

## Journeying to the Wonderland by African Migrants: Socioeconomic Deprivation as Drivers

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### Abstract

*Migration has been a part of human activities from time immemorial. This has increased with globalization. Despite the abundant human and natural resources in Africa, the continent is characterized by widespread poverty, inequality and a general dearth of economic opportunities. Therefore, productive resources flow from places where they are abundant to others where opportunities abound. This paper therefore examined the dynamics of migration with respect to survival and economic opportunities in Africa. The issue of migration is a mix of good and bad outcomes. The paper identified remittances, human capital development and trade as the positive aspects of migration in Africa. However, xenophobia and brain drain among others are the attendant problems of migration. Sometimes migrants are at the receiving end of ill-feelings in times of economic recessions as they are accused of taking up the already insufficient jobs from the citizens of such countries. In extreme cases, migrants are labelled as international carriers of diseases and crime perpetrators as is the case in some countries. Therefore, migration is a phenomenon with economic, health and educational dimensions. The paper recommends investments in human capital development and creation of economic opportunities through the promotion of enabling business environment in the continent.*

**Keywords:** *Africa, Drivers, Economic Opportunities, Migration, Poverty, Wellbeing.*

### Introduction

*I pack my bags, I am leaving town,*

*I bought one way ticket, I aint coming back,*

*.....I am heading for the city and that's my home*

*I gat no money, just hopes and dreams,*

*.....I'm gonna find my destiny,*

*I heard about life, life in the city,*

*so that's where all dreams come true.*

Timi Dakolo (2015).

The above is part of the lyrics of a hit song by a popular Nigerian singer. This explains the wide-held belief on positive side of migration in developing countries. The attendant effect of migration on wellbeing and economic development of both the origin and destination has received considerable attention in literature. Currently, about 25 percent of the world's population lives outside their countries of origin. Another 16.7 million people were refugees as at 2013 while the number of internally displaced persons has increased to 33.3 million from 26.4 million in 2011 (IOM, 2014). Approximately one in seven people today are migrants. An estimated 232 million people (3.2 percent of global population) are international migrants and 740 million are internal migrants (IFRC, 2012; IOM, 2014; ILO, 2018). This increasing rate of migration has resulted in racial and ethnic diversity of societies. There are significant in the conditions in other countries in terms of travelling requirements. Therefore, the preferred migrants' destination is based on the available

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opportunities or social connections like marriage. Many people also migrate because they are left with no choice owing to political, economic and environmental issues (Ratha *et al.*, 2011; IOM, 2013).

Migration can be classified based on circumstances (forced and voluntary), location (rural and urban) or objectives (socioeconomic or sociopolitical). Socioeconomic migration covers the movement of people from one place to another in search of economic opportunities such as employment, business opportunities, education etc. Sociopolitical migration refers to the migration induced by social and political problems such as uprisings, human right violations, natural disasters etc. The forced migrants are also referred to as refugees and their reason for migrating is survival i.e avoiding imminent threat to their physical well-being obtainable in their homes (IOM, 2013; Kuhnt, 2019). Migrations that are induced by violence or armed conflicts are also referred to as man-made migration. Meanwhile, natural migration is caused by adverse weather conditions (flood, drought etc.) and famine. The consequences of disasters materialise through sustained rise in migration of people even after the crisis has ended (Rwamatwara, 2005). Migration is a conspicuous outcome of poverty and social disturbance and Africa is worst-hit. Migration is poverty-driven and poverty-limited. This is because poverty remains a motivation on one side and a constraint on the other hand for migration. However, migration has positive externalities in the area of market provision, remittances and transfer of technology consequently inducing development.

### *Migration in Africa*

The number of Africans immigrants in diaspora has been growing consistently in the last 30 years. This has been linked to the dearth of opportunities, poverty and instability that characterize the African economic landscape. There exists a link between industrialisation and migration. This is in line with the theories of Lewis (1954) and Ranis and Fei (1961) who explained the flow of human resources from agriculture to the modern sector. Agriculture employs about 60 percent of the African labour force and accounts for about 28 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (AGRA, 2014). Urbanisation on the other hand is increasing because of the fast growing cities and industries. Therefore, for the purpose of economic advancement people migrate from places with fewer opportunities to cities where they perceive opportunities abound. This places a stress on the already inadequate infrastructure in cities. In addition, crime rates and unemployment will begin to increase because of population explosion.

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced unprecedented level of migration of skilled professionals in the last few decades. This is closely linked to the widespread poverty, inequality and un- and underemployment in the continent. Meanwhile the continent is endowed with vast resources ranging from agricultural to mineral resources. However, Africa accounts for the bulk of the world's chronic poor. The continent has not fared well with respect to human development indicators and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In terms of Purchasing-Power Parity (PPP), Africa has the lowest income in the world with an estimated GDP per capita of US\$2,022 by 2010, which is slightly less than 70 percent of the obtainable in South Asia (World Bank, 2011). The literacy levels and health indices remain abysmally poor. Access to education, health and infrastructure remain inadequate thereby compromising the welfare of the vulnerable poor (Adepoju, 2008).

Uncertainty remains a serious constraining factor in migration discourse. This is because the outcome can either be good or bad. Previous resources and even lives can be lost to migration or opportunities might be harnessed towards the improvement of wellbeing. In fact, over 40, 000 migrants have died in transit since 2000 (IOM, 2014). Africa accounts for the greatest number of migrants who lost their lives in the migration process. About 27 percent of migrants who lost their lives are from Sub-Saharan Africa while 19 percent and 13 percent are from Middle East and North Africa and the Horn of Africa respectively (IOM, 2014). Again, sectoral-uncertainty inherent in African agriculture has necessitated migration of farmers and farm-labour from rural to urban areas in search of wage labour. This has gone beyond rural-urban dimensions as it spreads across borders. The opening up of South Africa in 1994, witnessed the influx of migrants from various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, Zaire, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Uganda (Adepoju, 2008). Broadly, African countries have many qualified university graduates struggling for very little spaces in formal employment.

The number of people born in Africa in the 2000s living in countries other than where they were born is around 20 million (World Bank, 2011). This is about 2.5 percent of the home population (Lucas, 2013). Within Africa, borders are quite porous owing to resource constraint and the attempt to compartmentalize migration into internal and international is artificial. The proximity of African countries to the developed world is one of the drivers of migration. The strait of Gibraltar separates Spain from Morocco by less than 8 miles and Lampedusa, Italy is just 70 miles off the coast of Tunisia (Lucas, 2013). This is the reason Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia account for 95 percent of the North Africans in OECD, Europe. Similarly, Cape town is less than 5000 flight-miles away from Athens (the nearest OECD capital), seven thousand miles from Sydney and Eight thousand miles from New York (Lucas, 2013; Reitano *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, this explains why Africa has many migrants. Meanwhile, outward migration is projected to increase significantly in the nearest future in Africa because of the rising youth population.

There is a relationship between violence and poverty in Africa. In fact, 40 percent of all wars in the last decade were fought in Africa (Witteler-Stiepelmann, 2009). Again, violence leads to increasing levels of forced migration. For instance, the activities of Boko Haram (a terrorist group) in Nigeria have resulted in forced migrations of people to neighbouring countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Africa has the highest number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world accounting for 20 percent of the world refugee population (Croll, 2009). Africa has a wide range of migration-inducing features—contract workers, labour migrants, skilled professionals, refugees and IDPs flowing through a continuum of internal, intraregional and international circulation (Adepoju, 2008).

#### *The Challenge of Brain Drain in Africa*

The issue of brain drain in Africa is a developmental challenge. The educational sector is bedeviled by severe infrastructure deficits, government neglect and corruption that make the sector unattractive. Therefore, Africa's best brains through the schools of Europe, America and Asia for functional education. They get trained abroad and some stay back for dearth of opportunities in their origin. Sometimes, productive resources flow from Africa to the developed world owing opportunities that abound there. Sadly, skilled workers are in a continuous one-way movement to the developed countries (Mateus *et al.*, 2014). In fact, one out of every eight Africans with a university education lived in a country in the OECD (Ratha *et al.*, 2011). Again, it is estimated that one-third of the most qualified Africans live outside their country of origin, mainly in Europe and North America (Sako, 2002). Immigrants from developing countries accounted for 40 percent of labour force growth in advanced economies between 1980 and 2010 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012; OECD *et al.*, 2019). Literature is inconclusive on the effect of brain drain on the African economy. Earlier studies have concentrated on the issue of labour flow from one direction—skill acquisition. While the migrant labour have access to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and work environment, their counterparts in Africa find it lacking. According to Easterly and Nyarko (2008) the brain drain in Africa is exaggerated as it involve some gains. The argument on whether migration in Africa has resulted in brain drain or brain gain is premised on the ingredients of economic development of our time. The inclusive economic growth desired in Africa requires human capital which is abundant but limiting in availability (Hoppli, 2014). Meanwhile, available data shows clear disparities among countries of migrants who return home to contribute to economic development. For instance, 80 percent of Ugandans and Tanzanians who obtained their PhD in US institutions return home as against 34 percent in Ghana and Nigeria (Easterly and Nyarko, 2008).

#### *The Rising Wave of Xenophobia*

One of the emerging problems in the African migration discuss is Xenophobia. Xenophobia describes attitudes, prejudices and behaviours that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreign to the community, society or national identity (ILO *et al.*, 2001). Xenophobia refers to the strife and uprisings resulting from the host (citizens) perceiving foreigners had taken up most of the opportunities available in their country (Adepoju, 2008). This has led to the loss of human lives and livelihoods in destination countries. For instance, about 60 lives were lost and thousands of people displaced in South Africa in 2008 because of attacks on foreigners by South Africans (Oluyomi *et al.*, 2014). The people affected in the latest attacks (2015) are still licking their wounds. In fact, recent

crisis in some countries like Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda and even Israel and Palestine have colourations of xenophobia and racism (Oluyomi *et al.*, 2014). This further compounds the problems of migrants in terms of harnessing business opportunities. This is because no business within moral perpendicularity will thrive in violent environments. Meanwhile, globalization has necessitated increased migration and this may not end soon. Irregular or unauthorised migrants are particularly vulnerable to racist and xenophobic hostility whether in countries of transit or destination (ILO *et al.*, 2001). Meanwhile, one in every five migrants is an irregular migrant (IOM, 2014; United Nations, 2019). The tensions and manifestations of Xenophobia are products of severe economic inequalities and marginalisation of persons from access to basic economic and social inclusion. Migrants are sometimes scapegoated as carriers of disease e.g HIV/AIDS, Ebola etc. and criminals (Adepoju, 2008).

### *Economic Importance of Migration in Africa*

The tale of migration in Africa is mixed-with good and bad outcomes. Therefore, it follows that migration of people in search of “greener pastures” is not entirely bad. The following are the prospects of migration in Africa:

#### *Education*

The world is a global village with significant reductions in borders owing to technological advancements. The positive externality of giving an African, 21<sup>st</sup> century education in order to return to home countries and contribute to economic development is overwhelming. Therefore, education tourism becomes a plus for Africa only if the citizens contribute to the development of their origin. People migrate year in year out to receive functional education abroad (ILO, 2018). The few people that manage to return contribute to nation building. If migration can be harnessed, Africa can be positioned for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economic growth. This involves quality manpower and use of efficient and improved technology.

#### *Remittances*

Remittances remain a very important source of external resource flow. This is especially true for developing countries where remittances exceed Official Development Assistance (ODA) and are more stable than Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) (Ratha *et al.*, 2014). Remittances cover more than 20 percent of imports in Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria. Remittance has proved effective in the process of rescuing families from the grip of poverty. This is through the increased access to productive resources as a result of funds at the disposal of the families. Remittances are currently used to pay for health, education and considerable investments in Agricultural production among receiving households (Watkins and Quattri, 2014). In 2013, remittances to Africa were valued at US\$ 32billion accounting for 2 percent of the GDP and it is projected to increase to US\$41 billion in 2016. However, sending money to Africa is expensive as it costs between 5 and 15 percent of the amount sent (Ratha *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, Africa loses between US\$1.4 billion and US\$2.3 billion annually as a result of high remittance charges (Watkins and Quattri, 2014). It is difficult to make inferences based on available remittance data alone. However, it is obvious that remittance is very important in the achievement of poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth in Africa (Lambrianidou, 2014). In fact, remittances are larger than foreign exchange reserves in Sudan (208 percent) and Egypt (165 percent). Nigeria accounts for 68 percent of total transfers to Africa with US\$20 billion in 2012 (World Bank, 2013). Four countries received remittance of at least US\$1 billion-Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, and Sudan (Ratha *et al.*, 2011). Remittances constitute more than 5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in nine African countries and as high as 25 percent and 20 percent for Lesotho and Liberia respectively (Ratha *et al.*, 2013, Watkins and Quattri, 2014). There are marked regional differences in remittance flows. Remittances to countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and East Asia and Pacific regions are higher than the average for developing countries (Gupta *et al.*, 2007). According to available data, the top recipients of officially recorded remittances for 2013 are India (US\$ 71 billion), China (US\$ 60 billion), the Philippines (US\$26 billion), Mexico (US\$ 22 billion), Nigeria (US\$ 21 billion) and Egypt (US\$ 20 billion) (Ratha *et al.*, 2014). This shows that two African countries are among the top 6 recipients of remittances globally.

## Trade

The literature is inconclusive on the effect of migration on trade between two countries (Parsons, 2012). Some earlier works reported causal relationship between migrate and trade (Ghoneim and El-Deken, 2011; Alonso, 2011; Genc, 2014). However, another school of thought believes that the relationship between migration and trade is complex and available data are ambiguous (Parsons, 2012). They also stated that the relationship between trade and migration may not be particularly linear. Migrants may both create and divert trade (Parsons, 2012). Meanwhile, empirical evidence suggesting that bilateral migration affects international trade flows abound (Fagiolo and Mastroiello, 2013). This is because migrants may induce imports of goods produced in their country of origin (bilateral consumption-preference effect) or reduce import transaction cost based on their familiarity with both home and host-country laws, habits, and regulations (bilateral information effect) (Ghoneim and El-Deken, 2011; Fagiolo and Mastroiello, 2013; Orefice, 2013). In fact, one additional migrant creates about US\$2800 in additional exports for his country annually in Africa (Ehrhart *et al.*, 2012). Trade between any two countries may be enhanced by the activities of immigrants present in either country or coming from the other one (Fagiolo and Mastroiello, 2013). Migration has a more substantial positive effect on the imports of the host country than on exports. Foad (2010) cited in Ghoneim and El-Deken, (2011) reported that there is a level of migration that can stimulate significant changes in trade. Therefore, it follows that if migration is below that level, trade might not be profitable until a certain stock of migrants is available in the receiving countries. A 10 percent increase in the stock of immigrants can boost trade by an estimated 1.5percent (Genc, 2014).

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Migration of people from and within Africa cannot be ignored. This is because of the realities of such movements in terms of challenges and opportunities available to migrants and their households. The prospects of migration include remittances, trade, transfer of technology and human capital development. However, Africa and African migrants face various challenges including Xenophobia, brain drain and economic uncertainties. Despite the challenges, migrants still manage to assist their households through remittances to reduce poverty and unemployment. This is because remittance-receiving households gain more access to productive resources (capital and equipment) for economic activities. Therefore, migration presents a trade-off because the outcome is neither good nor bad-it is good and bad.

The challenges inherent in the migration of Africans in search of opportunities have been discussed in this paper. Based on the findings of this paper, the following are recommended:

- There is the need for government to increase and monitor investments in human capital development in Africa.
- The creation of employment opportunities through the promotion of enabling business environment (infrastructure and policies) to encourage potential migrants to stay back and build their country should be prioritised.
- There is the need for attitudinal change among citizens of destination countries such that migrants are integrated into the societies without the fear of Xenophobia and discriminations.

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