger connections among Senegalese enterprises were not necessarily based on being from the same ethnic diaspora but rather on a shared religious identity. Many of the Senegalese business owners interviewed were practicing Muslims, and their ability to connect with other Muslim entrepreneurs from North Africa to West Africa created a connection of solidarity that extended beyond ethnic lines. These connections played out in daily life, from sourcing halal meats for special occasions like Eid, to community support during religious holidays and prayer gatherings. Religion, in this sense, provided another shared framework of meaning and reciprocity that facilitated business relations and deepened interpersonal ties.

Religious spaces themselves often served as nodes of informal economic activity and social connection. Entrepreneur G, for instance, shared how business opportunities emerged casually through interactions at her local mosque. A fellow member once asked if she could adjust a dress for her daughter, which she had agreed to do. This little request eventually led to more clientele as she received positive referrals about her business. Reflecting on this dynamic, she described these exchanges as:

"The business conversations are transactional. **I give you something and you help me**, but we are respectful, kind and fair." – Entrepreneur G[1]

Her experience illustrates how these interactions are not intrusive or overtly commercial. Rather, they grow organically from shared cultural spaces, rooted in mutual trust and respect. Such experiences highlight the role that religious institutions can play when supporting Senegalese migrants with entrepreneurship ventures. However, from a policy intervention perspective, this may be a dangerous road to go down due to the strict separation of church and

[1]This is a summarized and translated quote from one of the interviews that didn't want to be recorded. I strived to make it as close to the original speaker's original intent and message.

state. Thus, it seems that civic or similar community organizations can help facilitate such support through religious environments as needed, when an official government body may not be able to have the same reach.

Systemic Exclusion

Systemic Exclusion from the Formal Labor Market

From my conversations, there was a common theme of labor exclusion that severely limited the already difficult access to formal employment, which is what led to the Senegalese entrepreneurs that I spoke to to pursue entrepreneurship in the first place. For instance, Entrepreneur F mentioned how she had difficulty getting any job that she applied for as many times her application would be denied without even an interview. She would sometimes try to go into hair salons in person as well, but would be turned away. This was a surprising experience for her as, back in Senegal, it was easier to go up and get a job yet for her that wasn't quite the case. Thus, she felt as if she had to create her own job opportunity rather than wait for one to come to her.

It was perplexing that such an experience like this had to occur to someone, and made me curious as to why. When discussing similar experiences with other entrepreneurs, such as Entrepreneurs G and I, it seemingly was boiled down to sentiments of controversial and discriminatory politics that made it difficult for immigrants to gain a foothold in the Paris, let alone France economy. Both Entrepreneurs G and I mentioned the role of "laïcité" or secularism in French politics that have caused feelings of ostracization when finding a job or even trying to market their businesses to local French citizens. For contextualization, the principle of secularism in France has mainly implied the separation of the State and religious organizations, being a part of the French constitution since 1958 (Baubérot, 2000). Its original intent is to

ensure a mutual respect for freedom of thought and religion without imposing upon the will of others (Beswick, 2020). However, after further conversation with individuals like Entrepreneur G, a devout practicing muslim, that may not truly be the case. Entrepreneur G mentions how she has felt practicing her religion has been constrained, specifically that she may "be in danger" if she is public with her religion. She has little faith in the French government to support her as a citizen let alone as an entrepreneur. In fact, she mentioned how she felt some Parisians avoid Muslim businesses viewing them to be thieves, so that is why she operates mainly within the Islamic and Senegalese community.

It's also important to consider that concerns around citizenship significantly influenced the career paths of many of the entrepreneurs I interviewed. As previously mentioned, France has a complex and often difficult history with West African immigrants, particularly those from Senegal, which has made obtaining citizenship a challenge for many. Although this topic was not deeply explored in the interviews due to participants' discomfort, the widespread reluctance to be recorded suggested a deep-seated fear and mistrust surrounding this issue. Many entrepreneurs appeared to gravitate toward informal or "under-the-table" work and self-employment as a means to avoid drawing attention from government authorities. This reliance on entrepreneurship often stemmed not just from economic necessity, but also from a strategic avoidance of bureaucratic hurdles. As a result, these individuals leaned heavily on their cultural and diaspora networks rather than official institutions for support. This dynamic highlights not only a desire but a pressing need for civic organizations to step in and provide more structured, trustworthy support systems—particularly when fear of state surveillance discourages engagement with formal government services.

While this is her own personal experience, it seems that she may not be alone in these feelings. Amnesty International discussed multiple instances of where this "secularism" can disproportionately impact the rights of Muslim women and girls who are excluded from a variety of activities if they wear their religious regalia, such as a hijab (Amnesty International, 2025). Thus, this movement that is under the guise of ensuring equality and decreasing religious discrimination may in fact doing the opposite, especially for Senegalese entrepreneurs who are overwhelmingly Muslim (Karimi, 2018). Therefore, pursuing entrepreneurships for individuals like Entrepreneur 1, seems to be the way that they can circumvent institutional discrimination they may face and be more autonomous in choosing the customer base they want to operate in, thus creating as much of a welcoming environment as possible for themselves. This is a very intriguing point as this reason for pursuing entrepreneurship to overcome issues of systemic discrimination highlights a lack of trust in Parisian institutions that may support small businesses. If there is a way to mend such distrust, then there is a way to ensure that West African immigrants, such as Senegalese entrepreneurs are able to receive the support that they need to further thrive.

Aspirational Entrepreneurship

When understanding the drive for entrepreneurship among Senegalese immigrants in Paris, systemic exclusion was not the only factor; in fact, many of the entrepreneurs I interviewed said that they engage in entrepreneurship as a means to stay connected to their culture abroad. For instance, Entrepreneur H mentioned how the very structure of the 18th arrondissement where a lot of African businesses reside reminds her of the street markets of Dakar, a place where not only commerce is blooming but casual conversation and catching up

with others. There is a sense of community she feels being a part of the entrepreneurship community around her, and it helps her feel more at home in a foreign land.

Similarly, Entrepreneur G, who started off her journey mending clothes for her family and friends and now owns her own fashion line, saw her business as a way to show off the beauty that Senegal has to offer. Not only is this business her livelihood, but it brings her life as she gets to do what she truly loves to support her family and loved ones. Entrepreneurship has also been her way of connecting to other members of the African or Black community in Paris, beyond just Senegalese individuals. Her work not only attracted clients from the Senegalese and broader African diasporic communities but also drew interest from non-African Parisians seeking unique, Afro-French fashion. From experiences like her entrepreneurship became a channel for asserting the cultural relevance of Senegal in Paris, especially when movements like secularism can make African culture seem otherworldly or even invisible rather than a part of the Parisian landscape.

It is also interesting how these businesses and different services play into the tourism and vibrancy of the Parisian landscapes. All the entrepreneurs that I talked to were located in the 18th arrondissement, specially in Goutte D'or which is also known as Petite Afrique or Little Africa. While most of their clientele are local, there are also so many tourists that go through this neighborhood and see these businesses and this community almost like a tourist attraction. Thus, there is the opportunity to showcase these enterprises as a part of a cultural expression that, despite the institutional/bureaucratic barriers that may exist, is still a part of Parisian culture. In my discussion with Entrepreneur I, he mentioned how he enjoyed speaking to visitors, like me and who explore this neighborhood as it not only lets them get more business but to see what he believes to be one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in the city.

Cyclicality of Support and Remittances

Remittances

An interesting theme that arose was the topic of financial support, one the biggest, if not the biggest obstacle that each of the entrepreneurs I spoke to discussed. The issue that they primarily faced was getting the necessary start-up capital to start their enterprise. For some of the Entrepreneurs, such as Entrepreneurs F and G, start-up funding wasn't as major of an issue as they didn't have too many upfront costs. However, for entrepreneur I, who was running a grocery store, there were a lot of upfront costs that he had to deal with. Entrepreneur I mentioned that he was directed to use the Chambre de Commerce et D'Industrie (CCI) when registering his enterprise for a small business loan, and thought it would be an easy process. However, he had to set up multiple appointments, do a lot of paperwork answering questions he didn't quite understand, and was not fully aware of the terms and conditions of the financing he was engaging in. As Entrepreneur I described:

"I felt **confused and misled by the small business loan process**. I gave up multiple times, talked to many people. Everyone was confused like me." - Entrepreneur I[2]

As highlighted in his experience, it was a bureaucratically dense and difficult process that wasn't very accessible to his needs as a Senegalese migrant navigating a foreign business landscape. Yet, the lack of support he felt is concerning, and raises the questions of how many entrepreneurs had to go through this experience but were ultimately not as successful due to the difficulties that they faced.

[2] This is a summarized and translated quote from one of the interviews that didn't want to be recorded. I strived to make it as close to the original speaker's original intent and message.

It is due to experiences such as these that remittances play such a large role in Senegalese entrepreneurship in Paris. A central motivation among the Senegalese entrepreneurs was the desire to help their family and friends back at home, especially as, no matter how difficult it was to do so in Paris, they are earning more income that can go further back in Senegal. Entrepreneur H stated how about 10% of her wages go back to her family back in Senegal:

"**They helped me so I helped them back**. I am here only because of my family." - Entrepreneur H[3]

Entrepreneur H conveys how she views her ability of sending money back home as the means to help support her loved ones that helped her get to Paris in the first place. There is a sentiment of cyclical support, and individuals like Entrepreneur H help allow it to thrive.

Seeing how pervasive remittances were in the interviews I conducted, I became curious to see how encompassing it is in Senegalese populations in Paris. Ultimately, it seems that remittances play a major role in Senegalese migrants abroad, especially in Paris. According to a study by Champetier and Drevet (2000), Senegalese migrants originating from the Senegal River Valley were sending an average of €10,000 per year per household, with contributions involving as many as 132 active members per village fund. These remittances are not sporadic but structured, often collected through community associations and "village funds" established in Paris and its suburbs.

This dynamic of "village funds" was interesting to me, and upon further research led me to understand what are formally known as Organisations de Solidarité Internationale issues des Migrations (OSIMs) formalize this dynamic. Established in the wake of the 1970s immigration

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policy shift, when France began to restrict return movement to postcolonial African countries, OSIMs emerged as platforms through which African migrants could continue to invest in their home villages when they weren't able to travel back to their home countries (Mamadou, 2021). These organizations, that are still very active today, crowdsource capital from African migrants abroad, funneling them into various different developmental projects such as digging wells, supporting agricultural businesses, or even building schools (Mamadou, 2021). OSIMs act as a direct channel for Senegalese migrants who are abroad to support their home nation providing the financial support that their communities are in need of.

Learning about this organization was fascinating, as there aren't many similar organizations that I was aware of existing in France or even the United States, perhaps providing a testament to how strong and well-connected the Senegalese community is in Paris as compared to the Nigerian community in Chicago. I became curious about how applicable this experience was in some of the entrepreneurs' experiences, and individuals like Entrepreneur I had direct experience with such a program. Entrepreneur 4 noted that through the connections he made through his OSIM chapter he was able to gain knowledge on how to import Senegalese spices in an affordable manner to his shop, as well as working with his younger siblings well with community projects back in his home village. These organizations seem to fill in the gaps that institutions in France have not been able to: creating space for entrepreneurs to know how to further grow their businesses while still staying well connected to their homelands.

Comparative Analysis of Chicago and Paris Entrepreneurs

With a more in-depth understanding of the two different sets of the African diaspora, it is beneficial to compare the two groups in question under the comparative international entrepreneurship (CIE) framework to best understand the generalized policy implications as well as considerations to ensure that different members of the West African diaspora are supported in foreign countries in the Western world when trying to pursue entrepreneurship. There are various differences between the two cultures, such as language, cultural norms, and religion. It is also important to note that there are probably many differences among the cultures themselves with different ethnic groups, rural versus urban beginnings, and personal experiences. However, for this comparison, it is important to understand any similarities that arise despite all these various differences that each of these respective West African diaspora groups may have. It is when understanding these similarities that identifying areas of centralized intervention may occur.

With that in mind, the comparative analysis can be grouped into three main levels: institutional support and barriers, diasporic and cultural connections, and entrepreneurial motivations. As described earlier, the CIE framework centers on three different levels of analysis which are the macro, meso, and micro level of comparisons. These three levels, aligning with the three main themes explored respectively, will aid in ensuring that the comparisons explored can lead to the most comprehensive solutions.

Macro Level: Institutional Support and Barriers

In both contexts, both different sets of West African diaspora entrepreneurs conveyed many frustrations with their host governments' lengthy bureaucratic practices and processes that made it difficult to support, let alone start their own entrepreneurial ventures. However, despite

this commonality, there are still varying levels of support. When interviewing the Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago, there were some ethnic-based events, albeit not a lot, that they were able to take advantage of that were sponsored by the city such as the various food festivals. Additionally, there seemed to be less red-tape , as compared to their Senegalese counterparts, that made the resources they needed slightly more available. On the other hand, Senegalese business owners in Paris seemed to cite more instances of systemic discrimination that made it difficult to get more official support from the Parisian government. In addition, the French principle of secularism being so deeply entrenched that has unfortunately led to harmful sentiments against the Islamic community seems to lead to high levels of mistrust and a more autonomous nature with entrepreneurship activities in Paris, slightly more so than Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago. Regardless, this common distrust in government institutions seems to hold true, thus inspiring a solution that helps wrestles this problem.

It is also important to note that there seems to be a stronger informal institution in Paris for Senegalese entrepreneurs more so than Nigerian business owners in Chicago. From the testimonials of Nigerian entrepreneurs, there were smaller civic organizations that they can lean on for support but a lot more of their support networks came from personal relationships with family friends. While this still exists among the Senegalese entrepreneurs, there are stronger civic organizations such as the presence of OSIMs that makes it easier for these entrepreneurs to mobilize and crowdsource the support that they need while also sending remittances back home as well. OSIMs seem to have had a lot of amazing benefits for Senegalese entrepreneurs, especially when there is so much distrust with their host country's government. Thus, perhaps it is beneficial to look into solutions that help mirror similar programming so that West African entrepreneurs, regardless of where they exist in the diaspora, can have similar means of support.

Meso Level: Diasporic and cultural connections

At the Meso level, cultural norms and shared values play a central role in shaping the entrepreneurial pathways of both Senegalese immigrants in Paris and Nigerian immigrants in Chicago. While the two communities operate in different urban and national contexts, their approaches to business formation and growth are deeply rooted in their social networks, oftentimes mirroring the communal and informal community models of their home countries. For Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris, business is rarely an individual endeavor. Instead, it is socially embedded, emerging from networks of kinship, neighborhood, and shared cultural identity. Many businesses originate in domestic or informal spaces, such as hairstyling for family members or food preparation for community affairs, and grow through organic means of word of mouth referrals.

The strong community networks that exist in these host cities also exist across transnational borders through organized economic remittances. Senegalese entrepreneurs typically send money back to their home villages not just as individual remittances to family, but as part of broader solidarity efforts. Many contribute to OSIMs (Organisations de Solidarité Internationale issues des Migrations) or participate in village associations that fund infrastructure projects, educational efforts, or water systems. These organized remittances highlight how entrepreneurship for Senegalese migrants is not merely about individual profit, but about fulfilling a transnational duty to uplift their communities at home. In contrast, Nigerian entrepreneurship in Chicago, while similarly grounded in strong cultural pride and community ties, does not seem to have as many strong formal cultural or civic institutions that can support their community members. The Nigerian entrepreneurs that I spoke to still would send money back to their family members in their home country, but not in the same structure or community-

driven manner OSIMs operated with the Senegalese entrepreneurs. While less institutionalized than those of the Senegalese, they remain a key motivation behind entrepreneurship and often reinforce transnational ties. In fact, it seems as if there is a much stronger need for there to be more formalized institutions such as OSIMs in France for Senegalese individuals.

Religious institutions were also a major cornerstone for both communities. While Senegalese Muslims often build businesses through informal conversations and support found in mosques, Nigerian entrepreneurs lean heavily on church networks. In both cases, religious spaces double as economic spaces, where trust is established, services are exchanged, and entrepreneurial aspirations are encouraged. These shared spiritual foundations foster a strong sense of solidarity that transcends national identity. For example, both Nigerian and Senegalese entrepreneurs often collaborate with fellow West Africans, regardless of country of origin, and display an openness to supporting and learning from one another. Whether sourcing food ingredients or exchanging customer bases, these diaspora entrepreneurs demonstrate a strong capacity for cross-cultural economic cooperation.

In both communities, there is a deep awareness that business success is not only for individual gain, but to fulfill broader obligations to one's family, faith, and homeland.

Micro Level: Entrepreneurial motivations

When comparing the personal experiences of Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris and Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago reveals, there are similar and slightly differing motivations that led both groups to pursue entrepreneurship. One key similarity was how both communities rely on informal or underground economic activities, especially when first starting off their entrepreneurial journeys.s.

For Senegalese migrants in Paris, entrepreneurship is frequently necessity-driven, emerging as a response to systemic exclusion from the formal French labor market such as citizenship concerns or xenophobic experiences. These structural hurdles often block access to stable, formal employment, leaving entrepreneurship as one of the few viable paths for income generation. When in conversation with Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago, who also faced racial barriers, they seemed to be more opportunity-driven and are not pursuing their enterprises in as much a necessary manner as their Senegalese counterparts.

The differential ability to formalize businesses may also be a reflection of the distinct immigration and citizenship pathways available to each group. In the U.S., pathways to citizenship can offer more flexibility and entrepreneurial support once obtained. For Nigerians in Chicago, this often enables quicker integration into legal business structures. In contrast, Senegalese migrants in France may struggle with temporary or precarious legal statuses, which can hinder their ability to register businesses, access loans, or secure long-term commercial leases. These legal and institutional frameworks not only affect the type of businesses that emerge, but also how quickly and successfully they scale.

Despite these differences, both groups show a shared reliance on underground or informal economies in the initial stages of their ventures. Whether it's a Senegalese woman braiding hair out of her apartment in Paris or a Nigerian man selling imported goods from his garage in Chicago, the early phases of entrepreneurship are marked by resourcefulness and community reliance.

Policy Considerations

The aim of this research is to ultimately understand how diaspora networks foster entrepreneurship and community development across different West African populations in the effort of simulating similar practice through the art of policy. After developing an in-depth understanding of experiences of Nigerian and Senegalese immigrants in cities like Chicago and Paris, there are broader policy considerations that can be explored that may help rectify some of the issues and support systems that they face that may also be application to other West African entrepreneurs who find themselves in similar city landscapes. The recommendations developed here are meant to be adaptable, relevant across various cities and groups, however may not capture the complete nuances of the respective cities' socio-political landscape that may affect the feasibility of these recommendations. It is for this reason that these policy considerations were developed with finetuned specificity of how they may be relevant to the specific city contexts that were investigated.

Through the comparative analysis, several key themes emerged: the importance of increased visibility for West African businesses, the need to expand educational programs and entrepreneurial resources, and the persistent challenges posed by bureaucratic barriers. The policy considerations that follow are designed to reflect and respond to these core trends.

Policy Recommendation: Support Civic Organizations as Economic and Social Hubs

Interviews with both Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris and Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago revealed that religious spaces such as mosques and churches, as well as community centers can serve the role of supporting diasporic belonging in a new culture as well as providing the necessary platforms and connections needed for entrepreneurial success. Thus, there is the

opportunity for city governments to increase municipal funding for cultural festivals and heritage events that showcase the vibrancy of West African cultures through means that individuals within, or outside, of the diaspora can participate in. For instance, Chicago, known for its various food festivals, can partner with local civic organizations that host (West) African centric food events, by providing more visibility or resources to make these events as large as possible. By doing so, this encourages economic participation with West African businesses like the Nigerian entrepreneurs I was able to speak to as well as normalizing the presence of West African enterprises in their host country.

Additionally, governments should provide access to affordable public venues where diaspora organizations can host training sessions, business development workshops, and networking events. This would be especially beneficial for Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris, who often face exclusion from traditional professional networks, as well as Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago who frequently rely on religious and pan-African community structures to gain business traction. Thus, by having more city sponsored events that allow for such networking to occur can mimic the social networks that allow West African entrepreneurs to connect to other business-oriented individuals. This can help decrease the ostracization that the Nigerian and Senegalese entrepreneurs had felt when developing their ventures, ensuring that the entrepreneurship community is as welcoming and inclusive as it can be.

Policy Recommendation: Expanding Education and Training Programs for West African Diaspora Entrepreneurs

To address the persistent barriers to formal economic inclusion faced by Senegalese and Nigerian entrepreneurs in both Paris and Chicago due to lack of knowledge of resources for small businesses as well as systemic discrimination, local governments can invest in education

and training initiatives that directly respond to the needs and experiences of these diasporic communities. As highlighted in interviews and supported by comparative research, many Senegalese migrants in Paris are necessity-driven entrepreneurs, engaging in entrepreneurship due to an initial exclusion from the formal labor market due to biases they faced, language barriers, or incomplete citizenship materials. Similarly, while many Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago are more opportunity-driven, they still face challenges navigating local regulatory frameworks and accessing mainstream business resources.

This leads to the resolution of having more targeted, inclusive education pipelines. City governments can partner with local universities, community colleges, and business schools to develop entrepreneurship programs tailored to the lived realities of diaspora entrepreneurs. These programs should include practical skill-building in areas like accounting, legal compliance, marketing, and digital literacy– skills that often fall outside the reach of self-taught or informally trained entrepreneurs. Collaborations with local chambers of commerce can help embed these programs within broader entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Finally, establishing diaspora-specific mentorship programs can bridge the gap between emerging entrepreneurs and seasoned business owners within their communities can also be helpful, especially for Ws African entrepreneurs that don't have the same social or familiar networks as the entrepreneurs I spoke with for this project. These mentorship structures can reinforce transnational business knowledge, encourage intergenerational learning, and foster collaboration not only within West African groups but also across the broader immigrant entrepreneurial landscape. Ultimately, expanding education and training pathways equips entrepreneurs with the tools to not only survive but thrive, ensuring that West African entrepreneurs are able to have the best means of success.

Policy Recommendation: Reducing Bureaucratic Barriers to Business Formation

As a consistent major obstacle between both Paris and Chicago based entrepreneurs was the bureaucratic systems that can be complex to navigate, it would be important to have city-sponsored business navigation processes to diminish this barrier. In Paris, many Senegalese entrepreneurs struggle with understanding the business registration process, navigating French legal terminology, and meeting documentation requirements. For those with irregular immigration status or limited fluency in French, these challenges are even more daunting. Similarly, in Chicago, while some Nigerian entrepreneurs are highly educated and fluent in English, many still face confusion around zoning regulations, business licensing, taxation, and compliance with federal and state laws.

To address these barriers, both cities can potentially implement "one-stop" business registration centers or even just information desks that can provide culturally tailored services specifically for African diaspora entrepreneurs. These centers would consolidate the process of obtaining licenses, permits, and tax IDs while offering translation services in relevant languages such as Wolof, Hausa, Yoruba, and French. While it may be difficult to obtain in-person staffing with these needs, even just providing these resources online in an increasingly digitized world can go a long way.

In addition, cities can invest in legal assistance clinics or legal aid partnerships that specialize in supporting immigrant entrepreneurs. These clinics would offer affordable or pro bono advice on compliance, tax obligations, contract negotiation, and intellectual property protection. For example, a Senegalese fashion designer in Paris who begins by selling custom garments informally could access a legal clinic to formalize their business structure, protect their designs, and expand their clientele through official commercial channels.

By reducing bureaucratic and legal hurdles, cities can help transform necessity-driven informal businesses into sustainable, growth-oriented ventures. These reforms would not only empower West African entrepreneurs to operate with greater security and legitimacy, but also strengthen the broader urban economies by bringing more diverse businesses into the formal sector.

Conclusion

At its core, this research works to understand the strength that lies within diasporic networks when fostering entrepreneurship and community development across varied urban and cultural contexts. By centering the lived experiences of Nigerian entrepreneurs in Chicago and Senegalese entrepreneurs in Paris, this thesis was able to shed light on how deep rooted and important communal ties are in order for such migrants to not just gain a foothold in their host city but to also thrive within it. From challenges to navigating bureaucratic business processes to being showcased in their host city cultures to being reliant on civic organizations for support, Nigerians and Senegalese entrepreneurs interviewed shared similar experiences despite coming from different parts of the West African diaspora as well as operating in different urban contexts. Thus, this provides insights that even across the diversity of West African diaspora there are policy interventions that can be made in cities outside of the African continent that can provide the tailored support such entrepreneurs need, such as investing more in civic and cultural organizations as sites of economic activation or having more targeted training pipelines for new business owners.

This study began with a personal question, exploring what support systems should be in place to help make it possible for migrants like my parents to find not just survival, but stability and belonging in foreign cities. The answer, as demonstrated in the journeys of so many others, lies in the strength of diasporic communities and the networks they cultivate. But not everyone arrives with an existing village to lean on. For this reason, cities must step into the role of co-builders: not replacing these communities, but supporting and resourcing them.

In an era of increasing migration and urban diversity, integrating cultural identity with economic opportunity is no longer a niche concern, it is necessary for inclusive business

development. West African entrepreneurs, like those in this study, are not just beneficiaries of policy; they are cultural and economic contributors shaping the very fabric of their cities. It truly takes a village to ensure that all members of our cities can truly thrive.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview questions for Chicago Entrepreneurs (in English)

Theme 1: Personal and Cultural Background

- Can you tell me a little about your background, such as where you are from in West Africa and how long you have been living in Chicago?
- What motivated your move to Chicago?
- How has living in Chicago influenced your cultural identity?
- How important is it for you to maintain your cultural heritage in your daily life?

Theme 2: Cultural Exchange and Integration

- Can you describe your experiences interacting with community members of your culture in Chicago? How do these experiences shape your personal and professional life?
- How do you navigate cultural differences in your interactions with both the local population and other West African immigrants?
- What challenges have you faced in integrating into the larger community in Chicago?
- How have social and familial networks helped you in overcoming these challenges?

Theme 3: Business and Social Organization Development

- What motivated you to pursue entrepreneurship or business opportunities in Chicago?
- How have social networks influenced your business strategies and growth?
- In what ways have these networks supported your personal and professional growth?
- What types of investments (financial, social, or intellectual) have you seen within the West African community in Chicago? Do you feel like these investments were enough?

Theme 4: Future Impact and Community

- What are some of the biggest challenges facing the West African community in Chicago in terms of businesses, and even community development?
- What opportunities do you see for improving community development and integration in the future?
- What initiatives or projects have you been involved in that aim to build and strengthen the West African community in Chicago? How do you think these efforts align with the broader goal of fostering robust community development?
- How can Chicago foster an environment that better supports cultural exchange and integration?

Appendix 2: Interview questions for Paris Entrepreneurs (in French)

Thème 1 : Contexte Personnel et Culturel

- Pouvez-vous me parler un peu de votre parcours, par exemple d'où vous venez en Afrique de l'Ouest et depuis combien de temps vivez-vous à Paris?
- Qu'est-ce qui a motivé votre déménagement à Paris?
- Comment la vie à Paris a-t-elle influencé votre identité culturelle?
- Dans quelle mesure est-il important pour vous de préserver votre patrimoine culturel dans votre vie quotidienne?

Thème 2: Échange culturel et intégration

- Pouvez-vous décrire vos expériences d'échange culturel à Paris? Comment ces expériences façonnent-elles votre vie personnelle et professionnelle?
- Comment gérez-vous les différences culturelles dans vos interactions avec la population locale et avec les autres immigrants ouest-africains?
- Quels défis avez-vous rencontrés pour vous intégrer dans la communauté plus large de Paris?
- Comment les réseaux de la diaspora vous ont-ils aidé à surmonter ces défis?

Thème 3: Développement des Entreprises et des Organisations Sociales

- Qu'est-ce qui vous a motivé à poursuivre des opportunités d'entrepreneuriat ou d'affaires à Paris?
- Comment les réseaux de la diaspora ont-ils influencé vos stratégies commerciales et votre croissance?
- De quelle manière ces réseaux ont-ils soutenu votre croissance personnelle et professionnelle?
- Quels types d'investissements (financiers, sociaux ou intellectuels) avez-vous constatés au sein de la communauté ouest-africaine à Paris?
- Comment ces investissements ont-ils un impact sur la communauté au sens large et contribuent-ils au développement économique?

Thème 4: Impact Futur et Communauté

- Quels sont les plus grands défis auxquels est confrontée la communauté ouest-africaine à Paris en termes de développement social et économique?
- Quelles opportunités voyez-vous pour améliorer le développement et l'intégration communautaire à l'avenir?
- Dans quelles initiatives ou projets avez-vous participé visant à construire et à renforcer la communauté ouest-africaine à Paris?
- Comment pensez-vous que ces efforts s'alignent sur l'objectif plus large de favoriser un développement communautaire solide?
- Comment cette ville peut favoriser des environnements qui soutiennent mieux les échanges et l'intégration culturels?