

NIGERIAN YOUTH MIGRATION: A QUEST FOR PEACE

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Abstract

The movement trend from Nigeria could be traced to the slave trade period, when many able-bodied men and women were forcefully transported abroad to work in plantations in Caribbean islands and the United States. At the end of slave trade, this movement increased tremendously as many Nigerians had to go abroad for educational purposes, to acquire skills to replace the departing expatriates. Today, what one can consider as drivers of Nigerian youth migration, include the breakdown of the Nigerian educational system at virtually all levels, high unemployment and poverty rates in Nigeria, and a general disillusionment with the country's political leadership. These have been the background for the influx of Nigerians to Europe and America. It is the interest of this paper to generally look at migration amongst Nigerian Youth and particularly link the 'search for peace' as one of the major drivers of Nigerian youths to exit the country. Nigeria has a very vibrant youth population that is not well catered for by the Nigerian government. One imagines how the future of the country would be with the youth that are not empowered, exiting the country with their potentials. Nigeria, which was once tagged as one of the peaceful country has turn out to be a land of insecurity and abject poverty. The position of this paper is that structural violence is mostly the push factor for many Nigerian youths exiting the country.

Keywords: Nigerian Youths, Migration, Unemployment, Poverty, Poor Education

Introduction

Since the earliest times, humanity has been on the move. The earliest recorded movement in history is found in the Holy Book (Bible), "Yahweh said to Abraham, leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you (Gen. 12:1)." What follows is the reason for the movement, "I will make you a great nation (vs. 2)." Hence, people across the world have continued to move from place to place for so many reasons. Some people move in search of job or economic opportunities, some to join family, or to study, while others move to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations, natural disasters, or other environmental factors.

Historically, the movement trend from Nigeria could be traced to the slave trade period, when many able-bodied men and women were forcefully transported abroad to work in plantations in Caribbean islands and the United States. At the end of slave trade, this movement increased tremendously as many Nigerians had to go abroad for educational purposes, to acquire skills to replace the departing expatriates. Today, what one can consider as drivers of

Nigerian youth migration, include the breakdown of the Nigerian educational system at virtually all levels, high unemployment and poverty rates in Nigeria, and a general disillusionment with the country's political leadership. These have been the background for the influx of Nigerians to Europe and America.

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Nigerian Youth

According to Nigerian 2009 National Youth Policy, "Youth in Nigeria includes citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18-29 years." What is of utmost important in this description of who a Nigerian youth is, "citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" and not the age bracket because recently, in May 2019 to be precise, a revised National Youth Policy was launched in Akure, Ondo State. A major thrust of the current review is regarding the age bracket for the classification of youth from existing grading of 18-35 years to 15-29 years. The new age classification has raised a lot of questions and controversies one of the issues is that this age classification sets Nigeria apart from other countries of the continent that aligns with the age classification in African Youth Charter of 18-35 years. Responding to the reduction from 35-29 years, the Nigerian Minister of Youth and Sport Development, Solomon Dalung said, "the review is informed by practical empirical analysis and the need to promote the appropriate targeting of desired beneficiaries of intervention programmes for the youth rather than adult masquerading as youth (Punch May 28, 2019)."

Accounting for the reduction from 18-15 years, UN Statistical consistency across regions defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. Similarly, the minimum Age Convention (1973) set the general minimum age for admission to employment or work at 15 years. The new age classification is also closely tied to the 'Not Too Young to Run Act' (age reduction) which was signed into Law in May 2018 (Punch May 28, 2019). Thus, Nigerian youths are young Nigerians between the age bracket of 15-29, who are agile, virile and are expected to be innovative within an enabling environment. However, Gotan gave a clear data of Nigerian youths saying "Nigeria has a youthful population of about 80 Million which is about 60 percent of her population" (2018, p.26).

This is in consonant with “The CIA World Factbook, 2014” record that, “Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with one of the largest populations of youth in the world.”

Migration

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling in the new location. It is a way to move from one place to another in order to live and work. Movement of people from their home to another city, state or country for a job, shelter or some other reasons has become so common in recent times. In trying to define migration, the Nigerian National Migration Policy 2015 said, “Migration is a fundamental part of human nature (2015, p.5).” It went on to say that, “Essentially, migration is the process of temporary or permanent relocation of a person from his or her place of primary abode to another place, in search of better living, family reunification, further studies or other reasons (2015, p.5).” Emigration is not cheap and most of the people leaving are not poor by any standard, this is why it is mostly the rich and middle class that are leaving. It is an epidemic that force people who have lost hope to exit.

Frankly speaking, there are two factors that influence people’s decisions to migrate; push and pull factors. The push factor occurs when people are forced to move away from their current/present abode. This could be caused by political unrest, lack of job opportunities or overcrowding. The pull factor occurs when people are attracted to migrate to another place to better their living conditions. Therefore, the reasons why people leave a place are called the push factor while the reasons why people are attracted to a new place to live are called the pull factors.

Migration can be of two types, internal and external (international) migration. Internal migration is the movement of persons within the country, which may be rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban and urban-rural migration. Of all these, rural-urban migration is most common as lack of access to social amenities, land and capital stimulate people to migrate from rural areas to urban centres. Many opportunities and attractions of the urban centres pull large numbers of people from rural areas. Speaking on this, National Migration Policy, says, “some of the push factors prompting rural outmigration including poverty, poor agricultural yield and lack of quality and affordable education and health care. The pull factors include opportunities for employment access to higher and quality education, and better health-care services in urban areas (2015, p.6).”

External or international migration is the movement of migrants across the border of home country. This movement is often motivated by a good number

of socio-economic factors. International migration is the movement from one country to another. People who leave their country are said to be emigrant while people who move into another country are called immigrants. Emigration of Nigerians is not only intra-regional within the ECOWAS community largely facilitated by the protocol on free movement of people, but also continental migration of Nigerians to Africa, America, Australia, Canada and Europe.

Causes of Migration

There are many reasons why people migrate from one place to another. In relation to Nigerian situation, this paper will limit itself to four.

1. Economic Migrants

Economic migrants are migrants who are attracted to another country because of the greater economic opportunities. The migrants are from less economically developed countries to more economically developed countries. People are often motivated to leave their country to other countries because of the availability of job, good remuneration and better working conditions.

2. Educational Migrants

Due to break down in educational system of a country, a lot of people move to other countries to acquire education. Countries where there is good and quality education attract people especially children of the rich, who can afford going abroad for studies.

3. Political Migrants

Today, on like before, many people are forced to migrate because of war, civil unrest or state policies which discriminate against particular group of citizens or people. The crisis going on in many places today have placed many to countries they never wished or dreamt to go as refugee.

4. Family Reunion

Family reunion has also been a cause of relocation of people from one country to another. In this situation, friends, relatives, fiancée, spouses, children or parents move to meet one of their own who are resident in another country.

Quest for Peace

Peace and war are conceived as being two sides of the same coin. This has led to the popular definition of peace as the absence of war, and war as the absence of peace. This definition has been heavily criticized by scholars in peace parlance. Some of the critics ask, why must war be mentioned in defining peace? Ibeanu argues that, "...even common sense would suggest that peace does exist independent of war. Thus, there can be peace even when there is war, as in situation when there are peaceful interactions between

countries that are engaged in active war (2006, p.3).” To concretize his position, Ibeanu sighted Palestine and Israel as example of countries that have been able to establish peace with the use of water resources despite the serious conflict they are experiencing. Therefore, there can be a definition of peace without any reference to war. Adversely, it is very possible not to have peace even when there is no war. That was what was in the mind of Johan Galtung the Father of modern peace studies, when he coined the concept “structural violence.” Structural violence refers to a form of violence wherein some social conditions may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. These social conditions Ibeanu identifies as poverty, exclusion, intimidation, oppression, want, fear and many other types of psychological pressure (2006, p.4). It would be wrong to classify a country experiencing pervasive structural violence as peaceful.

Precisely, it is the feeling of a dismal future that fuels the desperation of Nigerian youths seeking greener pasture abroad. Because of the collapsed of these social conditions and psychological pressure that drive many young Nigerians to exit the country. This is totally against the misconception of many countries who at first contact with a Nigerian youth abroad thinks of him/her as nothing but criminal or one who has come to dispossess them of their land as in the South African case. Nigerian youth are hardworking ambitious, enthusiastic, promising and peace loving people, who migrate to other countries to better and improve their living conditions. Thus, it is the presence of this structural violence that has forced and will continue to force Nigerian youths to exit the country to better their lives.

Prominent among the structural violence pushing Nigerian Youth is unemployment. Nigerian youths are increasingly becoming restless because of unemployment. Gotan (2018) noted that, “Nigeria has a youthful population of about 80 million which is about 60 percent of her population. It is disheartening to know that 70% of this population are unemployed after obtaining relevant work experiences and other qualifications necessary for the job (p.26).” for Kazeem (2019), “Nigeria’s unemployment rate has climbed for 13 consecutive quarters and an ambitious four-year plan to boost the economy following a recession in 2016 is proving to be a failure.” The situation is becoming worst and scary especially when one consider the data of students who gain admission to the university, graduate and even past out from National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) every year without any provision of jobs by the government. To this effect, Adepoju (2018) believes that, “The limited capacity of the country’s labour market to absorb productively the annual cohorts of job seekers turns youths into potential emigrates....stressful economic conditions, especially the absence of sustainable livelihood opportunities, have fuelled the emigration of young educated persons in a

desperate venture to enter the European Union countries (p.2).” More opportunities exist outside the shores of Nigeria for Nigerians. This is unfortunate but true. That is why Nigerian graduates who can barely earn enough money to sustain themselves in Nigeria will suddenly start sending thousands of dollars/euros home once they manage to move out of the shore of the country.

Nigeria has a very vibrant youth population that is not well catered for by the Nigerian government. One imagines how the future of the country would be with the youths that are not empowered, exiting the country with their potentials. In truth, the brain-drain and exodus of Nigerian youths is not exactly new after similar outward wave during military regimes in the late 1980s to early 1990s and also since the turn of civilian rule in Nigeria. The trend previously seemed restricted to people in specific professions, now it is more of a free for all especially with countries like Canada looking to fill several gaps in their workforce and are offering diverse opportunities from software engineers and accountants to cooks. The rate of employment is low and wages are not even commensurate with the economic demands of the people, thus the reason for young Nigerians searching for peace, going to places where their hopes are raised and their social needs met.

However, in some cases, the grass outside Nigeria is not as green as we perceive it from afar, some emigrants face real and expensive challenges of relocating, settling into a new country and starting all over. Many leave their lucrative jobs here in Nigeria to Europe, America, Canada, Australia and Asia for 3D (Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning) jobs that their national scorn. As such, highly qualified individuals who leave high-level jobs in Nigeria often have to trade down to restart their lives. Despite the known challenges, the possibility of a higher quality of life and education for their children remains a strong pull for several middle-class Nigerians who can afford to move. Some only realize their mistake after arrival but would not return because they have found the peace they lack in Nigeria.

Education is the engine for peace and development of any nation. The deteriorating nature of Nigerian educational system has also been a major contributor for young Nigerians to exit the country. The standard of education has drastically fallen; the constant strike, which has caused the uncertainty of year of graduation, teaching input and output of students has been deteriorating in quality overtime. Lack of modern training and learning facilities, equipment and motivation amongst teachers are really driving Nigerian youths away. More worrisome is the existence of cultism, “sex-for-grades” and “money-for-grades” which has also been a major contributor to Nigerian youth leaving the country to acquire education and even after education, due to lack of employment; stay back and work in these countries

causing brain-drain in Nigeria. National Migration Policy 2015 agrees with this position saying, “Thousands of Nigerian students have sought admission to universities abroad and then stayed on to secure employment, thus depriving Nigeria of their skills and education. Between 60,000 and 80,000 Nigerian students are currently studying abroad (pp.61-62).”

Furthermore, the lack of faith in Nigeria’s political leaders and their inability to reverse the decline in the educational sector is such that many of the young Nigerians making the exodus to Europe and America do not trust the situation will change soon. The looming big picture for Nigeria is that many who either have emigrated or plan to, are unlikely to return and neither are the children they raise in their new countries of residence. There, there is the access to opportunities that become available to the children on the back of the education they have. The range of opportunities that are available to children in Nigeria is limited because the range of education is limited.

Insecurity as a breach of peace is presently a thing of concern to migration. The incessant destruction of lives and properties in Nigeria recently is a major cause of migration of Nigerian youths. Security is important for national growth, peace and sustainable development. The Boko Haram insurgency, farmers/herders conflicts in the North spreading through North central to the Eastern Nigeria, the Niger Delta militants in the South has almost crippled economic activities in the country. Kidnapping and arm robbery all over the country is on the increase. The security apparatus seems to have been severely weakened, overpowered and rendered ineffective by these rascals. To this effect, many young Nigerians especially the privilege few exit the country not because of unemployment or education but to look for a safe haven.

Conclusion

From all indications, Nigeria has become a den of lion. The creation of structural violence by the leaders is forcing young Nigerians to exit from the country. Like the famous Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau would say, “man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains.” Nigerians have wake up to the reality that we are actually living in bondage; we are chained in every aspect of our lives. The only means of escape Nigerians have discovered is to travel and settle abroad to search for peace eluding the whole system. Nigerians are happy people, who would not allow systemic challenges; abject poverty, crime, social inequality and the legacy of political instability rob them of their peace. It seems natural to say that all these factors would put a damper on Nigerian cheerfulness. Rather, as the Frenchman would say, “joie de vivre” is the obvious. Interestingly, a global survey has confirmed it: in a 53-country Gallup poll, Nigerians were rated at 70 points for optimism, it is an optimism born of hope (Adewunmi, 2011). Nigeria is a nation of hope.

However, I think it is imperative for young Nigerians to consider vocational education; skill acquisition can empower young Nigerians to meet their needs. We need to take a leaf from Chinese people where young people who have taken to different vocations produce many of the things we buy and use in Nigeria, whereby contributing to their economic. Considering the on-going debate over minimum wage between the Federal Government and the Labour Union, Nigerian youths should be pro-active and innovative in creating job for themselves rather than waiting for the government to provide jobs that will pay them meager. Migrating to 'already made' countries will not proffer solution to our problems, the future leaders of the country need to stand and fight for their future. Therefore, the quest to fight poverty, hunger, unemployment and insecurity, among other reasons, is the quest for peace.

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