

BRAIN DRAIN, RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

While there no longer exists any expedience to sound alarm on the issue of ‘Japa’ given its widespread cognizance, its pathetic effects on national development remain alarming. It has, in fact become a nationwide issue which has brutally plagued all sectors of economy, paralyzing national growth and development. Brain drain, lack of skilled and professional personnel in various fields, underdevelopment of rural areas, among others are the various indications of strain on the national growth perpetrated by mass migration. Against this backdrop, this paper commences a critical essay investigation into the causes and implications of brain drain and rural-urban migration. Factors like government/industrial policies, security challenges, food insecurity, and low availability of amenities, among others are adeptly discussed vis-à-vis their responsibility for the ongoing mass migration. The implications for national development and sustainability are further discussed. It is, in fact on this premise that the author goes on to make feasible recommendations for the surcease of brain drain and rural-urban migration in Nigeria. The paper concludes on this note.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Brain Drain, Implications, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Relocation, which ought to be a natural human experience has been made a brutal one by the excessiveness and careless abandon with which it is practiced in the 21st century. The degree of economic and developmental strain orchestrated by migration has made it most undesirable for virtually all government administrations. Accordingly, rural-urban migration refers to the movement of people from rural or undeveloped areas to developed and industrialized cities. It can be internal whereby people leave less industrialized rural communities to more developed cities within a nation or international whereby citizens leave their countries in search of better opportunities. In fact in 2017, the United Nations Migration Director, General William Lacy Swing was of the opinion that rural-urban migration involves the situation whereby people leave their homes in the countryside and migrate towards urban centers both within their own countries and across borders¹. Thus, the departure of citizens from an underdeveloped or “slowly” developing nation to a developed one is, as well rural-urban migration. Brain drain, on the other hand refers to the loss of talented and skilled professionals to other regions and nations as a result of emigration.

Sequel to the foregoing, this paper, in analyzing the implications of rural-urban migration and brain drain for sustainable development adopts a two-way approach for the purpose of a thorough analysis. Thus, while the first approach explores the impacts of rural-urban migration within Nigeria on the country’s sustainable economic development, the second discusses the implications of brain drain spurred by relative rurality of Nigeria and urbanization of developed countries on Nigeria’s economic development. It is, in fact to these issues, alongside the proposal of practical solutions that this discourse is tilted.

2. RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND BRAIN DRAIN: CAUSES AND CONCERNS

The desperation with which Nigerians migrate is indeed worth critical essay investigation. The cities are becoming increasingly overpopulated at the expense of the origin rural areas as much as the country as a whole is losing her citizens to other nations. It follows that while the nation struggles with encouraging the dwelling of citizens in the rural areas, the bulk of her skilled professionals are leaving the nation. This has adversely affected the nation’s economic development, hence the causes are herein discussed.

2.1 GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRIAL POLICIES

Government policies are, to the citizens of any nation either incentives to stay or stimulants to leave. A country’s policies for its labour market, agriculture, education, investment and financial services, and social protection and health all affect the prevailing economic and social climates and, in so doing influence the incentives to migrate or stay at home.² This has been the case overtime. In the 1980s and 1990s, when developing countries were encouraged to liberalize their economies and reduce public intervention, most social and labour safety nets tended to disappear and in many countries, this translated into a significant increase in emigration.³ This created the consciousness of the instrumentality of government policies in migration inflows or outflows.



Apparently, most migrants decide to migrate for reasons relating to employment, job opportunities and/or incentives to work. These conditions, though economic are largely dependent on government policies. Industrial policies, for example serve as viable stimulants for the productive transformation of a country, thus affecting labour supply and demand. The same applies to education policies which can contribute to reducing skills mismatches and hence, unemployment. Therefore, policies improve on the conditions of the labour and industrial market and, in turn reduces the incentive to migrate, especially from the rural areas to the cities and towns. It suffices, therefore that the high rate of migration is caused by poor or poorly strategized government policies. Where the policies are not geared towards labour market efficiency, the likelihood of migration is accelerated.

2.2 SECURITY CHALLENGES

On the 29th of September, 2013, 78 students were killed in the Yobe State College of Agriculture⁴; In 2020, the EndSARS movement led to the death of thousands of Nigeria, especially in the South East part of the nation; In 2023, there were tons of inexplicable killings in Kaduna and Plateau States, leading to the explosions of places of religious worship and deaths of thousands of Nigerians; In August 2024, what was supposed to be a peaceful protest led to the death of various Nigeria citizens, especially in Kano State; Currently, no one moves around or performs business in the South East on Mondays for fear of his life and property. Whatever the odds are, no one will decide to live in a country bedeviled helplessly with such vices.

2.3 FOOD INSECURITY

Hunger and malnutrition are rude affronts to human dignity and the fundamental right to live. It is, therefore quite pathetic that Nigeria has been plagued with this unbecoming circumstance.

Report has it that 26.5 million of a 229 million-persons-Nigeria⁵ go hungry regularly and this is quite appalling considering the rich agricultural endowments of the nation. It suffices, therefore that this is more an issue of food insecurity than it is of food productivity. This has, most especially increased the poverty rate of citizens of the nation and led to a further decline in the national economy. Thus, migration is encouraged.

2.4 WEAK ENERGY RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Climate change is at its worst, and this has had adverse effects on the economy. In 2019, the National Emergency Management Agency revealed that floods had displaced about 1.9 million Nigerians.⁶ And while the country is highly notorious for blackouts and energy grid collapses, the amount of fossil fuel gas released into the atmosphere by vehicles and generators further lead to the degradation of the environment. As a result of these, the nation's working environment has become so uncondusive which has, in turn subjected the countrymen to a state of unproductivity. Most rural areas have no presence of energy at all. The inhabitants live in constant blackout and have no experience of energy availability. This promotes rural-urban migration.

Aside from the factors that "push" Nigerians out of Nigeria, the exact opposite of these factors which are present in other countries "pull" these migrants into these countries. Such that while Nigeria struggles with insecurity and unemployment challenges, her citizens are forced to migrate to countries that are relatively or entirely safe and have jobs to offer. The same applies to rural- urban migration in its primitive sense. Thus, villagers leave their villages to towns primarily because of the seemingly better things the town has to offer.

3. IMPACTS OF BRAIN DRAIN AND RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The already struggling economy of Nigeria has been incredibly stifled by brain drain and rural- urban migration. As expected, the more highly skilled citizens and entrepreneurs leave the nation on the grounds of zero opportunities and vague benefits, the vaguer these benefits become. This applies to rural-urban migration as well. Thus, the nation's economic stability is gravely affected by such migrations. In exploring the implications of migration for Nigeria's sustainable economic development, this discourse first discusses the effects of brain drain spurred by international migration on the nation's economic sustainability and then goes on to explore the impacts of rural- urban migration on the economic development.

3.1 IMPACTS OF BRAIN DRAIN ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1.1 STIFLED INDUSTRY GROWTH

Industrial growth is key to the development of any nation's economy because of its yields of revenue through tax and other funds as well as the creation of youth employment. On the other hand, then absence of industrial growth is the bane of economic development. Thus, as a natural consequence of brain drain and emigration, the growth of Nigerian industries is crippled and as such, the economy is adversely affected. In March 2024, it was revealed by the Nigerian government that the country now has only 55,000 licensed doctors to serve its growing population of over 200 million⁷, the rest have migrated to other countries. The same goes for the skilled professionals in the legal sector, educational sector, agriculture,



technology and other sectors of the economy. Thus, these sectors no longer serve their requisite purposes to the country's citizens who, as a result of this decline are inclined to look elsewhere. In the long run, the industries are unable to generate as much revenue as expected, consequently spiraling the decline of the national economy. As a result, Nigeria's contemplation of a sustainable economic development is crippled in these industrial incapacitations and failures.

3.1.2 LOSS OF TAXES, FUNDS AND REVENUE TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Income taxes form the basic source of revenue for the funding of social programs and infrastructure projects. In fact, as at 2021, report had it that 63.73% of the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) was from the Personal Income Tax (PIT)⁸. Therefore, migration and the resultant brain drain reduces the nation's receipts of PIT, therefore affecting the revenue of the country. This goes further to affect the implementation of developmental policies due to lack of revenue, and thus, the entire economic development process is stifled. Furthermore, the more Nigerians leave the nation, the more they spend on visa fees which amount to nothing less than 500, 000 Nigerian naira. This is paid by Nigerians to other nations and of course, affects the economy. Similarly, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) report shows that Nigerians spend at least \$220.86 million on foreign education.⁹ Of course, where the growth of industries are stifled, the citizens leave to meet their need elsewhere and those monies which when integrated into the national economy will promote economic development are lost to other countries, thus negatively affecting the economic development of Nigeria.

However, brain drain and emigration of Nigerians also has some positive implications for sustainable economic development within the country. There is, of course the diaspora remittance inflow which has been estimated to be more than the Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). Thus, the presence of Nigerians in other countries has facilitated the inflow of remittances, thus boosting the national economic revenue. Also, brain drain holds potentials of becoming brain gain when there is effective technology and knowledge transfer, as well as the return of emigrant Nigerians to promote investments. This affects the growth of industries and as such, the general economic development. Furthermore, brain drain compels the country to fill in the industry gaps by doubling her education and training efforts on those that are left. This is very positive for the economy.

3.2 IMPACTS OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

3.2.1 CONGESTION AND OVERSTRETCH OF SOCIAL AMENITIES

The migration of citizens from the rural areas to the developed cities leads to congestion and overcrowding of those cities. The implication of this is that the social amenities such as health facilities, educational institutions, roads, water and energy resources are overstretches such that they become insufficient to serve the needs of the people. This expedites the wearing out of these facilities, reduces the economic development already attained and creates more economic need. Thus, the economic state of the nation faces a decline and consequently less sustainable.

3.2.2 REGIONAL ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Economic development is not sustainable if it is concentrated on specific regions. For an economy to be sustainable, it ought to be evenly distributed to all regions and areas. Thus, because rural-urban migration promotes the underdeveloped state of rural areas, the economic inequality extant in the country is further magnified. Besides, the absence of human resource in the rural areas stifles development projects in those areas since there are hardly human resources to facilitate and maintain the developments.

3.2.3 DEGRADATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The migration of the inhabitants of rural areas leaves those areas uncared for, thereby promoting the degradation of the environment and all forms of life on land and in water. The labour shortages also affect agricultural productivity leading to increased abandonment of lands. This robs the nation of resources for exploitation which can contribute positively to the economy when harnessed.

As the positive impacts of rural-urban migration, there is more labour force for the urban areas, remittances in form of return investments are also made in the rural areas and these facilitate the development of the rural areas.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of heinous implications and uncertainties, it is pertinent to adopt and implement certain policies and measures for the reduction of the excessive migration rate extant among Nigerian citizens. In exploring and analysing these measures, this discourse adopts a two-way approach. While the first emphasizes on policy suggestions that directly tackle the problem of rural-urban migration and the challenges it creates, the second accentuates indications that promote the general wellbeing of Nigeria such that her citizens are incentivised and encouraged to stay even in the rural areas.

4.1 ADDRESSING THE ILLS OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND BRAIN DRAIN

4.1.1 IMPROVED MIGRATION POLICIES

The government should prioritise independently creating and adopting policies that promote effective management of migration for Nigeria's economic development such as diaspora engagement, the attraction through internal development of the country, especially the rural areas and granting of visas to highly skilled individuals and investors. These professionals and investors should also be encouraged to invest in the rural areas to solve the problem of rural-urban migration in Nigeria. Policies that foster circular and return migration should also be encouraged to promote return investment on those rural areas.

4.1.2 EFFECTIVE BORDER MANAGEMENT

It is essential to review the strategies and mechanisms already in place, weighing them against the rate of migration. New strategies can, thence be put in place. Also, the border management personnel should be properly trained in migration issues, border control mechanisms and the scrutiny of cross-border migration. This improves the administrative efficiency of border management and help regulate migratory movements within and across the country.

4.1.3 PROMOTION OF INVESTMENT IN REMITTANCES

Ordinarily, remittances should be a positive impact of migration on the national economy. However, the lack of adequate and strategic policies to promote investment in remittances has further worsened the Nigerian economic experience of migration. These private funds invested by nationals in diaspora to improvements of homes, the purchase of landed property and entrepreneurial activities such as the establishment of companies or businesses, among others count as Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and boost the national economy. Nigeria should, therefore double up her efforts in promoting these investments by good diaspora engagement and encouragement of the building of subsidiary companies and institutions in the country's rural areas as a way of promoting rural development and curbing the rural-urban migration.

4.2 TOWARDS A BETTER NIGERIA

Having traced rural-urban migration and the ills it facilitates to certain indisputable causes, it is pertinent to address these causes as a means of proffering a long-lasting solution to the issues of migration in Nigeria. The expedience of this approach is underscored in the fact that if the wellbeing of the nation is promoted and ensured, the citizens have less reasons to leave and the rate of emigration becomes largely reduced.

4.2.1 QUALITY EDUCATION STRATEGY

Indisputably, Nigeria's brain drain problem is accentuated by the fact that she has few brains. As pathetic as this sounds, it is, in fact the reality of the nation. If the nation's human resource investment grows and there are more highly skilled workers in all spheres of life, emigration will not have as much toll on the nation's economic health as it does currently. Also, the fact that most Nigerians travel for educational purposes further testifies to the fact that the education system of the country is of very poor quality. Therefore, it is important that Nigeria begins to promote quality education by creating intensive training for teachers, providing hard infrastructure for effective and practical studies and effecting structured changes to the academic curriculum. Apparently, the curriculum for Nigerian students is, rather unfortunately very outdated, rigid and unproductive. Technology-intensive, business management and leadership courses should be compulsorily included in the curriculum. Furthermore, the Covid-1910 pandemic exposed world governments to the inevitability and practicability of digital education strategies. Such strategy should be encouraged in Nigeria for its many benefits of promoting less expensive, easily accessible and more production-oriented education. This can be promoted by organizing internships and programmes that promote the skills of the youth in technology such that they can be able to navigate these digital opportunities. More value should also be placed on certificates gotten from virtual programmes and institutions than is already placed. This further empowers the youth for employment opportunities. More so, the rural areas should be the concentration for these projects as the institutions of learning therein are much more underdeveloped.

4.2.2 PROMOTION OF SKILL ACQUISITION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship raises the citizens' standards of living by creating new businesses and jobs, driving economic competitiveness, fostering community development and providing economic independence of citizens. For its boisterousness, entrepreneurship owes a lot to the prosperity of Nigeria. It is, therefore expedient to pay attention to the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and foster their growth by promoting business loans and establishing more centres for skills acquisition. Thus, unemployment is eradicated, crime rate reduced and insecurity tackled. Additionally, creating an innovative approach towards entrepreneurship to develop new products while decreasing the production cost, encouraging optimal use of resources, and promoting skill acquisition programmes all foster the growth of entrepreneurship and in turn, catalyses prosperity in Nigeria. This is particularly important in the rural areas as the availability of enterprises and businesses promote the industrial development of these areas.

4.2.3 ADEQUATE REWARD SYSTEM FOR WORKERS

The reward system in the country is considerably poor. Largely poor, in fact. Discussions have been held, arguments canvassed, protests staged, a number of which were, fortunately or otherwise, nipped in the bud, all to the end that the reward and reward systems of workers in Nigeria be improved. Obviously, not much has been done to that effect, whatever the reason might be. It should, however be noted that it is impossible for labourers and the entire working class to remain in the country when they are not rewarded appropriately for the efforts they put into the country. The rural areas are worst hit by the poor reward system of the country which makes them leave their primitive societies for the “seemingly promising” urban areas. Therefore, the labour demands on salaries and wages should be properly attended to, other incentives such as sick, study and medical leave as well as the creation of a conducive working environment should be promoted and provided, especially in the rural areas.

4.2.4 LOCAL CONTENT PROMOTION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION STRATEGY

At first, it must be mentioned that the country has, probably unbeknown to her encouraged the underdevelopment of her rural areas. Where rural development projects are handled by outsiders, mostly the whites, it negatively affects the members of that society. It will do great good to the inhabitants of rural areas if they are adequately trained and involved in the implementation of rural development projects. This enables them to keep up with these developments afterwards. Furthermore, Nigeria spends a lot of money buying what she can comfortably produce and this has tremendous negative effects on the country. Aside from stifling economic growth, it encourages unemployment and low quality production within the country. Thus, it is important that Nigeria begins to look inward. The enormous natural resources of the nation such as bitumen, iron and iron should be properly exploited and the youths adequately skilled and engaged in their production and commercialization. The nation’s agricultural soil should also be properly utilized.

4.2.5 PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

In a finite world with an ever-expanding population, agricultural innovation is vital in order to increase productivity and secure global food supply.¹¹ However, the only way to ensure agricultural innovation is to promote agricultural research and development, especially to farmers in the rural areas of the nation. The issues of food insecurity can be effectively addressed when agricultural technology is promoted, thus encouraging the use of infrastructure for farming as well as creation of new varieties of essential food for consumption. Also, as a direct response to the issue of food insecurity, the usability (quality and safety) of available food, food safety management should be considered highly essential at each phase of industrialisation and production.

4.2.6 RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

The entire globe is going green and it is important that Nigeria follows suit for there is no better way to simultaneously resolve the issues of climate change, environmental degradation and weak energy resources than an effective energy transition. Thus, the removal of fuel subsidy should be the leap Nigeria needs into the production of CNG¹²-empowered vehicles, as well as stations for that purpose. Concerted efforts should also be made towards creating awareness and educating the citizens about energy conserving activities such as the use of solar panels instead of petrol generators, the effective disposal of wastes, among others. This solves the problems of environmental degradation and energy grid collapses, thus promoting a good working atmosphere for Nigerians.

4.2.7 URBANIZATION

This is the fundamental solution to the problem of rural-urban migration within Nigeria and it basically involves the concentration of developmental efforts on the rural areas to promote the industrial development of those areas. Therefore, the aforementioned should be implemented especially in the rural areas such that members of every society, however primitive are encouraged to stay. This encourages further development of those rural areas and the general development of the country.

5. CONCLUSION

The rural areas are as much Nigeria as the cities and towns, thus they must not be neglected. However, in the implementation of her rural development projects, Nigeria must remain aware that the bulk of her citizens, the professionals in particular are leaving the nation and must, as such, spread out her growth agenda to the rest of the country for the promotion of a sustainable economic development.

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