



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF SKILLED LABOUR AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

CHARLES C. AKPUH, PH.D.; & PRINCE G. ANONABA, M.A.

Department of History and International Studies, Babcock University

Abstract

Skilled labour migration is an age-long national development variable across the globe, with a dual tendency to make or mar the development of any country. Critical survey of Nigeria's experience with skilled labour migration portrays Nigeria more as an exporter of skilled labour. Even though Nigeria experiences immigration of labour from many countries, especially from its neighbours like Benin, Cameroon, etc., the exchange of skilled labour with the international community has remained skewed against Nigeria, both in size and benefits to sustainable development. This paper explored the underlying factors that define the skewness of the size and benefits of skilled labour migration between Nigeria and other countries of the world, alongside their implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. It was discovered that despite the numerous development plans and the accompanying initiatives by various administrations in Nigeria, unsustainable development has been a major challenge to Nigerian, because of excessive dependence on petroleum to fund national development initiatives. Also, the national government has been unable to basically design and execute the necessary projects through its local machinery and to be committed to providing enduring supply of soft funds for sustaining the projects. Moreover, its approach to national development programmes have been largely ad hoc. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the majority of immigrants in Nigeria are poorly skilled, mostly the highly skilled people emigrate to other countries from Nigeria. Mounting insecurity of lives and property, livelihoods crisis, inadequate infrastructural supply and maintenance, as well as geometric rise in food and commodity prices

in Nigeria have been promoting skilled labour emigration from the country, leading to loss of manpower and unsustainability of development in Nigeria. The paper therefore concluded that since skilled labour emigration is detrimental to the Nigerian state, it should limit the factors that aid the emigration in order to ensure that the majority of its skilled nationals can stay and work or do business in Nigeria, thereby contributing their quotas to sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Keyword: *International Migration, Skilled Labour, Sustainable Development.*

Introduction

Akpuh and Onyebuchi (2019: 1) had succinctly captured the relevance of sustainable development and the plight of the Nigerian society when they posited that “...the achievement of human welfare is best realised when the available resources outweigh the needs of the population...” in any given society, and that sustainable development can hardly be achieved when and where the reverse is the case. In the case of Nigeria, the country has been experiences loss rather than consolidation of its achievements through loss of resources in the forms of skilled labour to the external environment. Meanwhile, the country has the potentials to attract more than dispel its own internally groomed skilled labour, which could help to sustain its development. The extent of endowment of the Nigerian State can be seen in the following observations. From a recent evaluation of the endowments and potentials of Nigeria, the country is among the leading countries of the world whose potentials can lead to their becoming strong places of attraction to all and sundry kinds of people. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) made the following observations about the country in 2019 in line with the records of Nigeria’s *National Bureau of Statistics, 2014* that Nigeria has the largest population (about 170 million) and economy in Africa, with “...relatively good access to skills, capital and technology, fertile land, mineral resources and a favourable geographic location, a GDP of \$488 billion and a GDP per capita of \$2,688” (p. 1). This has been largely consequent on Nigeria’s crude oil endowments, whose exploitation has constituted the most significant proportion of the country’s economic supply through foreign exchange earnings since 1958

when the British first discovered oil in commercial quantity at Oloibiri. Accordingly, Nigeria has become the 12th largest oil exporter in the world. Also, the country, especially since the inception of the Fourth Republic has continued to make tangible, albeit challenge-laden, socio-political achievements, especially in the promotion of democracy. Thus, there have been improvements in the country's political stability and basic freedoms, comparatively improved regard for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and expansion of the role of civil society and the mass media (FGN and ILO, 2019).

Despite all these achievements, many skilled Nigerians have had to emigrate to other countries around the world thereby robbing the Nigerian nation the benefits they could have contributed to the nation's all round development, especially through sustenance of the achievements made. Obviously, certain factors of obvious concern are responsible for this experience, therefore, there is the need to identify and resolve them if Nigeria's development will be sustained in the future.

Conceptual Discourse

International Skilled Labour Migration

From the suggestions made by Arowojolu-Alagwe, Ankeli, Odewande, and Apata (2013), skilled labour migration is the movement of trained personnel from one location to the other in search of greener pastures. It is the same thing as "Brain-Drain" (Anekwe, 2003) and human capital flight. Skilled labour migration is also "...the loss of skilled intellectual and technical labour when they move to a geographic, economic or professional environment which is more favourable to them..." than where they were formerly engaged in. It is the loss of scientific, technical, and leadership talents through emigration of people equipped with useful skills. Skilled labour migration can occur within the same society or across borders of different societies. When it involves cross border migration, it becomes known as international skilled labour migration. This is the conceptual context within which this discourse is situated. Aremu (2008) observes that this kind of migration is an age-long phenomena which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Throughout the history of its occurrence, skilled labour migration has been more prevalent in the form of migration from developing countries to more advanced nations. In the African

and Nigerian experience, this has been the case, especially beginning with emigration to the metropolises of the former colonial countries like America, Britain, and France, and then spreading to other favourable geographical locations around the globe.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development simply implies the condition in which achievements made are maintained and not largely lost by any means to unwanted situations. It is highly associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which consist of the parts and parcels of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, sustainable development can be accurately measured using the extent of achievement of the set of 17 integrated and indivisible goals of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs which constitute measurable parameters for ascertaining the level of sustainable development include: Poverty eradication; elimination of hunger through food security occasioned by promotion of sustainable agriculture; promotion of healthy living and well-being for all; promotion of inclusive and equitable quality education for promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation; ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation; reducing inequality within and among countries; making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns; taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, and halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss; promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels; strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Akpuh and Onyebuchi, 2019; Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017).

Sustainable Development in Nigeria

As rightly observed by Akpuh and Onyebuchi (2019) and Ibietan and Ekhosuehi (2013), unsustainable development had been a major challenge and problem to the Nigerian society before the evolvment of the Agenda 2030 and its ratification in 2015. Moreover, the Nigerian government had begun seeking for solution to this problem since its evolvment as an independent country in 1960. Among the first measures were the development plans which began with the 1962-68 National Development Plan for development through collaboration between the public and private sectors; the 1970-74 National Development Plan for post-Civil War (1967-70) reconstruction, rehabilitation, and resettlement; the 1975-1980 National Development Plan for increasing per capita income, equalising the distribution of income, creation of job, improving the quality and quantity of supply of manpower, and diversification of Nigeria's economy; and the 1981-85 National Development Plan for promoting export-oriented industries, developing small and medium scale industries, sourcing inputs from the local setting, improving the efficiency of government owned enterprises through acquisition of technological skills, improving real income for all Nigerians, reducing unemployment, developing technology for greater self-reliance, and for increasing Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings.

In addition to the developmental plans, some mostly accompanying initiatives were also designed for the same purpose as observed by Baghebo and Emmanuel (2015), Ibietan and Ekhosuehi (2013), Umukoro (2013), and Ugwu (2012). The developmental initiatives include: The 1963 Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Service at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; the 1967 International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, IITA; the 1972 National Accelerated Food Production Programme, NAFPP; the 1976 Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and River Basin and Rural Development Authorities; the 1980 Green Revolution; the 1986 Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), and Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP); the 1989 Peoples Bank of Nigeria, PBN; the 1992 Community Banking System, CBS; the 1994 Maryam Abacha's Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Family Support Programme (FSP); the 1999 National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS); the 2000 Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

the 2001 National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP); and the 2004 National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Even though the foregoing evinces the commitment of all succeeding administrations to ensure the achievement of development and its sustenance through laudable plans, policies, programmes, and institutions, very little results have been achieved in general. Most of the stated development efforts failed because of excessive dependence on petroleum to fund national development initiatives. This condition even ensured that the national government became the dominant employer of labour, thereby causing extreme competition for the limited employment opportunities and the resultant massive corruption, which further aided the failures of the plans and initiatives for national development. Moreover, the national government could not basically design and execute the necessary projects through its own local machinery nor ensure enduring supply of soft funds for sustaining the projects (Akpuh and Onyebuchi, 2019; Akpobasah, 2004). Even so, almost all the efforts of the government to ensure national development were largely ad hoc, simply evolving from the urgent need to resolve threatening national developmental conditions. For instances, even though SAP was rejected by the Buhari-Idiagbon's administration because of its foreseeable inherent potential to compound Nigeria's national developmental problems in the long run, Gen. Babangida's administration was compelled by the existing economic realities to adopt it as an ad hoc remedy to the situation in 1986 (Akpobasah, 2004).

Nigeria's Experience with Skilled Labour Migration

Afolayan and International Organisation for Migration, IOM (2009) provide tangible information on Nigeria's experience with skilled labour migration. According to them, Nigeria experiences skewed immigration cum emigration of skilled labour in favour of the latter. Nigeria's endowments and achievements make it to be an important destination for many migrants, especially from West Africa. Unlike what it was during the latter part of the military administration in Nigeria (477,135 in 1991), the immigrant population in Nigeria had risen to more than double (971,450) during the first five years of the Fourth Republic, with the expectation of a further increase to 1.1 million in 2010 (UNPD, 2009) and more in the years that followed. The immigrants are mainly from Nigeria's West African neighbours like Benin, Cameroun, Ghana,

and Mali. Nevertheless, the immigrants make up just 0.7 per cent of the total population of Nigeria. Although the majority of immigrants into Nigeria are poorly skilled, some of them are highly skilled. For instance, as at 2004, National Manpower Board averred that the categories of skilled immigrants to Nigeria were in the following proportions: General managers (2.73 per cent), corporate managers (0.89 per cent), physical, mathematical, and engineering science professionals (0.43 per cent) and the clerical work categories like customer service clerks (0.21 per cent). The professional and technical categories were mainly from Europe (47.37 per cent), while most of the clerical workers were from the ECOWAS countries (42.84%) (National Manpower Board, 2004).

The foregoing notwithstanding, more people emigrate to other countries from Nigeria. For instance, from 2000 to 2005, the net migration rate per 1,000 people decreased from -0.2 to -0.3, implying a higher emigration from Nigeria than immigration into the country. The UNDP (2009) had estimated that this will rise to -0.4 in 2010. According to the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation, and Poverty (DRC, 2007), 1,041,284 Nigerian nationals lived abroad in 2007, with majority of them living in Sudan (24 per cent), the United States (14 per cent), the United Kingdom (9 per cent) and neighbouring African countries like Cameroon (8 per cent) and Ghana (5 per cent). In reality, it is difficult to ascertain the real characteristics of Nigerian emigrants in terms of the skills they possess. But certain indications suggest that it is mostly the highly skilled people, whose potentials are falling away as a result of scarcity of employment, that are most prone to such emigration. The confirmation of this notion can be gleaned from the fact that 83 per cent of Nigerians living and working in the United States and 46 per cent of those of them in Europe are highly skilled. As at 2006, Docquier and Marfouk (2006) had noted that not less than about 64 per cent of them had tertiary education. Also, Clemens and Pettersson (2007) noted that as at 2007, 14 per cent of medical professionals trained in Nigeria worked abroad, with 90 per cent of them living and working in the United States and the United Kingdom. The trend is the same with Nigerian migrants working in the OECD countries.

Reasons for Skilled Labour Emigration from Nigeria

Despite the previously stated achievements of the Nigerian State, it has often had to struggle with mounting insecurity of lives and property in the forms of terrorist attacks from Boko Haram sect in the Northeast, Fulani herdsmen vs. non-Fulani farmers imbroglio in Plateau and the surrounding areas, government

ordered genocides in the oil producing communities like Odi, incessant occurrence of crimes like armed robbery, abduction and kidnapping for ransom, cyber-crimes and frauds, as well as ritual killings across the entire country. The prevalence of these vices in the country is largely due to the fact that the observed economic achievements are merely on the macroeconomic basis, and have failed to translate to tangible improvement of the living conditions of the majority of Nigeria's citizenry. According to FGN and ILO (2019), this is also why there has been widespread occurrence of rising poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructural supply and maintenance, and disproportionate rise in food and commodity prices in Nigeria. Despite the economic growths, there has been insufficient job-creation in Nigeria in the midst of rising population and youthful labour force, leading to an unemployment rate of over 24 per cent even amidst high level of education of tangible proportion of the work force in the country. For instance, while the average population of people living in abject poverty rose from 17.7 million in 1980 to 67.1 million in 1996 and 71.3 million in 2012, about 78 per cent of Nigeria's citizenry subsisted on less than \$1.25 per day, with about half of the country's population living in abject poverty, having a life expectancy of 52.3 years (as at 2012) and infant mortality rate of 61.7 per 1000 (as at 2013). Accordingly, the National Bureau of Statistics (2017: 1) noted that the population of people who are within the economically active or working age (15 – 64 years) rose from 110.3 million in the second quarter of 2017 to 111.1 million in the third quarter of the same year; that despite this rise in available workforce, the total population of people in full-time employment of at least 40 hours a week declined from 52.7 million in the second quarter of 2017 to 51.1 million in the third quarter of the same year; that the rate of unemployment, therefore rose from 14.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2016 to 16.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2017 and to 18.8 per cent in the third quarter of the same year. Thus, while the population of the unemployed rose from 13.6 million in the second quarter of 2017 to 15.9 million in the third quarter of the same year, the population of the underemployed rose from 17.7 million to 18.0 million within the same period. It was for this reason that "18 job seekers died and many were injured during a nationwide recruitment test conducted by the Nigeria Immigration Service in March 2014" (FGN and ILO, 2019: 2) as a result of the ensuing competition for the few available employments. Amid the condition of unemployment and the attendant

livelihoods crisis, the few employers of labour have seized the *opportunity* of the prevalence of unemployment “...to reduce the earnings of new entrants and to raise the standard for fresh applicants” (FGN and ILO, 2019: 2). These are the conditions that have aided the rising incidence of poverty in Nigeria. Available data shows that while Nigeria ranks 153rd out of 186th position on the Human Development Index (HDI), her Gender-related Development Index (GDI) is 139 out of 157 countries.

Under the foregoing conditions of prevalent insecurity and socio-economic uncertainty, it can only be normal for people whose skills are in appreciable demand elsewhere to migrate to anywhere they can be sure of tangible employment and security of their lives and property alongside those of their dependencies and loved ones. This is because, even those who have the potential of being self-employed cannot be very certain of the extent of security of their lives and businesses in the long or short run. This is a major reason why people with skills which are in demand elsewhere often emigrate out of Nigeria.

Effects of Skilled Labour Emigration on the Nigerian Society

As already noted, skilled labour migration often leads to loss of manpower for the Nigerian society. Although one may claim that the Nigerian State seem, most often, to have more manpower potential than it actually requires, and that the immigration of skilled labour from outside the country augments the available supplies, the implication goes beyond all that. Whereas Nigeria experiences skilled labour immigration, the proportion is fewer when compared with Nigerian skilled labour emigrants. Moreover, the components of the skilled immigrant labour force are often specialised and designated for specific functions which may not often benefit the common people of the country. They are often paid in hard currency equivalents, which even impoverishes the country the more. Even so, the Nigerian State expends enormous resources in training the skilled personnel that later leave the country to use their acquired potentials for the improvement of other countries. The resources expended on such individuals are never recovered but lost forever. This sustained condition makes the Nigerian State to be a constant “exporter” of skilled labour to the international community without a foreseeable benefit to the state. This sustained development eventually amounts to underdevelopment for Nigeria through unsustainable preservation and use of its trained labour personnel. As

the cycle repeats, the state resumes fresh training for skilled labour which it eventually loses again and again alongside the resources used in developing them. Thus, national development is not sustained.

Conclusion

Based on the observed detrimental effects of skilled labour emigration from Nigeria to other countries of the world, it is important that the Nigerian State finds ways through which the majority of its skilled nationals can be encouraged to stay and work or do business in Nigeria, thereby contributing their own quotas to Nigeria's national development and the sustenance of the achievements made. Improving on the security of the country, providing employment, and ensuring conducive environment for local business people and the self-employed citizens will go a long way to ensure that the menace of excessive international emigration of skilled labour from Nigeria is curbed for the ultimate contribution to the achievement of sustainable national development in Nigeria. Thus, this paper supports Afolayan and IOM (2009) in their notion that sustainable development cannot be realised in Nigeria without tangible supply of highly skilled labour. So, high-rate emigration of skilled Nigerians to other countries, despite the supposed contribution of remittances to Nigeria's economy as claimed by the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN (2009), consist of a deadly blow on the efforts made to sustain development in Nigeria. It is for the experience of such "migration inequalities" that the Nigerian State and its citizenry have often suffered developmental setback from inability to sustain their achievements. For the same reason, the Nigerian State and citizenry have had to largely depend on the meagre supply of highly skilled immigrants' labour force to fill the vacuums created.

References

- Afolayan, A. and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2009), *Migration in Nigeria: A Country Profile, 2009*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
- Akpobasah, M. (2004), "The Development Strategy for Nigeria". A paper presented at the Overseas Development/Nigerian Economic Summit Group Meeting on Nigeria, London, June 16-17, 2004

- Akpuh, C. C. and Onyebuchi, U. J. (2019), "Population Explosion and the Actualisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria". *Babcock University Journal of History and International Studies, BUJOHIS, vol. 4.*, 2013: 13-30.
- Anekwe, M. C. (2003), Brain-drain: The Nigerian Experience. Retrieved from <http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com> on April 7, 2018.
- Aremu, (2008), "Problem of Brain-Drain". Retrieved from <http://www.articlebase.com> on April 15, 2018.
- Arowojolu-Alagwe, T., Ankeli, A. I., Odewande, A. G., and Apata, O. C. (2013), "An Appraisal of Skilled Labour Migration in Nigerian Construction Industry". *International Journal of Business Administration, Vol. 4, No. 1*, 2013: 86-91. Retrieved from www.sciedu.ca/ijba on December 15, 2018.
- Baghebo, M. and Emmanuel, N. (2015). The Impact of Poverty Alleviation Programmes on Economic Growth in Nigeria, 1981-2013. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(10): (online). Retrieved from http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_10_October_2015/20.pdf on April 10, 2019
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2018). *National Bureau of Statistics, NBS – 2017 Demographic Statistics Bulletin*. Abuja: FGN
- Clemens, M. A and Patterson, G. (2007), *New Data on African Health Professionals Abroad. Working Paper*. Washington, DC: Centre for Global Development
- Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, DRC (2007), "Global Migrant Origin Database". *Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty*, March, Version 4
- Docquier, F and Marfouk, A. (2006), International Migration by Educational Attainment, 1990-2000. In Ozden, C. and Schiff, M. (eds.), *International Migration, Remittances and Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2019), Decent Work Country Programme II, 2015-2018. Retrieved from www.ilo.org
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2018). *National Bureau of Statistics, NBS – 2017 Demographic Statistics Bulletin*. Abuja: FGN.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2017). *Nigeria: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Baseline Report, 2016*. Abuja: Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs) and National Bureau of Statistics
- Federal Government of Nigeria, National Manpower Board, NMB (2004), *Labour Market Analysis of Nigeria's Manpower Stock and Requirements, 2002*. Abuja: NMB
- Ibietan, J. and Ekhosuehi, O. (2013), Trends in Development Planning in Nigeria: 1962 to 2012. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 15(4) (Online): 297-311. Retrieved from m.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/content/download/34812/.../Ibietan%26Oghator.pdf on April 8, 2019
- Ugwu, O. C. (2012), "National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Challenges of Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria, 1999-2011". A Master Degree

Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, for the award of Master of Science (M.Sc.) Degree.

Umukoro, N. (2013). Poverty and Social Protection Policies in Nigeria. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 29(3): 305-322.

United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2009), *Human Development Report, 2009: Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2009/> on august 8, 2016.