

Migrational Issues in Contemporary Nigeria: A Call for Urgent Attention **By**

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Abstract

Migration is an act of humans needing to move to other places from where they have been for various reasons but with the sole aim of getting better living condition. In the contemporary Nigeria there have arisen issues of migration with serious negative trends which need very urgent attention to redress. Using historical research design and on the strength of structuralism, the writers evaluated the issues constructively. They observed that migration has been going on among Nigerians but that the dimension it has taken in the present time is rather dangerous both for the migrants and the nation. It is therefore, recommended that the migrants and the entire peoples and government of Nigeria should take caution, be of good behaviour, being more patriotic and ensuring the enthronement of good governance so to stem the worrisome trend and possibly reverse the movement for the good of the country especially.

Keywords: Migration, history, contemporary Nigeria, good behaviour/governance, and patriotism.

Introduction

The movement of people from one area to the other had been experienced in Nigeria prior to the colonial period. Several communities of diverse levels of development in the country such as Calabar, Opobo, Benin City, Bonny, existed prior to colonialism. They had a long history of internal trade, as well as with the Europeans. Benin City had a very rich historical record emphasizing the presence of population in-flow due to its well established administrative and monarchical structure before the coming of the Europeans. Europeans who visited the continent from the middle of the 15th century attested to the fact that the

population density of the capital city of Benin kingdom was attributed to its level of development, which necessitated the movement of people from the hinterland into the city.

Why migrate?

Prior to the known documentation on migration in Nigeria and indeed Africa, people moved from one place to another internally and externally across local territories. The trans-Saharan trade was a case in point. Merchants traded on slaves and produce from one region to another spanning through Morocco to Kano. The popularly named Moroccan grain leather made from red goatskins was one renowned product transported from Kano through Tangier, Agadez to Marrakesh and subsequently to Spain. Obetta (1998:1-2) said that the European explorers, Clapperton and Barth could not hide their admiration for hides and skin from the area. It was the toast of many European importers. This was followed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade of about the 14th to 19th centuries, which saw an increase in commercial activity and movement of people across international boundaries. The trans-Atlantic slave trade accounted for about 12 million slaves that migrated from the region Mberu and Pongou (2010). Orugbani (2005) explained that the indigenous states and class structure of the Nigerian communities at the beginning of the 19th century was impacted by both the trans-Saharan trade and the European exploration of the African hinterland.

Furthermore, the introduction of colonialism and independence gave rise to the new trends of migration within the Nigerian state as new towns and cities developed. Mberu and Pongou (2010) also noted that before the 1960 migration stream in Nigeria, the mass movement of people had already started with the employment of workers in farm plantations, mines, and the recruitment of British administrative officers with the Royal Niger Company (RNC) taking charge of British commercial interests in Nigeria.

The discovery of mineral resources such as coal, bauxite, and tin-ore in several places, such as Enugu and Jos and the crude oil exploration in the Niger-Delta attracted many migrants to the newly found economic zones. Skilled and semi-skilled workers thronged into these areas in large numbers. The desire for good life drew many young people to the towns in search of jobs. They had to leave their villages and the drudgery of subsistence farming to seek for better life in the cities.

Lagos, Kano, Enugu and Port Harcourt attracted large inflows of economic migrants because they were major centres of commercial and industrial activities. The development of sea infrastructure for the easy evacuation of farm produce for export brought increased

commercial, industrial, and financial activities to such areas as Lagos and Port Harcourt specifically, has also been noted in Akinyemi and Kuteyi (2011).

Interestingly, land and water transportation have defined and shaped the movement of people within the country. The various means of transportation have quickened the rate at which people moved, especially in coastal states, such as Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta. It is a viable channel of migration through creeks, rivers, seas, and oceans. The particularly to the south consists of interconnected water bodies from Calabar to Brass. Water transportation in Africa predates the coming of colonialism. Many Nigerian communities were renowned for building sea floating communities and the use of sea transport, especially the Ijaw speaking people of the Niger Delta.

Similarly, land transportation stems from its ancient form by walking. People moved long distances in search of food, shelter, and trade. Caravan and matocks were used to visit families scattered in neighbouring communities and distant villages, kingdoms sending emissaries and in the prosecution of war. One significant impact of transportation in precolonial times was that it aided nodal communication and the rise of control of network and trade, which followed with invasion and wars, consequently population shifts and emergence of powerful ethnic groups and kingdoms. Post-colonial developments deepened the migration penetration in the hinterland, as existing bush paths were made into motorable roads, leaving behind a network of all season roads.

As far back as 1960 as Onokomaiya (1978) reported that the nation had constructed 74,000km length of roads. The roads were classified under Trunks A, B, C based on surfacing and regional level. Studies have shown that roads greatly impacted on urban transportation as 75 per cent of the cities relied on road transportation. The villages were also linked to aid the movement of agricultural produce to the urban centres and nearest railway terminus for evacuation of produce for export. People also take through the roads to migrate. The migratory stream has a diverse colouration of women, children, relatives, and spouses.

The Forces of Migration in Contemporary Nigeria

Social change and government policy impacted on the migration pattern within Nigeria decades after independence. The country witnessed a major migratory push with the relocation of the nation's capital from Lagos to Abuja in 1991. Another factor of migration that saw the mass movement of people in and around Nigeria was natural disasters, as many people lost their livelihoods to flooding, landslides and desert encroachment. This development forced many residents to move from their natural abode in search of safer

environment. A Nigerian agro- economist, Chinedum Nwajiuba argued that natural disasters, such as desertification and flooding were pushing people in search of fertile and safe lands. He stated further that in the northern states of Yobe, Jigawa, Kebbi and Gombe, flood displaced about 450,000 people between 2004 and 2007. Nwajiuba also argued that the southern part of Nigeria was also not spared due to the overflow of water from the Cameroonian dam, which led to the over flooding of the lower part of the Niger Delta and responsible for the displacement of several thousands of people in the area.

Outside the search for economic opportunities and the challenge of natural disasters, violent conflicts have also become a recurring cause for forced migration. Siollun (2009), observed that war and conflict were bound to lead to social dislocation of local populations, as evidenced during the Nigerian Civil war, which lasted 30 months. The outcome of the war was very catastrophic, especially for women and children. This condition has not stopped, mostly in areas undergoing cycles of violence in Nigeria and is forcing people to run to areas that are less turbulent.

The resurgence of violence in the 1990's and the emergence of major ethno-religious uprising in Nigeria rendered many people homeless, as citizens were forced to seek refuge elsewhere outside their aboriginal habitat. Some of the major crisis includes the Kaduna and Jos religious crisis, which many social commentators have regarded as some of the nation's bloodiest ethno-religious violence, with properties worth billions of naira lost and several thousands of people killed. However, the latest displacement of residents occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency and herder/farmer conflicts in Nigeria, from Borno, Adamawa, Kogi to Taraba is also hurting the poor, weak and vulnerable in these areas. Sadly, scores of people have been sent to their early graves and thousands maimed from locally improvised explosives detonated by the insurgent group Boko Haram and many butchered by suspected killer herdsmen.

According to the Sun Newspaper, January 31, 2018, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) said that 208,000 Nigerian refugees are in Niger, Cameroon and Chad. The UNHCR further said that they need help of about \$157 million dollars to cater for the internally displaced persons by Boko Haram. Recent statistics revealed that there are currently about 3.1 million refugees because of the Boko Haram conflict and over a million IDPs from the activities of the rampaging herdsmen. Many of the Boko Haram victims are taking refugee across the Nigerian boundaries in Cameroun, Chad, and Niger for fear of being attacked and killed.

In addition, Osaghae (1996) is of the opinion that government should understudy the cause of violent conflicts, which is multi-dimensional in nature, as it can erupt from several ways, especially because of the struggle for economic resources and power. The Ijaw/Itsekiri crisis was also referenced. This crisis lasted for a period over the struggle for the control of Warri South Local Government area. It resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people, with several thousands of people displaced and properties worth billions of naira destroyed. He believes that conflict exist where there is disequilibrium with regards to power, status, and access to basic needs. And that it is a major cause of forced migration, as it is only natural for people to flee for their safety in the presence of danger. The Boko Haram insurgency and killer herdsmen have presented a terrible state of insecurity in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram is largely responsible for many villagers in the area fleeing their abode. Many of the rural communities have been ransacked and destroyed, including farmlands. And of late, the activities of killer herdsmen have sent chills in the spines of the people.

Many farmers have abandoned their farms for fear of been attacked. Bayo Akinloye reported in the Punch Newspaper of August 6th, 2017 how herdsmen have made the rural communities killing fields. According to the report, the rise in the migration of people from these areas is closely associated with growing food shortages in Nigeria, which is linked to the atrocities of killer herdsmen in some of these states, such as Enugu, Benue, Kaduna and Plateau. Akinloye further stated that Nimbo, a border community in Enugu State have seen many farmers run away after they have been seriously injured and many killed by suspected herdsmen in their farms.

Although, while we recognize violent conflict as a major cause of forced migration, sex trafficking has also been identified as a critical factor causing youth migration. Recent repatriation of Nigerians from Libya has shown that many of these returnees were lured into sexual slavery. More so, it is believed that they were seduced by promises of better pay and welfare abroad. However, sex traffickers have been empowered by the porous national borders and family conspiracies. This has made the crack down on sex trafficking by security agencies difficult in Nigeria.

Recent revelations have shown that some of these victims voluntarily offered themselves to be trafficked, because of family pressure, arising from poverty and unemployment. Unknown to these irregular migrants, perilous times await them as they travel through transit countries and even at their destination country. Mass migration is a fundamental issue of public concern in Europe and America, because of the fear of demographic change and uncontrolled social diversity. It has become a popular tool for political resistance by

many far-right groups, as they are quick to blame rising unemployment, and upsurge in crime and prostitution on irregular migrants. This has led to many of the countries instituting strict border controls.

There are several reasons behind the desperation of African migrants to reach Europe. Some persons have attributed it to the quest for better life and security. It is obvious that the push factors of migration are overbearing in Africa in view of this fact. There is no gainsaying that socio-economic hardships, war, ethno-religious conflicts, lack of access to better education, epidemic, insecurity and quest for better economic opportunities are major factors pushing young people in Africa to leave illegally for other areas in search of better life.

However, other Nigeria migrants have also reached Europe and America through legal means of migration, all in a bid to escape poverty and hardship in the continent. Unfortunately, many of these regular migrants overstay their visas, there by becoming irregular migrants after the expiration of their valid stay. Nigeria accounts for the largest population of migrants seeking to reach Europe from North Africa. According to Nigeria's Foreign Affairs ministry, about 59,000 of its population were found in the area travelling without valid documents to Europe.

One wonders why young Nigerians have become so desperate to leave its shores. However, many people have argued that poor governance in Africa has been an underlying factor pushing irregular migration in the continent. Many African scholars are of the opinion that the near absence of international cooperation and partnership on developmental frameworks and the ongoing economic exploitation of Africa have worsened the hopes of population retention in Africa.

Negative Effects of Migration on Nigeria

Acemoglu and Robinson (2013:450-455) stated that local, as well as international migration crisis are major fallouts of underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria. They further argued that developmental aid cannot help Africa out of its current migration crisis. These scholars also argue that the failure of foreign aid is because rich Western countries have an incorrect understanding of the causes of poverty in the continent. They are of the opinion that the poor standard of living in Nigeria is mostly caused by the forces of international economics, which instituted an extractive nature of economy in Africa, as it further puts the continent at the margins of the international economic system.

In addition, Nigeria's susceptibility to the forces of corruption and weak governance may also add to its burden of regenerating tangible development. Except there is an aggressive effort by Nigerian governments to create similar standards of living with Europe and America, Nigerian migrants will continue to see these places as Eldorado.

In view of the fact, mass migration of Nigerians may continue endlessly with more horrendous outcomes. A recent report showed that Nigerians among other African migrants were openly traded in a North African country. According to Othman Belbeisi, Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya, he said that some migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe have become victims of slave trade. More so, girls as young as 12 and 13 years litter the brothels of Agadez and Tripoli, which are the major routes for trafficking people illegally to Europe.

In a similar vein, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) stated that trafficking in persons, especially in young girls is more prevalent in Nigeria with 85.09 per cent of the trafficked population in the West African sub-region. According to the British Metro, Tuesday October 24th, 2017 "The Police are failing to tackle slavery" the HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services said that about 13,000 modern slavery victims are in the United Kingdom and that human traffickers have gone unchecked by the Police.

Conclusion

Getting out of this dilemma of irregular migration in Nigeria similar to what obtains in many other African countries, which has drawn global attention and concern needs to be urgently addressed. Leaders in the continent and its partners may have to do more than talking, signing of communiqués and agreements. African governments must be committed towards creating inclusive and productive economies, political institutions, as well as restoring law and order as a first step in building a new Africa. The enthronement of good governance, change to more patriotic behaviour, thinking inwards is advocated as means ensuring genuine reversal of ugly trend of the contemporary Nigeria.

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