

## **Trends and Issues in Nigerian's Mass Migration to other Countries in the 21st Century**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the causes and consequences of Nigerians massive influx to other countries within the last four to five decades. To achieve this, primary and secondary sources and method of historical reconstruction was used extensively. In the study, newspapers and magazines reports were used in conjunctions with books, and official records and government publications. This is evident with the teeming population of Nigeria, especially, the youths seeking entry visas at the various consular offices in Nigeria. This reveals the hasty, hot-headed, ill-advised and thoughtless attempts by millions of Nigerians to check out of the country. On a global scale, a damning report released by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees on global statistics on asylum seekers has shown that Nigeria ranks among other war-torn countries whose nationals are seeking asylum in Europe and other developed countries of the world. This paper argues that the unabated migration of Nigerians to other countries is due to the bad state of the economy and the level of insecurity in the country. This study also provides a panacea to curb mass migrations of Nigerians to other countries.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Underdevelopment, Migration, Youths, Unemployment, Insecurity

### **Introduction**

Migration is the movement of a large number of people from one place to another. The concept of migration is not a new thing, it is known from ancient time. People, generally migrate for several intentions, these intentions may fall under these four areas: environmental, economic, cultural and socio-political; within that, the reasons may also be "push" or "pull" factors.

Push factors are those that force people to migrate voluntarily and in many cases, they are forced because such people risk danger if they stay. Push factors include conflict, drought, famine, or extreme religious crisis, poverty, lack of job opportunities, discrimination, political marginalization, political intolerance and persecution of people who question the status quo, whereas pull factors are

those factors in the destination country that attract people to leave their home. Those factors are known as place utility, that is, when a place offers better economic opportunities, more jobs and the promise of a better peaceful life often pull people into such places or environment, Samagra (2018). Migration has been defined simply as "a process of moving, either across an international border or within a state which results in a temporary or (semi) permanent change of residence" (UNESCO, 2008).

In Nigeria, many Nigerian youth migrants travel to Europe, America, and Asian countries to find better work; some are political refugees as well as economic migrants. Nigeria is blessed with all manner of resources that can sustain us. A casual visit to any Nigerian Immigration Office or any Consular Office of many countries in Nigeria would reveal a rush to attempts by millions of Nigerians to check out of the country. Even many of the Nigerians who had lived abroad but returned home at a point as a result of the nostalgia for families and homelands are heading back abroad with ubiquity.

#### **Causes of Mass Migration of Nigerians to other countries in the 21st Century**

This research has come forth with the causes of mass migration of Nigerians to other countries on the following reasons which include:

#### **The State of the Economy**

Obioha, (2017) ascribed the increased migration of Nigerians to other countries to the state of the economy, as the management of the oil wealth is poor and unmanageable. Even though, Nigeria can be regarded as a rich country because of its crude oil revenue. On the other side, it can be labeled a poor country considering that over 70 percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line at less than one US dollar a day. We can boast of millionaires that rank among the top of the continent, yet the poor in Nigeria are among the worst in the world. It is the poor in Nigeria, especially among the youths that are desperate to migrate to other countries to earn a better living

#### **Lack of Good Governance**

The Nigerian system of governance, politics, and democracy cannot be said to be among the best in the world. The federal system is faulty as it was imposed on Nigerians by the military junta. It is full of contradictions; federal and the same time unitary, its contradictory nature is fueling ethnic agitations in the country with most Nigerians calling for a restructured Nigerian federation, where the federating units will develop at their own pace. Today Nigeria is a blood-soaked country because so many people have died calling for the restructuring of the false federal system. So many have migrated to other countries as a political asylum to escape the highhandedness of the

ruling class that says Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable. The citizens are under siege as soldiers usually occupy streets and homes in the name of "Operation Python Dance or Operation Crocodile Smile". Thus asylum-seeking and the growing tendency for Nigerians to leave the country in search of greener pastures abroad are simply attempting to escape from some of the harsh and dehumanizing effects of the poor socio-economic conditions in the country. What is apparent is that Nigerians have lost faith in the capacity of their government to create an enabling environment for worth-while engagement in productive activities as well as self-advancement of the youths.

#### **The Unbearable Insecurity and the Quest to Secure Asylum Abroad**

Obioha, (2017) ascribed the unbearable insecurity in Nigeria and the increase asylum seekers to the root cause of mass migrations of Nigerians to other countries. On a global scale, he revealed a damning report released by the United Nation High Commission for Refugees on global statistics on asylum-seekers, has shown that Nigeria ranks among other war-torn countries whose nationals are seeking asylum in Europe and other developed countries of the world. According to *the Authority Daily editorial*, (2017), the Geneva report placed Iraq on top of the asylum seekers list, followed by Somalia, the Russian Federation, Afghanistan, Nigeria, among others. It is important to note that political unrest, large scale violence, religious intolerance, conflicts and dislocation by

mililitants in the Niger Delta are the criteria that qualify citizens of Nigeria to seek asylum elsewhere. Likewise, the magnitude of killings and pockets of discontents by activist and freedom fighters that are languishing in jails without trial all over Nigeria encourage many Nigerians into the political asylum. Thus, the escalating wave of insecurity in the country means that Nigeria is not by any means better than any of the war-torn countries. The situation has now been compounded by the growing menace of the citizenry living under military/police siege and oppression that causes a massive exodus of Nigerians to other countries, especially the youths. It is shameful that more than eighteen years into the democratic dispensation things are so bad in the country that Nigerians are desperate to abandon their fatherland in search of better living conditions even in some less endowed countries.

#### **Nigeria is deeply rooted in Corruption**

Corruption is so endemic in Nigeria to the extent that President Buhari was quoted as saying that "if we don't kill corruption, corruption will kill us." The high level of corruption scam in the country by the ruling class are some of the factors that encourage young Nigerian migrating to other countries to earn their living in an honest and decent society abroad, Obioha (2017). Corruption gives Nigeria a bad name and image globally. It affects her citizens in the Diaspora. Corruption is the bane of the Nigerian society and

the major cause of poverty and the reason people are migrating out of the country. Of course, Nigeria, since 1998, has been described by the Berlin-based anti-corruption organization, Transparency International as one of the five most corrupt countries in the world, Dan Amor, (2017). Nigeria's public sector is characterized by corruption and nepotism of all shades. Check all the government agencies, commissions and departments. Foreigners have taken over the economy from Nigerians because of corruption and mismanagement, while Nigerians are migrating to other countries in search for greener pastures – what a shame to the giant of Africa!

#### **The Growing Slums, Poverty, and Lack of Social and Physical Infrastructures in Nigeria**

It is necessary to note that Nigeria's fine cities are encircled with growing slums and poverty and lack of social and physical infrastructures. If the Nigerian government had made concrete efforts to invest in physical and social infrastructure, generate and equitably distribute the "dividends" of democracy across the six geopolitical zones of the country, many young Nigerians would not have contemplated leaving the country. It is most unfortunate Nigeria which is the Giant of Africa and the most populous nation in Africa perceives its nationals as expendables. Richard Estes, who has studied human development for over 45 years, equally stated:

The bottom 10 poorest nations in the world, they include

Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Guinea, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The report was compiled based on data provided by the United Nations and measures the ability of nations to meet the basic needs of their residents in terms of health, education, security, human rights, political participation, population growth, and improved women status, cultural diversity and freedom from social chaos. According to the report, the overall picture of social progress to the world is grim with 21 African and Asian countries nearing social collapse due to concentrated poverty, weak political institution, repeated economic failure, disease and cultural dislocation, Dan Amor (2017:17).

It is a historical fact that Obasanjo, Buhari, and Babangida are the progenitors of poverty culture in Nigeria as commanders in chief of a ruling class. Since the past eighteen years of a democratic system. Nigerians have experienced the worst form of poverty in the history of the country. It has become unbearable in the current Buhari administration, as Nigerians are dying of hunger and gnashing of teeth. The reality of today's Nigeria is that there is a deliberate determination on the part of the

leadership to create a poverty class who are to be used as a reference for real underdevelopment to attract loans from international finance institutions. It is also to establish an underclass populace that would serve as some sort of benign index of the permanent fest to which an indifferent world would always react when laughing at Nigeria. Yes, people laugh at Nigeria and then Nigerian leaders themselves try to stave off this laughter by pointing to the underclass they created as the real laughing stock. Nigeria is a fool's paradise, a jester's haven where members of the looting class involve in divine and religious paradigms to perpetuate the poverty syndrome. A government which encourages force of arms by herdsmen against armless or defenseless farmers and communities is deepening poverty in society. It is agonizing that even in the 21st century, Nigeria still has leaders, a bunch of social pretenders who don't border a hoot whether the poor survive or not.

No longer is higher education a guarantee of the good life as the take-home pay of the average honest Nigerian worker can longer take him home. Currently, poverty is expressed in manifest deaths and epidemics across the country. Nigeria is a peculiar kind of hell Amor, (2017). Despite plenty of money from crude oil sales and Value Added Tax (VAT), it is a shame that there is abject and chronic poverty in Nigeria. It is what is fueling insecurity, agitations, tensions, kidnapping, and killings across the country and the cause of many Nigerians migrating to other countries

as refugees and to earn a better living standard.

### **The Menace and Insecurity caused by Boko Haram, the Niger Delta Militancy and men of the Underworld**

Today, many Nigerians are migrating out of the North because of the Boko Haram killings, destruction and dislocation of the population, thus, the social, religious and economic life of the people are adversely affected by the Boko Haram Islamic sect, likewise, many Nigerians have migrated out of the oil-rich Niger Delta region because of cult activities and militancy kidnapping of oil workers and expatriate who pays fat ransom to secure their freedom. Likewise in the South East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria, kidnapping and arm robbery are making many Nigerian citizens migrate out of the country. Today in Nigeria, it is estimated that more than 20,000 precious lives of Nigerians were lost to the bloodthirsty Boko Haram terrorists while close to two million people were dispersed, dislocated and currently live in internally displaced people's camps in the North East and other states of the federation; Okoroma, (2017). From there they prepared their documents to leave the country to other countries in the world. What do you expect from millions of Nigerians that are forced to leave their homes, farmlands, and businesses while insecurity becomes the order of the day? The best option is to migrate to other countries to earn a better living rather than die in your fatherland in the hands of bloody Boko

Haram terrorists, kidnappers, militants, and men of the underworld, Okoroma (2017).

### **To Earn High Income from Advanced Nations Abroad**

Many Nigerians migrate to other countries because of the drive to earn high income from advanced nations abroad. The country has lost legions of its experts and educated elite to other lands. Easily, many Nigerians of varying persuasions have come to believe that their prosperity lies abroad. From athletes to professors, to medical practitioners, the feeling is one of resignation and a strong resolve to ply their trades abroad where their services are better appreciated and remunerated.

### **The Failing Health Sector**

Many Nigerians migrate to other countries for medical treatment because many Nigerians die every day of treatable ailments such as malaria and typhoid fever. Many pregnant women die in Nigeria every year in the course of giving birth to future citizens. Many under-five children die annually in the country because of failing health sector. Many children also die because of malnutrition, Obioha, (2017).

Foreigners, especially those in Europe and America, often wonder why many Nigerians die prematurely in spite of our good weather, foods, and the nation's abundant material resources, while the health sector is underfunded by successive governments. Thus, our leaders join the next available flights to the United

Kingdom and America to access first-class medical treatment. The wealthy Nigerians have also joined the bandwagon of burgeoning medical tourism, which they have extended to Asia countries. Medical tourism will persist until we bring back our health sector. It will continue until the government revamps the ailing sector, and patronize it. Health is wealth; the healthiest nations are among the richest nations. They are also among the most industrialized. They fare well in academics and sports. Their citizens are among the happiest in the world. The nexus between health and other sectors of human development cannot be neglected Obioha, (2017). Nigeria has lost a legion of its medical experts to the industrialized or advanced countries of Western Europe and North America and the high-income nations at the gulf region of the Middle East and even South Africa because of the failing health sector in Nigeria.

### **The Failing Education Sector**

Another reason why many Nigerians are migrating to other countries is because of the failing education sector. For example, the recent report from Kaduna State of many teachers that failed exams meant for primary four pupils depicts the deteriorating nature of the sector. Frequent and prolonged strikes at the universities and polytechnics also make parents send their children to other countries to earn better quality education abroad. Even though, schooling abroad is very expensive than what is obtainable in Nigeria Obioha, (2017). Moreso, since

the introduction of the Presidential Amnesty program and the PTDF scholarships many Niger Delta students and other Nigerians from other ethnic groups have been enjoying the benefit to migrating to Europe, America, Asia and other African countries for schooling, but sometimes, the unfortunate scholars often complaint of failure of government agencies, and departments to pay their stipend as at when due; which makes them experience sufferings in other countries.

#### **The Dangers of Mass Migration of Nigerians to other Countries**

Many Nigeria students and youths that migrated to other countries in Europe, America, Asia, and African countries for schooling or in search for jobs to earn a living, sometimes, unfortunately, had resorted to crime and other forms of illegality since they no longer in school and were finding it difficult to get jobs.

Saraki, the Senate President of Nigeria, said on *Daily Sun*, October 26, 2017:11 that, the situation of Nigerians schooling in Russia is very pathetic and it is also very serious and we must stand firm behind our students, as Nigerians are roaming Russian streets and going into crime. Some of the stranded students complained that Federal Government agencies taking care of them have not paid any outstanding two-year scholarship to their schooling in Russia; the minimum figure is about \$500 per student. This is a dent on Nigeria's image abroad and it is not acceptable. Many of the Nigerian

scholars are students who got a scholarship, either the Presidential Amnesty scholarship or the PTDF scholarship. According to Saraki,

The story that these students told us was most pitiable. They regaled us with endless stories of suffering because their stipends and tuitions have not been paid. We know very well that Russia is a very cold country. And, in the winter months, especially, it's almost like a taste of reverse hell. Likewise, I also got a very lengthy e-mail from Nigerians scholars in the United Kingdom, complaining just like those students who spoke in Russia. The stipends on which these students will live for food, transportation, housing, have not been paid for many months.

As Senator Basse also pointed out in his contribution to the suffering of Nigeria migrating to other countries, said, "there was a time Nigerian students from the Niger Delta region on scholarship with the Presidential Amnesty looked up the Nigerian Embassy in Moscow, he intervened and salvaged the country from that embarrassment in 2013 with the tune of ₦127 million. Unfortunately, the fund has not been refunded. (*Daily Sun* editorial, October 26, 2017:11).

Nigerians - who have to travel to seek medical treatment abroad and those traveling out through illegal and

unconventional routes such as the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea must be wary not to become victims of organ trade. The illegal trades in human organs are of the darkest secrets of modern medicine. It was, therefore, no surprise when the Minister of Health, Prof. Isaac Adewole, on an Editorial of *Daily Sun*, October 24, 2017:15, alerted Nigerians to the incidence of illegal harvesting of organs in some unscrupulous foreign hospitals. In a letter signed by the Minister's behalf by the Director of Health announced an alarming increase in illegal harvesting and transplanting of organs and the ongoing prosecution of 41 suspected kidney traffickers by the Egyptian authorities. The letter, which was addressed to the President of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Dr. Mike Ogirima, urged the association to ensure that Nigerians are educated on the dangers of undergoing surgery abroad. The Nigerian Medical Association was also directed to disseminate the information to doctors in the relevant "specialties" so that Nigerians would be "circumspect" about the hospitals from which they seek medical treatment abroad. A list of four Egyptian hospitals suspected to be involved in the heinous practice was released by the ministry.

Stories of the people losing their organs through deceptive surgeries may sound incredible but they are sometimes true. The demand for human organs for outstrips supply. This has given rise to the illegal trade in human organs estimated to worth

more than \$1.2 billion a year. Vulnerable Nigerians who are desperate to travel abroad without proper documentation and information are thought to be victims of the trade. *The Times of London*, in June 2016, disclosed the fate of some African migrants who got stranded in the North African country, Libya, after the hopes of connecting Europe were dashed. The newspaper quoted a former trafficker, Mauredin Affa, as saying that "African migrants who cannot pay their passage to Europe are being sold for \$15,000 to Egyptians who harvest their organs". The man, who later became an informant to the Italian Police, said, the Egyptians took the organs away in thermal pouches. His disclosures led to 23 arrests and the seizure of 526,000 Euros from a perfume shop in Rome being used as a front by organ merchants (*Daily Sun*, October 24, 2017:15).

In May 2017, a Nigerian civil society group, Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI), revealed that it had received reports from Nigerian serving jail terms in China about the unexplained disappearances of Nigerians from Chinese jail houses, with strong suspicion that they were taken out of their cells and executed by prison officials for harvesting and selling their organs. Although those allegations could not be substantiated by an editorial on *Daily Sun*, October 24, 2017:15, reports from other services justify the suspicion owing to the high number of kidney transplants reported in China (10,000 a year), during which there were only 130 kidney donors.

Migration of Nigerians to other countries because of our failing health sector is a shame to Nigeria. The direct consequence of this is that the country is needlessly losing its human capital and population to the industrialized or advanced countries of Western Europe, North America and other high-income nations at the Gulf region of the Middle East, Asia and even South Africa, while we encourage medical tourism and brain drain of our medical Doctors to other countries. At home, it is forced at our health sectors, industries, and oil companies to engage expatriate personnel for our critical industries at a prohibitive cost. Besides, part of the dangers witnessed in the recent history of Nigerians migrating to other countries was the xenophobic attacks of Africans, especially Nigerian businessmen and women by the South African youths for fear of Nigerians domination and hatred because they are foreigners. It was witnessed that out of malice and hatred many Nigerian businessmen were unlawfully murdered and killed by the South African restive youths. While the South African government under the leadership of Zuma and the police were inactive and passive to check the aggression of South African youths attack Nigerian businessmen; as some of their shops were plundered and looted by the South Africans.

To point out also the dangers of migration of Nigerians to other countries in the 21st century, New Telegraph, November 7, 2017:9, reported the death of 26 sexually abused Nigerian girls; the ladies, who

were suspected to be victims of sexual abuse, were said to have died as they struggled to cross to Europe through the Mediterranean, the victims were between 14 and 18. Following several rescues, their bodies were reportedly discovered in a Spanish warship, Cantabria, which was carrying 375 migrants and the dead women. Most of the 375 survivors brought to Salerno were from Sub-Saharan African countries - including, Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Gambia, and Sudan. Among the 375 survivors were 90 women, eight of them pregnant, 52 children and some Libyan men and were on board. People smuggling gangs charge each migrant about \$6,000 (£4,578) to get to Italy, \$4,000 of which is for the Trans Saharan journey to Libya and many migrants have reported violence, including torture and sexual abuse, by the gangs. This illegal migration of Nigerians to other countries of the world often breed diplomatic conflict and crisis between Nigeria and those countries our youths are migrating to; as many of the girls end up to serve as commercial sex workers and the young men criminals Mofeed Alabi, (2017).

### **Strategies to Curb Mass Migration of Nigerians Abroad**

The following strategies should be considered to curb the migration of Nigerian to other countries. On the issue of organ trade, the Federal Government and the Ministry of Health should urge the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) to ensure that Nigerians are properly educated on the dangers of undergoing surgery

abroad. The Federal Government should also negotiate with the Chinese Government for the release of Nigerian Prisoners in China so that they can serve out their terms in Nigeria; to avoid secret harvesting of their organs in Chinese prisons. The Federal Government and the Ministry of Health should keep Nigerians informed about the organ trade and investigate suspicious cases of organ trade. The Nigerian authorities must also watch out to ensure that no such nefarious trade is conducted in the country.

The Nigeria authorities should revamp the failing health sector to curb medical tourism and brain drain of our medical practitioners, medical tourism and organ trade will persist until we bring back our health sector. Health is wealth; the healthiest nations are among the richest nations. They are also the most industrialized. They fare well in academic and sports. Their citizens are among the happiest in the world. The nexus between health and other sectors of human development cannot be neglected. We cannot move to a healthy nation if our leaders continue to neglect the health sector as depicted by the Aso Rock Clinic, its x-ray machine is not functioning. If the State House Clinic is like this, you can guess rightly how others in the hinterland will be. If we revamp our health sector it will curb the migration of Nigerians to other countries. Likewise, if we revamp our ailing education sector, many parents will desire their children to attain their primary, secondary and tertiary

education in Nigeria, rather than sending their children abroad for their schooling. The agriculture sector should be revamped from the rudimentary stage to mechanized farming so that it would create employment opportunities and income generation to our unemployed youths who are desperate to travel abroad. The demerits of leaving the country far outweigh the merits. For example, it was reported in the recent history of Nigeria that no fewer than ten thousand Nigerians were stranded in Morocco and Algeria following their inability to cross over to Europe, especially Spain. The figure excludes those that died as a result of starvation or in the hands of wild animals in the desert. Moreso, the survivors are often subjected to, in these countries of their destination with harsh treatment. North, South, East and West, home remain the best place to be. The returnees from abroad should, therefore, develop the mindset to stay and adapt to the condition at home.

The Federal Government should provide minimal economic and social safety nets for the Nigerian citizenry. The Nigerian government should make concrete efforts to invest in physical and social infrastructure, generate equitable dividends of democracy to all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. This will make Nigerians not to contemplate leaving the country. This will make Nigeria, not to lose her legion of its experts and educated elite to other lands.

### **Conclusion**

It is shameful that more than eighteen years into democratic dispensation things are so bad in the country that Nigerians are desperate to abandon their fatherland in search of better living conditions even in some less endowed countries. What is apparent is that Nigerian youths have lost faith in the capacity of their government to create an enabling environment for worthwhile engagement in productive activities, because the state of the economy is hopeless, the security situation of Nigeria is unbearable for the people to live a peaceful life. Hence many of the youths become restive as a result of poverty and hardship caused by ethnic politics, corruption, and lopsidedness. This makes many of the youths to migrate to other countries to earn high-income from advanced nations and those who oppose the high handed authoritarians regimes end up as political asylum abroad. Thus, the study tries to examine how to curb the migration of Nigerians to other countries.

### **Recommendations**

At the end of this study, the following recommendations were made to curb the mass migration of Nigerians to other countries, which include:

- The Federal Government should revamp the social and physical infrastructure; so that the economy can be reactivated to eradicate poverty and hardship. This will curb the migration of Nigerians to other countries.
- The Federal Government should revamp the failing health sector so that Nigerians would stop migrating to other advanced countries for medical tourism. Moreover, the Federal Government should also enhance the salaries of medical practitioners in Nigeria to curb brain drain of our medical practitioners.
- The Federal Government should also renovate our failing educational system, from primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, to enhance the educational standard in Nigeria so that parents would consider the education of their children in Nigeria.
- The Federal Government should endeavor to provide good security network in Nigeria, so that life and properties can be protected across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. So that Nigerian youths would not be desperate to migrate in more peaceful and stable countries in the world.
- The Federal Government should be led by a leader that is Pan-Nigeria and a detribalized person. A president that would form a government of National Unity and reflecting the federal character as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. A leader that would give every ethnic group a sense of belonging and not lopsidedness, so that ethnic agitations and people on political asylum would drastically reduce.
- The Federal Government should diversify the economy of Nigeria

into other real sectors, like agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and mining, etc, to reduce the over-dependence on crude oil, so that employment opportunities and income generation should increase rapidly to curb migrations of Nigerians to other countries.

- The Federal Government should also restructure the federal system from a unitary system to a true federal system that would open resource control fronts in the 36 states of the federation; for states and regions to develop their God-given resources and pay royalties and taxes to the Federal Government at the Centre. This would also curb the overdependence of the 36 States on Niger Delta crude oil money and increase space for regional and state development, thereby reducing the quest for Nigerians to migrate to other countries in search for jobs in advance economies and nations.

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