

Implications of Human Migration in a Fast-Globalizing World for the Developing Economy: The Nigerian Experience

Simon I. Peter **OKOH**, Ph.D
Department of Social Sciences
School of General Studies
Federal College of Education (Technical)
Gombe, Gombe State
Email: igweokoh@yahoo.co.uk

Mallam Usman **GURAMA**
Department of Social Sciences
School of General Studies
Federal College of Education (Technical)
Gombe, Gombe State

Introduction

Man has always been in search for better and favorable conditions of existence and thus, has been on the move. People have moved and continue to do so in search of work or economic opportunities, to join family, or to study. Many have moved, in the course of human history, to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations and in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors (World Migration Report, 2023). According to the World Migration Report (2020) “...more people than ever, live in a country other than the one in which they were born.” The same source posits that as at June 2019, the number of international migrants was estimated to be almost 272 million globally, 51 million more than in 2010 and observes further that nearly two thirds were labor migrants. International

migrants comprised 3.5 per cent of the global population in 2019. This, when compared to 2.8 per cent in 2000 and 2.3 per cent in 1980 speaks to increase. Certainly, with the current realities, these figures have quadrupled today. “About 184 million people, 2.3 percent of the world’s population, live outside of their country of nationality. Almost half of them are from low- and middle-income countries.” (World Migration Report, 2023). Many individuals may migrate out of choice but a host of others do so out of necessity.

The International Organization for Migration (I.O.M.) posits of ‘Human Migration’ as the movement of people from one place to another with intention of settling, permanently or temporarily, in geographic regions other than the regions they ventured out from. This describes human external migration (movement of people from country to country) but the movement of people from a geographical region within a polity (Human Internal Migration) is also possible and is the most common of the two. (I.O.M., 2020). Razum and Samkange (2017) observe, notably, that human migration is associated with human capital and access networks facilitating such possibility It has a high potential to improve human development, and some studies confirm that migration is the most direct route out of poverty. (Kumar, S., Choudhury, S, 2021). Migration, generally, can be conceptualized as the general process of people moving from one place to another. It designates the movement of persons from one country or locality to another. It could be internal or external migration, gross or net migration, and immigration and emigration. Migrants are usually categorized depending on their goals and reasons for relocation; people change the country of residence for general reasons which may include better job opportunities or healthcare needs. As a term, it is widely perceived as anyone changing his or her geographical location permanently either as a refugee, or as an asylum seeker (Blackwood, 2020). Each category is defined broadly as the combination of circumstances that motivate a person to change his or her location. Refugees are usually associated with people who must unwillingly relocate as fast as possible. The reasons for this sort of migration usually involves war actions within the country or other forms of oppression, coming

either from the government or non-governmental sources. (Blackwood, 2020). Asylum seekers are associated with persons who also leave their country unwillingly under oppressing circumstances to escape the degradation of the quality of their lives. The motivation for migration here may border on unstable economic or political situation (Blackwood, 2020).

Nigerians are not left out of the scenario and reality here. In a globalized clime and era, they have also been exposed to the realities and opportunities inherent in the process. A deep-seated desire to leave the country for other countries where the conditions of human existence are milder and more rewarding in contrast to Nigeria pervades the mindsets of a great majority of Nigerians. This worrisome development has gained more momentum in recent times. This development has come to be designated as the 'Japa' (to flee, run away from, leave a particular place). Coined and adopted into the parlance of Nigerians from the Yoruba language, 'japa', as lexical item, denotes 'leaving or to leave the country' basically for reasons bordering on search for better lease of life and welfare in other countries. It is synonymous to the English word 'migrate'. This Nigerian lexicon accentuates the subject matter 'japa syndrome'. The English word 'syndrome' denotes a complex of concurrent things and its usage, in relation to our subject matter, speaks just to that when the socio-economic situation in the Nigerian polity today is considered. Since the advent of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, sequel to years of protracted military rule, the hopes of many Nigerians, especially the young and vibrant percentage of the population, appears to have been consistently dashed with regards to the possibility of having a truly democratic nation and government capable of addressing the nation's socioeconomic impasses and many continue to express pessimism with regards to the possibility of the country picking up on meaningful emancipation as well as all-encompassing development. There is this widely shared view that the country and its wealth are only for the ruling and political class who see politics as a means to ends that are selfish rather than for ameliorating the countries myriad of socio-economic challenges. So much striving, perseverance, hope and hard work appear to be

greeted by too little or no reward and when many people see the opposite in other climes as well as the possibility of a better and more rewarding life being lived by Nigerians outside the shores of the country, many prefer to save up and relocate from Nigeria. It appears nine out of every ten Nigerians who are literate on the average and understand the interpretation of the socio-economic situation in the country today will demonstrate willingness to and opt to leave the country. Migration, however, is a development challenge.

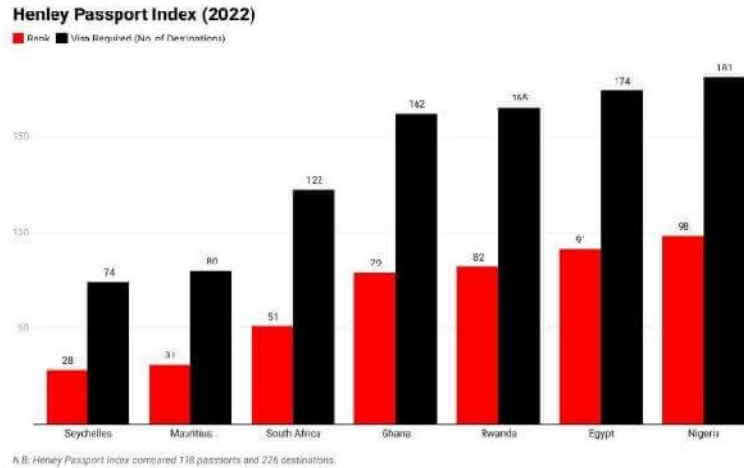


Figure 1: Data Showing Nigerian Passport as one of the highest headed to other destinations

Source: Ibimere (2021)

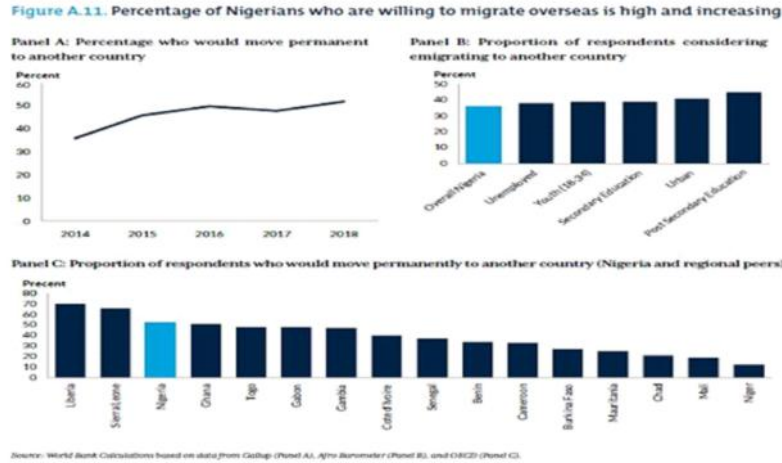


Figure 2. Data showing percentage of Nigerians willing to migrate overseas
 Source: Ibimere (2021)

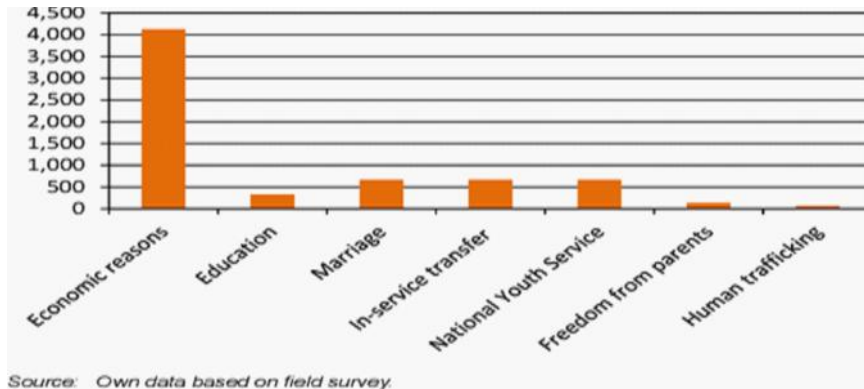


Figure 3. Data showing some reasons for Migration from Nigeria by Nigerians
 Source: Oyeniya (2013)

Data above from a study of seven countries (in figure one), reveals and shows the Nigerian passport as one headed most for other destinations. Again, from the data on Nigeria presented in

figure two, it is apt that Nigerians rank among the most nationals who would want to leave their countries permanently. Among the nations polled from the data above, Nigeria placed third in West Africa trailing only Liberia (70 percent) and Sierra Leone (60 percent) in terms of respondents who would relocate permanently to another country. Data as shown in figure three lends credence to the assertion that economic reasons underscore the desire to leave the country most.

The Systems Theory of Analysis

The systems theory of analysis considers the society as a complex arrangement of elements as they relate to a whole. Basically, as a conceptual framework, the theory is premised on the principle that the component parts of a system can be best understood in the context of the relationships they share with each other and with other systems rather than in isolation (Wilkinson, 2011). A system is a cohesive group of interrelated, interdependent components. Systems can be seen as well as a fusion of sub systems. They have causal boundaries are influenced by contexts, defined by structure, function and role and expressed through relations with other systems. (Bertalanffy, 2017). The main argument here is that changing one component may affect the other and dysfunctionality of a part can as well stall the whole. The Nigerian polity can be likened to, not just a system but an agglomeration of systems supposed to be working in conjunction with each other for development growth and progress. This is obvious from the plethora of quarters ranging from the three arms of government to the respective parastatals and executory bodies whose combined efforts are expected to give strength, value and valiance to the economy. This is, in turn, expected to improve quality of life, expectancy and expectations of the generality of the population within the geographically defined area. However, for obvious reasons, this has not been the case. The reality is suggestive of certain components of the system being dysfunctional and failing to play their requisite roles for the system to yield its goal and live up to its cause. This dysfunctionality, in turn, generates dissatisfaction and frustration

as other parts of the system continue to exert energies and play their component functions. However, the failure of a part disrupts the whole. The blame goes chiefly to the national economy and its management; i.e., the production, distribution and trade as well as consumption of goods and services by different agents of a nation. The goals of every economy are, primarily, economic growth, low and stable inflation, balanced balance of payments, efficiency, equity and economic freedom. Certain indices come to play and constitute factors that affect the national economy. These include human resources, physical capital, Natural resources, technology, education, infrastructure and level of investment. Perhaps the following issues and data would lend more credence to socio economic conditions that create room for it in our country.

Nigeria is blessed with massive wealth, a huge population to support commerce, a well-developed economy, and an abundance of agricultural and natural resources such as oil. The country's economy encapsulates a huge informal sector estimated at around 60% or more, of the current GDP figure (Sparks and Barnett, 2010). It is hard to imagine that against all these, the level of poverty Nigeria has should be the case. Over the years, the Nigerian economy has not been able to cater for the polity meaningfully due to poor management. Absence of visionary leadership to harness the economic lot of the polity and their transformation into prosperity for the generality of the masses has remained the growing challenge. Nigeria is blessed with abounding human resource. According to the World Population Review by the United Nations, the current population of Nigeria, as at July 2023, stood at about 223, 804,636. The World Bank Report (2022) projected that the number of poor Nigerians would hit 95. 1 million in 2022. The number was 82.9 million between 2018 and 2019 and rose to 85.2 million in 2020 due largely to population growth (World Bank Report, 2022). The growth rate of Nigeria's population is higher than its economic growth rate leading to rise in poverty as a consequence.

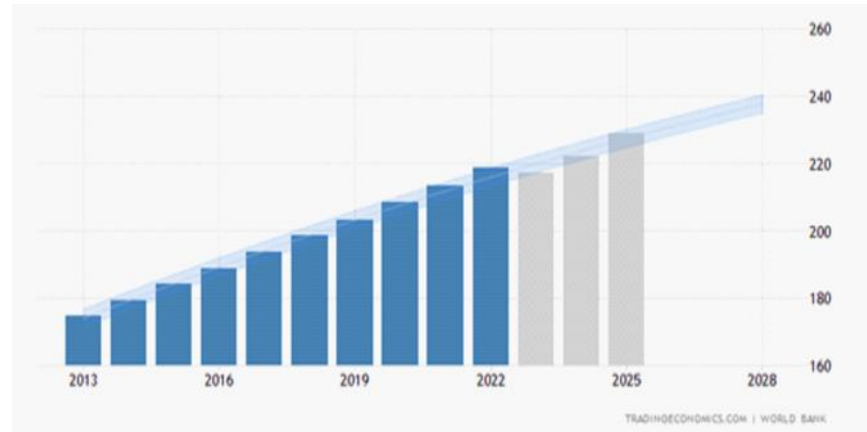


Figure 4: Nigeria; Population Growth (plus forecast)
 Source: tradingeconomics.com (2023)

Data above shows progressive rise in the trend. The period depicted between 2019 and 2020 was a period of non-activity globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic but it did not slow down the trend either.

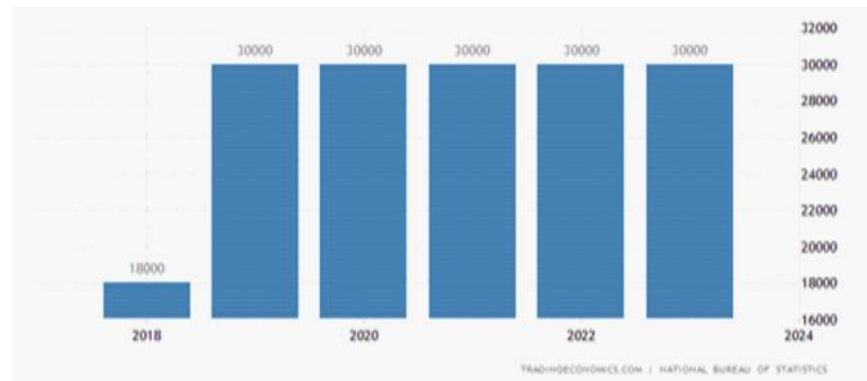


Figure 5. Nigeria; National Minimum Wage
 Source: tradingeconomics.com (2023)

The reward system for labor in Nigeria is a sad commentary. There is too little reward for addressing the harsh and prevailing socio-economic realities. The living wage increase has remained largely static up till date and is incommensurate to rising and soaring costs of goods and services in the country which renders wages far from living wages. Towards the end of the immediate past administration, this was a major contention and this contention lingers till date. This is further exacerbated by the rising inflation in the country.

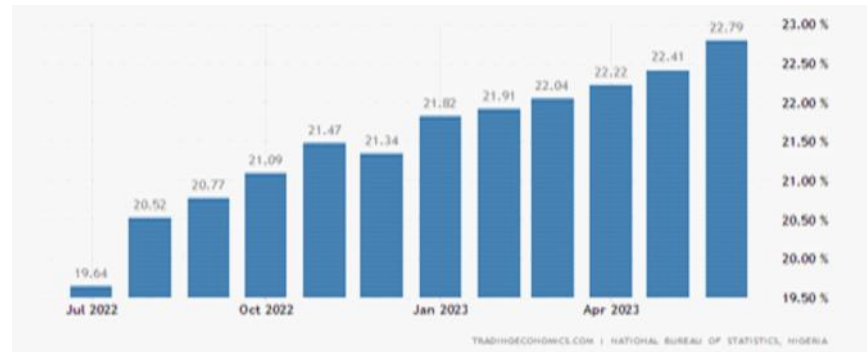


Figure 6: Nigeria; Inflation rate
 Source: tradingeconomics.com (2023)

In addition to the poverty rate, unemployment and poor reward or remuneration for labor is the issue of inflation (increase in the general price level of goods and services in an economy. This leads to currency weakening as reflected in the reduction of purchasing power. Inflation eats more into wages. From the data above, it is clear that it has rather remained on an escalation path. The main drivers of inflation in Nigeria are high food and energy prices, a weakening naira, insecurity, and supply chain disruptions. Nigeria’s current President removed fuel subsidy and loosened the restrictions on foreign exchange and trade leading to a plunge in the naira and a rise in transport and import costs recently. This further exacerbated the situation socioeconomically. The country’s Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) is not spared either. In 2022, it was worth 477.39 billion US dollars according to data from the World Bank. This is not unconnected with the realities of un-industrialization and technological backwardness inhibiting meaningful harnessing of the country’s resources for greater production rather than importation and consumption which appear to have made the Nigerian economy a ready market for other producing economies; a reality the immediate past administration tried to tackle but not economically strategic enough tactically. The GDP value of Nigeria represents 0.21 percent of the world economy (Tradingeconomics, 2023).

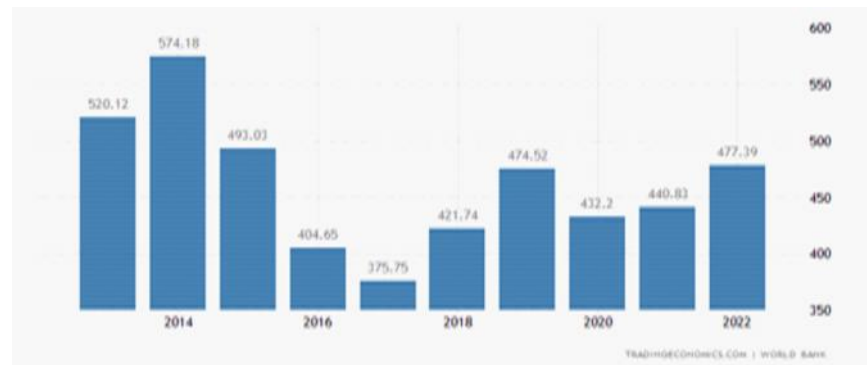


Figure 7: Nigeria; GDP
Source: tradingeconomics.com (2023)

Recommendations

1. There is a need to declare a state of emergency on Poverty, social welfare incentives and the further creation of meaningful economic opportunities for the masses in the Nigerian polity with a serious will to address these. The socioeconomic lot of the polity is in a dire strait’s situation and the current ‘lip service’ being paid to it is not helping the situation. Purchasing power (financial ability to buy products and services owing to monetary value) is crucial for economic development. When the amount of goods and services that a unit of currency can buy at a given point in time is grossly limited, as the situation

in Nigeria portends, frustration and disillusionment are bound to be the case especially when the masses are already contending with high poverty rates.

2. Industrialization must be pursued more tenaciously in Nigeria if the economy is to be salvaged. As it is, this will be herculean in view of the global technological gap and the disproportionate politics in global technology, which appears determined to keep Africa and its densely populated states such as Nigeria, as a ready market. The Country has intellectuals and resources which can be harnessed. In return for the raw materials the west seeks from Nigeria, bilateral agreements with friendlier economies for technology and the establishment of industrial capacities can be pursued. This will create jobs through galvanized production and aid revenue generation.
3. Public Policy must be pursued democratically. Government decisions and economic thrusts are meant for bettering the lot of the people but when, for years, the result of this is the opposite, causing increased hardships yet the system is forced to bear the brunt of it all, dysfunctionality is bound to be an end result and a dysfunctional system will generate discordant results. What Nigeria needs today is healing and not the exacerbation of existing turmoil.
4. The government must realize that its populations are not passive tools. The seeming neglect of the pressing concerns of the greater generality of the population makes it almost apt that they constitute mere expendables and, for a democracy, this is a recipe for disaster. Government must not shy away from investing meaningfully in them and must create enabling environments and conditions for them to thrive and give back to the system with a deep sense of patriotism. The situation where a minister can declare that the country has enough manpower in certain sectors and those who wish to leave could do so is rather unfortunate. Nigeria's man power resources litter the advanced economies of the world as success stories benefiting other economies while the nation wallows in

deprivation and is unable to manage its human resources. Poor remuneration and rewards, stifling of the voice of the people via force and court injunctions which the government itself is, most times, never disposed to obey is undemocratic. People are cardinal in democracy and this must be respected in Nigeria especially when what they demand is obviously a need.

Summary and Conclusion

Against the afore elucidated background, an appreciation of the disillusionment and discontentment for many Nigerians who desire to, can afford to and choose to ‘japa’ can be better appreciated particularly among the youth and younger generation who see so much potentiality in migrating. The results from others who have managed to do so and are reaping meaningfully from dexterity in other favorable climes in contrast to the situation at home further fuels such ambition. A sad reality is that “destination countries gain significantly from the contributions of migrants whose skills and attributes strongly match their needs ...” (World Migration Report 2023); skills that losing countries like Nigeria may have aided the development of and needs but may have failed to harness. If the trend continues, it will affect manpower capacity in diverse areas, further decline in productivity for the polity as the case already seems to be showing in the medical/public health sector for instance. A nation's wealth and success should reflect on the quality of life of its citizens. This appears, from all indication, not to be the desired case for many Nigerians today and with the system not seeming to be able to recalibrate and set the existing order in repair for encompassing welfare and wellbeing for all its citizenry, the ‘japa syndrome’ may remain a viable option for a long time to come. Until serious attention is paid to Human capital development and welfare and until the Nigerian system begins to meaningfully factor the welfare of citizens into consideration in the scheme of things so that social equity and a sense of belonging permeates the polity meaningfully, people will continue to crave for leaving and leave if they have the opportunity. This is not wrong but may have unfavorable consequences for the Nigerian economy. The indices

and issues raised in this paper are subjects of common knowledge and their magnitudes are known. What Nigeria needs the most today is the resolve and will to do the needful.

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