



## Migration as a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria: The way forward

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### Abstract

Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural, human and material resources; however, corruption, political and economic instability, environmental and other emerging factors continue to impede the Nation's development thereby leading to forced and irregular migration within and beyond the shores of the Nation. This study relying on secondary sources of qualitative data, aims to understand why migration is a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria, and recommended the capacity strengthening of policy actors, humanitarian and development practitioners as well as introduction of social safety nets and other incentives necessary to buffer the negative effects of factors that influence Migration.

**Keywords:** Migration; Humanitarian; Development; Issue; Nigeria

### Introduction

Migration is defined as movement from one country, place or locality (Place of Origin) to another Country (Place of Destination) in search of better opportunities to settle (BYJU'S, 2023). Migration also refers to movement or relocation from place to place; and encompasses several categories, including voluntary and involuntary, internal and international, regular and irregular modes of migration. Societal factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, poor standard of living, insecurity, inflation, preference for greener pasture are among the main reasons for migration from Nigeria (Oluwabukunmi, 2021).



In recent times, Nigeria experiences high internal and external migration due to the size of its population, economic climate, as well as its porous borders (IOM, 2023). Annually, thousands of Nigerians seek refuge and asylum, and some also migrate illegally, transiting through North Africa while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Poverty, religious and ethnic conflicts are among the key drivers of migration (Blessing & Roland, 2011). Nigeria has been grappling with adverse effects of Migration despite Government's efforts in addressing the humanitarian and development concerns emanating from migration; as such, there is need for urgent and more concerted actions in curbing the negative impacts. This study therefore discusses migration as a precarious humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria.

### **Statement of Problem**

Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural, human and material resources; however, corruption, political and economic instability, environmental and other emerging factors continue to impede the Nation's development thereby leading to forced and irregular migration within and beyond the shores of the Nation. As Nigerians migrate in search of greener pastures and/or safer environments, they meet challenging development and humanitarian situations that heighten insecurity and expose them to further harm.

Various initiatives and incentives were introduced at Local, State and Federal levels to enhance the quality of life of Nigerians and address the factors that influence such forced or irregular migration. Unfortunately, with heightened insecurity across, evolving natural and human-induced disasters particularly flooding, armed conflict, communal clashes, increased poverty, it becomes very difficult for such initiatives and incentives to have the desired effects. To understand the needed actions to be taken to curb the negative pull and push factors for migration, this study therefore examines Migration as a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria, recommended the capacity strengthening of policy actors, humanitarian and development practitioners as well as introduction of social safety nets and other incentives necessary to buffer the negative effects of factors that influence Migration while addressing the felt needs and aspirations of Nigerians.

### **Rationale for the Study**

This study offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the impact of migration on Nigeria's humanitarian and development sector, and how multi-faceted and timely interventions can help stem the tide of



irregular and forced migration within and outside the Country. The study contributes to extant literature on the subject matter while bringing fresh perspectives to ongoing global discussions on migration.

### **Limitation and Focus of the Study**

This study is focused on and limited to migration as a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria and the Way forward.

### **Research Methodology**

This study, in line with its study objectives, employed the use of desk review of existing literature on Migration, humanitarianism and development. The desk review of literature includes scoping existing online records, scientific articles, and reports the subject matter.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

This study is hinged on the Aspirations-Capabilities Theory; according to the main proponent of the theory - de Haas (2021), migration *aspirations* are a function of people's general life aspirations and perceived geographical opportunity structures while migration *capabilities* are subject to positive ('freedom to') and negative ('freedom from') liberties. Migration aspirations are often affected by culture, education, personal disposition, identification, information and the images to which people are exposed.

Under the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework, aspirations are regarded as future plans, ambitions or goals, inspired and formulated in the present social context, with a varying degree of clarity or vagueness which are affected by culture, education, personal disposition and imaginaries while capability refers to the ability of individuals to lead lives which they value and to enhance the options they have (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Sen, 1999; Ray, 2003; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Mingot, 2023). According to Carling & Schewel (2018), people's life aspirations and their perceptions of opportunities 'here' and 'there' may trigger a desire to migrate; however, the extent to which changing preferences lead to migration aspirations depends on the degree to which people feel that their needs can be fulfilled (or not) locally (Carling & Collins, 2018).

### **Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

In undertaking an analysis and discussion of findings, this study on migration as a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria adopted the aspirations-capabilities theory which emphasized that an



individual's aspirations and capabilities are determining factors for migrating. This is true for many Nigerians who migrate because they aspire for a better life or because they want to be able to lead lives that they value in a more conducive environment.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Migration (also known as human migration) is the movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, at a new location (geographic region). Kok (1999) defined migration as the crossing of the boundary of a predefined spatial unit by one or more persons involved in a change of residence. Migration is the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification. Migration is often analyzed in terms of the 'push-pull model' where the 'push' factors drive people to leave their Country as a result of economic, social, or political problems while the 'pull' factors attract people to the Country of destination (Rubinskaya, 2020).

The 'Push' factors make the place of origin seem less attractive for reasons like unemployment, poor living conditions, political turmoil, unpleasant climate, natural disasters, epidemics and socio-economic backwardness whereas the 'Pull' factors make the place of destination seem more attractive than the place of origin for reasons like better job opportunities and living conditions, peace and stability, security of life and property and pleasant climate (BYJU'S, 2023). There are two major migration trends: voluntary and involuntary (forced) migration. Voluntary migration is influenced by formed by factors such as work, business, leisure, education, and a search for greener pastures, among others (John, 2019; Oluwabukunmi, 2021). Voluntary migration is often undertaken based on the initiative and free will of the person (migrant) and is influenced by a combination of factors such as economic, political and social either in the migrant's Country of origin ('determinant' or 'push' factors') or in the Country of destination ('attraction' or 'pull factors'). 'Push' factors are the negative factors that influence one's decision to emigrate; this includes wars, armed conflict, and natural disasters occurring in the Country of origin whereas 'Pull' factors are the positive aspects of a country that influences citizens of another Country to emigrate in search of a better life. Push factors are also seen as harmful or determinant/trigger factors, and according to Tataru (2020), they



include: poor quality of life, lack of jobs, excessive pollution, hunger, drought or natural disasters. Such conditions represent causal factors and decisive reasons for voluntary migration, the population preferring to migrate in order to prevent financially unfavorable situations or even emotional and physical suffering.

Forced migration refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (displaced by conflict) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects (Forced Migration Review, 2022). Involuntary or forced migration is often impelled by natural disasters and environmental challenges such as famine, desertification, floods, earthquakes, social conflict, war, and human trafficking (John, 2019; Oluwabukunmi, 2021). Forced Migration, according to Rubinskaya (2020), is a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects). Immigration is a process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement while Emigration is the act of departing or exiting from one State with a view to settling in another. Labour Migration is movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment. Irregular Migration is movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. From the perspective of destination countries, it refers to entry, stay or work in a Country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is for example seen in cases in which a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfill the administrative requirements for leaving the country.

### **Migration as a Critical Humanitarian and Development Issue in Nigeria**

Migration has huge socio-cultural, political and economic impacts; thus, it is a serious humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria that must be urgently and comprehensively addressed so as to enhance quality of life while reducing the emigration of Nigerians especially the professionals whose contributions are pivotal to economic development of the Country. Adedokun & Karzanova (2019) identified underdevelopment as a symptom and a cause of migration. Peterside (2022) believed that the recent wave of Nigerians relocating out of the country (particularly skilled youth, including doctors, nurses, IT



engineers, university lecturers and technicians) represents the largest movement of people out of the country since the end of the civil war. He identified the five major factors that influence such migration from Nigeria as the desire for better career opportunities, heightened insecurity in the country, the need to provide a better future for one's children, the requirement of further education, and poor governance in the Country. Ibrahim (2022) believed that young Nigerians are migrating because of economic policies and political practices that have created poverty, insecurity, and misery that are currently plaguing the Country; hence, reforms that improve the quality and job relevance of education will strengthen the economy and limit emigration.

Migration continues to be a critical issue in contemporary Nigeria both internationally and internally. For instance, there has been a growing trend in human trafficking, and as UNODC (2022) noted, Nigeria remains a source, transit and destination Country for trafficking in persons, in particular women and girls, for purposes of labour exploitation. Owing to migration flows in the sub-region, many women and girls and women living in poverty, and increasingly Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), are vulnerable to trafficking. There are also cases of internal migration arising from security and climatic challenges across the country (for instance, there is an influx into major cities by people fleeing insurgency-affected areas). The growing incidences of violence and insecurity continue to cause displacement and when combined with regional economic challenges, intensify the risk of increased internal and external migration with consequences for regional stability and social cohesion (especially in communities with already existing tensions, and can worsen the poor standard of living for those in such congested communities and can translate to limited access to basic amenities and services including access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene).

Within the past few decades, Nigeria has been experiencing large internal and external migration flows; in the 1970s, the oil boom attracted foreigners thereby increasing the number of people immigrating than emigrating. However, in the 1980s, the number of Nigerians leaving the country increased as a consequence of the economic downturn and political instability. In 2021, the migration rate in Nigeria stood at -0.29 per 1,000 population which means that the number of people leaving Nigeria is slightly higher than that of those entering the country. Between 2000 and 2021, the migration balance stayed negative (Sasu, 2023). According to MacroTrends (2023), the current net migration rate for Nigeria in 2023 is -0.273 per



1000 population, a 2.5% decline from 2022 while the Country's net migration rate was -0.280 in 2022 (a 2.78% decline from 2021), -0.288 in 2021 (a 2.37% decline from 2020), and -0.295 in 2020 (a 2.64% decline from 2019).

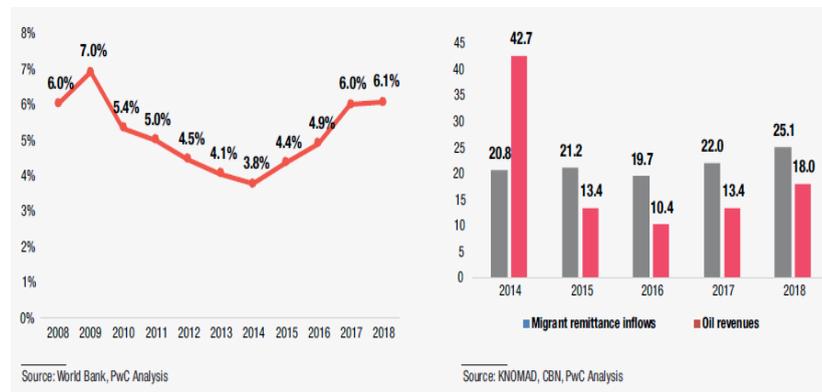
### **Effects of Migration on the Humanitarian and Development Sectors in Nigeria**

Migration has both positive and negative influence on Nigeria's humanitarian and development sectors. On the positive side, remittance inflows were identified by Adeseye (2021) as one of the most constant sources of economic growth and development in Nigeria. Remittances are migrant workers' earnings sent back from the country of employment to the country of origin (Oke et al, 2011). Remittances represent the income of migrants' households in overseas which occur primarily from the temporary or permanent movement of men and women to these nations; remittances include cash and non-cash items that were transferred through formal channels, such as transfer from financial institution or informal channels through friends or items transported throughout borders. The effectiveness of migrants' remittance on economic growth depends on channel and the usage of the proceeds received by the receiver. On channel, it hangs on financial development of financial institutions of the recipient's country. For the receiver/household, when households invest remittances received into more productive economic activities, there would be increase in consumption pattern and saving (Falade et al, 2021).

Remittances promote financial development as well as economic growth and development while reducing poverty and inequality in developing countries (Aggarwal et al, 2006; Beck et al, 2007). Remittances also help poorer recipients meet basic needs, fund cash and non-cash investments, finance education, foster new businesses, service debt and essentially, drive economic growth (IMF, 2014; PWC, 2019). Remittances transferred by migrant workers represent a huge percentage of the country's foreign exchange earnings and GDP growth contribute meaningfully to the economic improvement of migrant families (Muhammad et al., 2019). According to the World Bank (2018), the amount of cash transferred by migrants to evolving economies is almost three times of foreign development aids, which is critical in development of economic and human well-being in beneficiary countries. For instance, PWC (2019) reported that Nigeria's remittance inflows for 2018 were 7 times larger than the net official development assistance (foreign aid) received in 2017 (US\$3.4 billion). Similarly, remittance inflows to GDP (%) in Nigeria was reported at

3.9805 % in 2020 (Trading Economics, 2023) while in 2021, it was 4.42% (The Global Economy, 2023). **Figure 1** below shows Nigeria's Remittance Flow as a GDP % from 2008 to 2018. Interestingly from 2014 – 2018, official remittances exceeded Nigeria's oil revenues.

**Figure 1 - Nigeria's Remittance Flow as a GDP % from 2008 to 2018, and Comparative Analysis of Oil Revenues and Remittance Inflows (2014 – 2018), US\$' Billions**



Migration, particularly internal displacement which is a common form of forced migration can have negative impact on Nigeria's humanitarian and development sectors especially as regards access to basic amenities and services including social safety nets, economic incentives, relief materials, psycho-social support and recovery services and infrastructure which if not adequate or easily accessible, can exacerbate human sufferings especially among the displaced and affected communities. Internal displacement in Nigeria is the result of a multitude of complex and often overlapping triggers and drivers including armed conflicts, criminal and inter-communal violence driven by competition for resources that is aggravated by climate change. The UNHCR reported that Nigeria faces immense humanitarian and protection challenges due to the ongoing insurgency in the Northeast which has caused grave human rights violations, impacting particularly on the most vulnerable civilians (IBDP Geography, 2023). According to IDMC (2021), conflict and violence triggered 376,000 new movements; rainy season downpours and floods triggered 24,000 new movements while about 107,000 people were living in displacement as a result of disasters as at 2021.

As a developing Country, Nigeria faces systemic issues such as unemployment, corruption, poor leadership, infrastructural decay,



non-functional industries, insecurity, inflation, and a high poverty rate, among other issues. These impact the educational system, work, businesses, and overall quality of life (Oluwabukunmi, 2021). Nigeria continues to face prolonged internal displacement, migrant smuggling, human trafficking and 'brain drain' issues which have huge negative impacts on Nigeria's humanitarian and development sectors. Recent statistics revealed that there are currently over 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 1.7 million largely unsettled returnees (who were formerly Nigerian migrants and refugees in other countries) and 74 000 refugees and asylum seekers in Nigeria while over 300 000 Nigerian refugees in neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon also await repatriation (Mamman-Daura, 2022).

To address migration and other related issues, various policy, legal and institutional frameworks were introduced by the Nigerian Government including the National Migration Policy, 2015 which aims to mainstream migration into the Country's national development planning; the National Diaspora Commission established in 2017 to engage its international diaspora in national development policies and projects as well as engage and utilize the human, capital and material resources of this demography in the socio-economic, cultural and political development of Nigeria (PWC, 2019); the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons created in 2003 to address human trafficking; and the expansion of the mandate of the National Commission for Refugees in 2009 to include co-ordination of all migration-related activities and provision of durable solutions for internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, stateless persons and returnees. This subsequently led to the creation of the National Commission for Refugees Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (Mamman-Daura, 2022).

Duru (2021) argued that migration has economic, social and political effects, and highlighted the following positive and negative consequences of migration in Nigeria: integrated development, increase in remittances, cheap and surplus labour, urban services and social infrastructure under stress, stricter immigration norms, multi-ethnic society and increased tolerance, Xenophobia, and close gaps in skills and cultural dilution.

If the current trend of immigration continues and there is a decrease in the number of returnees to the country, there will be heightened poverty, brain drain and underdevelopment across the country. It is therefore important to address migration as a critical humanitarian and development issue particularly unemployment, insecurity, skills gaps and other factors that influence immigration. Also, sustainable

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social integration and economic empowerment programmes should be promoted for Nigerian returnees to prevent them from migrating again in search of better opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

This study concluded that migration is a critical humanitarian and development issue in Nigeria which must be addressed to enhance quality of life for citizens and to ensure that the country does not continually lose the best brains to other countries as a result of the poor socio-economic, environmental and political conditions in the country that influence such migration.

### *Way Forward*

As a way forward, this paper adopts the recommendation by Peterside (2022) that the long term solution to the migration syndrome is a multi-pronged approach that promotes the fundamental renewal of the educational system at the tertiary level (that is, a shift of emphasis from certificate education to entrepreneurship education), an onslaught on insecurity to enable internal migration of the factors of production (especially labour and capital) from one section of the country to the others, and taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of social services in the short and medium term. Finally, this paper also recommended the capacity strengthening of policy actors, humanitarian and development practitioners, introduction of social safety nets and other incentives necessary to buffer the negative effects of factors that influence Migration.

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