

International migration and brain drain: drags on sustainable development in Nigeria

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Introduction

Nigeria has been faced with the problems of migration and brain drain for several years, with the attendant economic and development consequences. A good number of her citizens continue to migrate out of the country unabated. What makes it worrisome is the quantum of highly educated and skilled professionals that have found haven in advanced economies; the situation normally referred to as brain drain. Brain drain is the migration of people who possess some technical skills and expertise as well as professionals in various fields of endeavour (doctors, nurses, engineers, technologists, university lecturers, engineers, computer scientists, business managers, etc) to countries rather than their own for better conditions of services and where they feel their utilities can be improved. Available evidence has shown that apart from South Africa, the destination countries of most migrants from Nigeria are in the North America and Europe while few are found in some Asian countries.

Evidence suggests that the number of Nigerian emigrants outweighs her immigrants going by the negative net migration data (-300000) of the country as at 2017 (see World Bank, 2019). Literature has also shown that Nigerian doctors that are practising outside her shore outnumber those in the country, with many of them trained in Nigeria why the country currently experiences acute shortage of medical practitioners. Reports have it that about 17 million Nigerians live overseas. This is capable of impacting negatively on sustainable development of the country.

Causes of Migration and Brain Drain in Nigeria

Several factors responsible for migration and brain drain in the literature are classified under push and pull factors. Push factors are those unfavourable conditions that make migrants to leave their home countries for another while pull are those favourable conditions that draw migrants to their countries of destination. The factors could be economic, political, environmental and so on. Most of these factors explain why people migrate out of Nigeria in their numbers. Some of them include: poor infrastructure, such as unstable power supply, which hampers business activities and has caused many small scale enterprises to wind off while some firms have relocated out of the country to neighbouring ones. High rate of insecurity; caused by the activities of terrorists, bandits, herdsmen, and kidnappers. These have made people to relocate not only from the affected areas but also from other parts of the nation to foreign countries.

Deepening poverty is another push factor aggravating migration and brain drain problem in Nigeria. Currently, the country is referred to as the poverty headquarters of the world; therefore, people move out to other parts of the world to escape the scourge of poverty. Low level of industrialisation, which has limited the ability of the economy to generate enough employment, and so, people migrate out of the country in search of jobs. Bad governance and leadership failure; which have been the bane of the country's development over the years; therefore, people prefer migrating to economies with good leadership has made the system to work. Poor pay package is another problem making people to leave Nigeria for other countries. Nigeria is one of the countries with very poor salary package. The new minimum wage of N30,000:00 (US\$82:65) is not enough to take care of

the worker and the entire household; so, people try to find greener pasture in countries with better pay package; not minding the nature of the job available in such countries. These coupled with pull factors in the destination countries, such as better working conditions, better pay, better training and better research opportunities, which encourage people to migrate to such economies. These have a lot of negative implications for sustainable development of the nation because the productivity and income of those who migrated out of the country are no longer available. Until these problems are addressed, the nation will continue to witness exodus of both trained and untrained persons out of the country for greener pastures.

Effects of Migration and Brain Drain on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Migration and brain drain have both negative and positive effects on sustainable development. However, the negative effects appear to have surpassed the positive in the Nigerian economy. With respect to positive impacts, the remittances sent by the Diasporas contribute to economic growth and development. Available data from World Bank (2019) show personal remittances received (current US\$) for Nigeria in 2017 as 22.00 billion, which was about 5.86 per cent of her GDP. This did not have any substantial impact on growth and development in the country because the average transaction cost of sending the remittances home same year was 18.30 per cent of the nation's GDP while the growth rate of GDP same year was 0.801 per cent (see World Bank, 2019).

Other positive benefits of migration and brain drain to the home country include skill acquisition by some of the migrants in addition to technology transfer, which could be later used temporarily or permanently in their home countries for development. Nigeria has not benefited substantially from this since most of her citizens abroad prefer to remain in their destination countries, thereby, using the acquired skills and technology for such countries. Her Net Migration Rate for the period 2015-2020 is -0.3 migrants/1,000 population. Migration and brain drain also lead to improvement in the standard of living of family members, who benefits from the funds or remittances sent to them from abroad.

Other benefits of migration to the origin countries include: i) improvement in governance to prevent excessive migration. Government policies have tremendous impact on economic conditions in a country and when emigrants' trend continues to rise, policies will be put in place to improve governance for better economic conditions to prevent excessive migration. ii) enhancement of trade networks that improve trade, which eventually leads to favourable balance of payments. This occurs as a result of the trade networks formed by migrants in destination countries; and with this they can increase trade with origin countries because of their familiarity with business conditions and environment in the home countries. All these however, are not really apparent in Nigeria; meaning that migration and brain drain have not so much benefited the nation.

Notwithstanding the benefits of migration and brain drain highlighted above, there are negative effects, which are obvious in the economy of Nigeria. Some of these include: loss of highly skilled professionals in all sectors, and this has imparted negatively on human capacity building and created shortage of skilled workers in the country. These are capable of impacting negatively on investment, improved public services, employment generation and level of productivity, which could lead to depressed growth and sustainable development in the country.

The latest sustainable development report released in 2019 ranked Nigeria on the SDGs Index as the 159th out of the 162 countries surveyed globally. The country is the 16th out of the 16 West African countries. The additional implication of this is high rate of poverty and poor standard of living. Another negative effect of migration and brain drain is underdevelopment of all or key sectors and

fiscal losses in the country. Persons that are lost to other countries do not pay their taxes to the Nigerian government; however, this to some extent is compensated by remittance flows. Furthermore, the issue is one of the factors contributing to capital flight, particularly as huge sum of funds are expended by Nigerians on healthcare services abroad; since most of their medical professionals are lost to advanced countries.

Solutions to Migration and Brain Drain Problems in Nigeria

The current situation of international migration and brain drain in Nigeria is not in the best interest of the country. Therefore, it is imperative to put in place measures to address the menace if the country will achieve sustainable development. Policies should focus on both push and pull factors. For instance the nation needs to provide infrastructure for the economy to thrive because without this, her economy cannot develop, and her citizens will continue to migrate out of the country. Furthermore, population growth, particularly in the Northern region of the country, where fertility rate is very high should be addressed. This can be achieved through education and birth control measure like the use of contraceptives. High rate of insecurity is one of the serious threats to the growth and development of the country. Its current dimension, which has further aggravated the situation recently through the activities of terrorist groups such as Koko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa as well as bandits and headsmen who are on rampage, call for international assistance to contain it. Many people as a result of the worsening state of insecurity have lost hope in the country, with some of them migrating to Canada and other countries in Europe with their families. The most preferred destinations for Nigerian migrants in Europe include the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Germany and Ireland while the most preferred in North America are the United States and Canada (see International Organization for Migration, 2016). Moreover, South Africa serves as an important destination country for Nigerians in Africa notwithstanding the recent xenophobic attacks on them.

Nigeria also needs to address the problem of high rate of poverty in the country (see Dauda, 2019; “Poverty in Nigeria: challenges and policy dimension” for policies to addressing poverty in Nigeria) to reduce migration and brain drain. Furthermore, if the country will solve the problem of international migration and brain drain, sound industrial development policies and implementation must be embarked upon while investment should be undertaking in research and development activities for technological advancement because industrialization and technological improvement will help to reduce international migration in the country. In addition, the current high rate of unemployment should be reduced by creating conducive environment for small scale enterprises and foreign direct investment to thrive. Policies aimed at entrepreneurial skills development should also be put in place. The education provided in the country should be made functional while its quality should be improved from time to time. Other ways to reduce international migration and brain drain in the order of priority is to raise the income level, install good leadership and reduce corruption, diversify the economy away from oil, and fund education properly. The nation’s health sector should be developed to prevent migration of persons abroad for medical services, which has also contributed to capital flight. Specific programmes that encourage the Diasporas to relocate home should be put in place while others can be encouraged to render some services aimed at sustainable development at home from time to time. These can be made possible by engaging them in human development activities, addressing some of the challenges they face in destination countries, encouraging them in political participation at home, provision of investment friendly environment and given them incentives to invest at home.

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