

The Activities of International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Nigeria: A Discourse

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Abstract

The issue of migration has remained a very sensitive aspect of governance and policy-making of a state. This is because of its multi-faceted impacts or implications on states that are involved (both originating and destination states). There are security, economic and humanitarian aspects of migration that if not well handled can cause international stir that may strain relationships between states in the international system. Irregular migration trends can also lead to humanitarian situation of catastrophic proportions. This makes it expedient to ensure the mitigation of irregular migration patterns by both state and non-state actors and this is where the activities of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) comes to the fore. IOM is based in Nigeria, both in Lagos and Abuja, and is implementing activities in the fields of labour migration, assisted voluntary returns, border management, capacity-building and migration health. Indeed, the IOM has performed credibly in Nigeria, where its activities are considered highly needed considering the high rate of migration patterns in the country (both regular and irregular). This feat is largely unsung in the academia, hence the need for this paper. Employing the historical research method, which is based on qualitative analysis, the paper finds that the IOM has contributed to the regulation of migration patterns in the country, returned and resettled migrants who had the need to return but could not facilitate it and also empowered the returnees to ensure productive lifestyle as they resettled. The IOM has also contributed significantly to the relief of people in distressed zone of the country, particularly the North-East. It has also supported the country in the fight against the Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists and has equally waded into the farmers and herders conflicts which have led to irregular migration patterns with the concomitant humanitarian situations. The organisation also encourages research on ways to minimise irregular migration in Nigeria and also tackle the security and humanitarian issues that emanate from the situation in the country. This paper adopts the theory of humanitarianism to establish the background that informs the purpose of the IOM in Nigeria.

Keywords: Migration, Human Trafficking, Security, Humanitarian, International Organisation, Terrorism

Introduction

Migration laws or legislations are very important and sensitive aspect of decision-making of a sovereign state. This is because no state can exist without facing the challenges that mostly accompany the movement of people into or out of the country. One can hardly doubt the fact that migration is closely linked to economy, security and other developmental factors. Therefore, it has become expedient that migration variables be closely watched and regulated by instituted authorities. A contemporary case where migration trends were cited as a major factor of clamour for review in foreign policy stance was the issue of Brexit. A.C. Agajelu and O.N. Orizu (2016) note that the rapid rise in EU immigration which began in the late 1990s and an attendant large-scale migration to Britain, basically because of the country's economic stability, exposed the country to insecurity, especially considering the growing spate of terrorism across Europe. This largely influenced the outcome of the referendum that led to Brexit. However, it is important to note that there are other social and humanitarian issues surrounding migration such as refugee problem, internally displaced people, asylum seeking, and human trafficking and so on. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) was established to address these

humanitarian issues and properly study and address migration patterns across countries of the globe to ensure cooperation and provide humanitarian assistance.

The IOM can be regarded as a partner of the United Nations that was created in 1951 exclusively for migration issues.(IOM, 2022) The organisation was previously known as Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME) and it was established to address the migration problems emanating from the post World War II Western Europe. After a series of adjustments in mandate and appellation, the organisation came to be known as International Organisation for Migration (IOM UN Migration, 2022) and Africa has become its principal area of focus considering the irregular migration issues, terrorism and humanitarian problems emanating from the region in the contemporary times.

Nigeria is particularly bedeviled by frightening migration humanitarian issues that have been exacerbated by terrorism, especially across the northern part of the country. This is seen in the scale of irregular migration patterns recorded from the country. The country is a vast populous West African state known to be rich in natural endowments but poor when evaluated by all known developmental indices. The scourge of underdevelopment has made the teeming youth population of the country (which is 60% of the country's population) to struggle by any means possible to leave the borders of the country for better prospects of livelihood. Expectedly, these vulnerable groups are exposed to varying degrees of humanitarian catastrophe. Such undesirable activities that accompany irregular migration patterns in Nigeria are human trafficking, modern-day slavery, contraband smuggling, and illicit drug peddling among others.

This study goes on to interrogate the efforts of the IOM to help promote orderly and regular migration patterns in Nigeria. In the analysis, some of the roles played by the intergovernmental organisation and the successes they recorded elsewhere are explicated. This shows that given sincere support by the Nigerian government, the organisation could improve the migration patterns of the country where illegalities are minimised and humanitarian catastrophe that normally accompanies irregular migration mitigated.

Literature Review

Some countries record high rate of migration more than others. There are certain factors responsible for this and as Solomon Obanlais (2022) notes, the push factors that can be blamed in the Nigerian case are turbulent challenges arising from internal political crises, economic cataclysm, and insecurity of various sorts. Of course, such situation reduces life expectancy and subject the citizens to enormous physical and psychological stress that eventual made them believe that life elsewhere would be definitely better than the hardship and existential threat they are meant to face in Nigeria. In like manner, Abebe Shimeles (2010) posits that bad socio-economic conditions generally seem to lead to higher rate of emigration by highly skilled individuals. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Oluwafunmiso Adeola Olajide (2013) declares that certain non-tangible factors such as sense of fulfillment can also be a strong push factor for migration in Nigeria. In his words, "It has become a thing of pride to have at least one member of the household living outside the shores of the country in Nigeria." However, the promise of economic prosperity is still not in doubt.

In more recent times, the trend of irregular migration has increased involving highly risky movement patterns. Individuals or groups that get involved in this movement patterns defy known migrations norms which L.O. Ikuteyijo (2020) notes as all policies and laws that govern the movement of people from one country to another. Ikuteyijo goes on to describe irregular migrants as those that migrate outside the regulatory norms of the origin, transit, or destination country and can refer to three groups of migrants: those who arrive in a clandestine fashion (i.e., enter and stay illegally in the considered country), those who arrive legally (for instance, on the basis of tourist or student visas) and then overstay the period for which their visa/permits are valid, and asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected and who have not left the country as required. While Ikuteyijo stresses the economic, social and political quagmire in Nigeria as the push factors that enhance irregular migrations, he equally points towards the

criminalisation of irregular migration and the strict security measures adopted by destinations countries as incentives towards employing clandestine measures by migrants. In his words:

Apart from economic push factors, the trend toward the securitization and militarization of borders as a measure to check illegal entry into countries of the Global North has been identified as another major driver of irregular migration... The continued criminalization of irregular migration is seen as another factor that incentivizes perpetrators to devise means of evading security agents (Ikuteyijo, 2020)

Indeed, illegal migration to the countries of Europe from Nigeria has become quite common but worrisome. It is worrisome mostly because of the humanitarian conditions that are normally related to such migration patterns. Crossing the borders of a country undocumented entails adopting clandestine movement tactics that are risky and unhealthy. Therefore such venture has dire consequences which I.A. Joshua and J.G. Makama (2017) indentify under such sub-headings as social consequences, economic consequences, political consequences and security consequences.

A rather notorious irregular migration route from Nigeria to Western Europe is the North African deserts and the Mediterranean. Umar Kari, Godwin Malasowe and Collins Ogbu (2018) quote the former Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, thusly:

Not less than 59,000 Nigerians are currently in Northern African countries without valid travel documents. This number represented those who were in transit waiting for the opportunity to migrate to the West. Figures available to the Ministry showed that 8,000 of the illegal immigrants were in Morocco, 16,000 in Algeria, 20,000 in Libya and about 15,000 in Mauritania.

Of course the above statistics as presented by the former Minister is worrisome. Kari *et al* go on to describe the routes taken by the irregular emigrants and the humanitarian situation that normally accompanies it. According to the writers, the major departure areas of the trafficked persons from Nigeria are Edo, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Lagos, through the neighboring border countries and onward to further away destinations. The latter comprise the ECOWAS Member States of Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as Chad, through routes along the south-eastern and north-eastern borders to the Central African countries of Cameroon and Gabon and to northern African countries through Mali. Kari *et al*, go further to assert that those who travel to Europe over land can be on the road for months, or even several years. Of course one will only want to imagine the humanitarian crisis that would associate such journeys.

Uche Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) writes extensively on migration governance. Considering the link between migration and development, Isiugo-Abanihe explicates the different levels of corporations in migration governance at state, regional and global levels. As noted by the writer, Nigeria has been in corporation with the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) on migration and development matters. The country also plays important roles in the formulation of programmes that tend to protect the rights of free movement of persons in the OAU and the AU. The African regional organisation has also being in partnership with their European counterpart in attempts at governing migration and ensuring mutual benefits thereof. As Isiugo-Abanihe further notes:

Dialogues at the EU–African level are, among others, the Euro–African Conference on Migration and Development (2006), the Joint Africa–EU Declaration on Migration and Development (2006), the Follow-up Meeting of the Rabat Process (2007) in Madrid, and the EU–African Summit in Lisbon (2008).

The IOM is a very important intergovernmental body on immigration matters across the world. As stated in an IOM report:

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance

understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.(Hall, 2018)

Samuel Hall (2018) explicates the workings of the IOM in collaboration with the Nigerian government to ensure the reintegration of returnee migrants and also internally displaced persons. There is also collaboration with other international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and national ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

Theoretical Background

In other to have an unambiguous understanding of the history of the role the IOM have played in promoting orderly and regular migration patterns in Nigeria and also their efforts in responding to humanitarian needs of those caught in the wrong web of migration, we shall employ the theory of humanitarianism as a framework for background check. Humanitarianism on the world stage has been viewed differently by different global blocks. While it means genuine social assistance to some, it means a furtherance of political overtures to others. The countries of the global South particularly view humanitarianism as the politics of the global North to spread their interest and strengthen their stranglehold in the international system. This view may be enhanced by the fact that the contemporary international humanitarian regime remains heavily influenced by the Red Cross movement, Western international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations system.(Pacitto, 2013). For many, the International Committee of the Red Cross's definition of humanitarianism is the definitive standard.(Pacitto, 2013) As seen in Pacitto (2013), Ferris argues that the seven organising principles established by the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement have become fundamental to the humanitarian movement. It has been said that four of these principles have become hallmarks of humanitarian assistance "throughout the international community": humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

As stated in the work of Pacitto, the position of the proponents of humanitarianism borne out of these principles is that politics is a moral pollutant. The strict dichotomy between morality and politics is robustly posited by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other Western international organizations, and is considered to be central to the credibility of these organisations, and thus to their ability to function on the ground in often highly politicized conflict environments. As already pointed out in this section, there are those who critique the assertion that humanitarianism should, and indeed can, be separated from politics. The opposing position therefore asserts that it is impossible for humanitarian agencies to be apolitical (Pacitto, 2013). An objective examination of the activities of the IOM as a humanitarian intergovernmental organisation in Nigeria would go further to inform a discerning reader's position on the debate on the motives and intentions of the western humanitarian organisations.

International Organisation for Migration in Nigeria

As already noted in the introductory part of this study, the IOM was established in 1951. According to the organisation website, it is the leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.(IOM, 2022) With 175 member states, a further 8 states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM enjoys wide coverage and this positions it to achieve its stated major objective which is an effort to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. The organisation strives to achieve this by providing services and advice to governments and migrants. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.(IOM, 2022) Furthermore, as stated on its website the IOM Constitution recognises the link between migration and economic, social and cultural development, as well as to the right of freedom of movement.(IOM, 2022)

Nigeria is a prominent country of origin for regional and international migration. The idea of migrating in search of "greener pastures" is rooted in Nigerian society and has shaped the nation-building process

since independence in 1960. There is a widespread desire to migrate among Nigerians. Between 1990 and 2013, the number of Nigerians living abroad more than doubled and passed the one million mark. Nigeria is also an important country of destination within West Africa, as well as a country of transit. Nigeria is known for high incidences of human trafficking and for the large number of irregular migrants reaching European shores via the Libya route. Additionally, Nigeria is affected by the internal displacement of millions due to the Boko Haram insurgency in the North.

IOM is based in Nigeria, both in Lagos and Abuja, and is implementing activities in the fields of labour migration, assisted voluntary returns, border management, capacity-building and migration health. In conjunction with the United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) and National Council on Family Relations (NCFR), IOM was involved in the repatriation of Liberian Refugees from 2004 to 2007. (Afolayan, 2009)

The federal government, in collaboration with the ILO and the IOM, developed the National Labour Migration Policy (2014) and the National Policy on Migration (2015), constituting the key legal vehicles for migration-related activities in Nigeria. The IOM provides support to Nigeria's Technical Working Group (TWG) on Migration and Development which is made up of ministries, departments and agencies, non-state actors, social partners, academia and development partners working on issues related to migration, chaired by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI). The main stakeholders that are directly/indirectly involved in the reintegration process are: the NCFRMI as the coordinating body for issues of migration, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and National Immigration Service (NIS).

Increasing the involvement of state governments in the provision of reintegration support and coordination is generally seen as key to ensure effectiveness, improved coordination and greater involvement and monitoring of local-level reintegration actors. The Edo state government, with its initiatives, can be regarded as an advanced example in the context of Nigeria. For example, the Edo State Task Force Against Human Trafficking (ESTFAHT) was established by the Edo state government to address issue of irregular migration and human trafficking, which has become endemic in the state. That notwithstanding, the NCFRMI coordinates various committees and working groups:

- Standing Committee on Diaspora Matters (SCDM), which focuses to diaspora mobilization and led by the Nigeria National Volunteer Services (NNVS);
- Working Group on Labour Migration led by the Federal Ministry of Labour & Productivity (FML&P);
- Working Group on Migration Data Management (WGMD), led by the National Population Commission (NPopC);
- Working Group on Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), led by NCFRMI itself; and
- Stakeholders Forum on Border Management, led by the Nigeria Immigration Services with the support of NAPTIP (issues that come to the forum include the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol, Border Security, Trafficking in persons, Migrant Smuggling and others).

IOM's role in the coordination of the stakeholders and in the management of migration in general is deemed as essential. However, some of the stakeholders consulted highlighted the need to put more emphasis on the strengthening of the capacity of Nigerian institutions and actors in view of improving ownership and reducing reliance on external support.

Impact of IOM Activities in Nigeria

According to the 2021 annual report of the IOM in Nigeria, the organisation's Mission in Nigeria has supported the country's response to migration management and governance issues over the past two decades, ensuring that migration works for all parties concerned. The report goes on to claim that over the past decade, the Mission has provided principled life-saving humanitarian assistance while ensuring that populations in crisis are resilient and sustainably transitioned to recovery. (IOM, 2021)

The IOM has impressively contributed to the relief of people in distressed zones of the country, particularly the North-East. Borno State, which is the worst hit state by Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists has numerous IDP camps housing the thousands of internally displaced people from different localities of the state. Communicating its efforts in Borno state, it is documented on the IOM 2016 newsletter thusly:

IOM Nigeria (15—17 June 2016) provided essential Non Food Items (NFIs), which include blankets, mats, soap, buckets, basins, plates, cups and cooking pots to about 22,500 IDPs (an estimated 3,000 households) in the recently accessible town of Bama in Bama Local Government Area (LGA). Bama LGA is located to the east of Borno State, at the border with Cameroon, two hours away from Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, and 8km away from the notorious Sambisa forest, a Boko Haram stronghold (IOM, 2016)

As already noted in the previous section of this paper, the IOM had engaged in partnership with state actors to ensure that its humanitarian mandate in Nigeria is achieved. Significantly, in 2022, the international organisation in collaboration with Edo State government announced the launching of a project titled “Managing Migration Through Development (MMDP 2.0)”, which was funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.(Abeku, 2022) The primary objective of the project was to improve migration management through development. The establishment of the IOM project in Edo State and the interest of the Italian government were quite obvious. The state had consistently recorded high rate of human trafficking to Europe, the number one country being Italy. According to the IOM, there was a time when an astounding 94% of all Nigerian women trafficked to Europe for prostitution hailed from Edo State, with Italy being the number one destination country. In fact, a 2003 United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute Report concluded that “virtually every Benin family has one member or the other involved in trafficking either as a victim, sponsor, madam or trafficker.” However, as noted in a Pathfinders Justice Initiative article, this trend is changing for good as people trafficked from Nigeria to Italy keeps decline in 2022. As documented in the Pathfinder Justice Initiative article (2022):

It is noteworthy that between 2014-2016, IOM recorded an almost 600% increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving in Italy via the Mediterranean. That figure is now on the decline, as Nigerians were no longer within the top nationalities of arrivals by land or sea in 2021 and 2022.

It is important to note that the MMDP 2.0 was established on the foundation laid by the initial partnership effort between the IOM and the Edo State government, which was known as the Migration Management Development Program (MMDP 1.0) that enacted the anti-human trafficking law and established the Edo State taskforce against human trafficking (ETAHT) in 2018.(Abeku, 2022) Therefore, considering the fact that the partnership between the IOM, Edo State and Italian governments towards curbing human trafficking and achieving human development were seen to be conceived and effected in the period when the ugly trend witnessed a decline in Nigeria in general and Edo State in particular, it is safe to aver that the efforts of the IOM, through its partnership initiative, reflected positively on that part of the country. In fact, it is noted that since April 2017, IOM has facilitated returns of over 29,000 stranded Nigerian migrants from different transit and destination countries out of which 46% of those returned voluntarily account for Edo state.(Abeku, 2022) A returnee migrant, Abieyuwa, whose return and settlement was facilitated by the IOM and who was interviewed by Tina Abuke, a Guardian Newspaper correspondent narrated thusly:

When I returned in 2017, things were very difficult but thanks to IOM which organized business skills training and assisted me to set up a building materials shop. The shop has really helped me, with this new project, I will further expand the business and employ youths from the community to work with me, I am glad that I am going to contribute in my own way by employing and training others to be self-sufficient.(Abeku, 2022)

Furthermore, an editorial on *This Day* newspaper explicated the commendable activities of the IOM in Nigeria as the international organisation marked its 20 years of operations in the country. As documented in the Nigerian daily, for the past two decades, the IOM has supported the efforts of Nigeria to strengthen governance and harness the development potential of well-regulated migration through development of National Migration Policy and Migration Labour Policies. The IOM has also provided, on regular basis, relevant information for migrants in transits, the available legal channels as well as the rights and obligations of migrants while helping to establish three Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) in Benin, Lagos, and Abuja.(This Day, 2021) The editorial also notes that the IOM did not only facilitate the return of stranded migrants, but also engaged in reintegrating them in the society to continue a meaningful and productive life. This was done through integration programmes, which were classified into two: individual and collective. The individual programme of the IOM allows for a more comprehensive package tailored to the migrant's specific needs and vulnerabilities while the collective reintegration programme enables capacity building and local ownership in which returnees from the same community come together to create a micro business. This business model that has helped thousands will allow for multiple returnees to start income-generating activities to sustain themselves and their families.(This Day, 2022)

The IOM has equally waded into the worrisome humanitarian situations that result from the farmers-herders conflict that has engulfed Nigeria in the recent times. In Benue State, the IOM is currently helping to support and protect the displaced and vulnerable through the construction of 1,100 units of emergency shelter.(IOM, 2022) The relative comfort provided by these shelters has helped to mitigate the drive to engage in irregular migration by these groups. This is because it has been shown that most of these vulnerable persons fall victims of human trafficking, forced labour and slavery as they become desperate to escape the deplorable conditions they were subjected to as IDPs. Similarly, women and children in terrorist ravaged zones of the North-East Nigeria easily fall prey of human traffickers and slavers. In Maiduguri, the IOM currently sensitises the populace about the need for violence-free society where women, girls and the displaced population can feel safe.(IOM, 2022)

Furthermore, the IOM has significantly shown commitment to partnering with the Nigerian government in countering terrorism. In 2016, it was recorded that IOM had engaged in supporting Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) in countering terrorism and other transnational crime by enhancing land border control in Nigeria through the installation of Migrants Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) in four Border Crossing Post (BCPs) in Nigeria under the Japan-funded Countering Terrorism – Enhancing Land Border Control (CT-ELBC) project.(IOM, 2016)

Importantly, the IOM has either published or encouraged the publication of myriad researches that proffer sustainable migration solutions for Nigeria. These publications range from articles to books and they are made freely available and easily accessible. Within these publications are found veritable solutions to the problems of irregular migrations and the attendant humanitarian problems. These publications are authored by renowned professors and academics in various fields of Social Sciences across Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has furthered the idea that migration is closely linked to development. In other words, legislation on migration; activities of ministries, departments and agencies in connection with international non-governmental organisations on migration, tend to affect the developmental strides in a country. Lose national borders have encouraged illegal emigration, terrorism, trafficking, slave trade and so on. All these are factors that are impediments to development.

Deductible from this study is the fact that the IOM appreciates the sensitive place of migration in a country. Poorly governed internal and external migration has resulted in varying humanitarian situations in Nigeria. There are some illegal migrants who have been deported but unable to be properly reintegrated into the society. There are those who are ignorant of the dangers of irregular migration because they only wanted to escape the unfavourable socio-economic environment of Nigeria. There are also those made vulnerable to preying merchants of trans-border irregular migration and these vulnerable persons are mostly the IDPs. As the spate of terrorism and insecurity escalates in the country,

IDPs also escalate. Many of these IDPs find themselves in very deplorable social situations that they become too eager to migrate, thereby making them vulnerable. Most of the IDPs are migrants themselves from zones fraught by insecurity. The IOM has endeavoured to step in to, among other things, provide humanitarian relief for the vulnerable and help regulate their migration patterns. It has also partnered with state and non-state actors to improve on migration governing in Nigeria. Even though some of these western intergovernmental organisations are viewed with scorn, especially by the African poor and non-ruling class, the IOM has managed to carve out a respectable and appreciable reputation for itself in the Nigerian societies through their humanitarian endeavours in many parts of the country as seen in this study.

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