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MIGRATION: ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rate of migration in south east Nigeria is one of the highest in the country and is fueled by population growth and the adverse economic and political situation in the country. Those who migrate are often the youths leading to high school drop-out, loss of labor and averagely literate groups from rural communities. This leads to increased pressure on infrastructural facilities like housing, water supply etc; poverty and the growth of urban slums. The family structure is gradually weakening as a result of migration; young men and women are exposed to societal vagaries from which they may not be recover in adulthood; the family security which children enjoyed by virtue of the presence of both parents is being lost.

Key Words: Family, youth, rural-urban, migration, poverty

Introduction

It has become a thing of pride to have at least one member of the household living outside the shores of the country in Nigeria. The picture that readily comes to mind is that of prosperity and unlimited opportunities for other members of the household or extended family to benefit from the success of the first person. This would appear logical given that the ‘member abroad’ would send some foreign currency home, eventually get established and be able to give information that could help others access the same opportunity. The expectation is even more logical if the individual happens to be in a developed country in Europe or in the United States of America because such countries offer a higher standard of living and a better quality of life for all cadres in the society. Such an environment and expectations of life are not readily accessed by all in Nigeria, hence the driving force to see a ‘better life’, spread the joy and share the goodies.

But how does it start? And from where does it start? The inequality of the society gives credence to the fact that for many, migration is the window through which they can improve their income, have educational opportunities and improve the prospects of their future generation. As such people move both within the country and across international borders with the expectation that they will have access to better opportunities in the destination location in order to benefit themselves, their immediate families and communities. The movement from one part of a country to another for example from a hamlet to a village and later from a village to a town is the usually the start and the characteristic patten of migrating. One moves to a place considered to be better or to have more opportunities. Several push and pull factors are responsible for this but some factors could be peculiar to the individual e.g. cultural stigmatization.

In Nigeria, rural-urban migration is a feature of many regions. The choice of destination depends on several factors but is significantly determined by the extent of the network which exists there. For this reason, rural areas are abandoned for a 'better' life in the city. This movement has dual perspectives: the loss of human resource on one hand and the benefit in form of remittances on the other. The focus in the short run on the remittance benefits makes migration desirable but the long term impact on the family, the society and the individual at large could have negative consequences.

This paper makes a critical assessment of the causes of migration and its consequences in the south east region primarily because the rate of migration is known to be highest. The objectives therefore are:

- To profile the cause of rural urban migration
- To examine the benefits to the migrant family and community or departure
- To examine the consequences on the social structure particularly the family
- To raise policy issues from the findings.

According to Nwajiuba (2011, p.4) most migration studies, especially in less developed countries are limited by being anecdotal. Lack of quantitative data on migration especially in less developed countries is well known. There is hardly any data on the numbers, trends and characteristics of migrants abroad. Statistics of flows of investments, remittances, support of charitable work, voluntary humanitarian and development agencies are often lacking. Hence, the source of information for this work is desk research, available data from secondary sources and cross-sectional studies. This paper as such is also an attempt at bringing empirical information together for future reference.

Causes of Migration in South East Nigeria

South-East Nigeria refers to the Southern Nigeria that lies east of the Niger River and a little south of the Benue River. Its land area is 8.5 percent but is occupied by about 25 percent of Nigeria's population. This could be lower when arable land available for farming alone is considered. In terms of vegetation, the region is mainly rainforest with a fringe of derived savannah in the north and mangrove swamp forest in the south bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Ecological conditions of the east are conducive for an impressive diversity of tropical crops. These include fruit and plantation crops, legumes, root crops, cereals and vegetables. The region contributes 68.77 percent of the total palm oil production in Nigeria and 12.33 percent of cocoa production. The region produces a wide range of animal food including fresh water and sea fish, sheep, goats, pigs cattle, poultry and bush meat (wildlife).

The region has a larger share of the Niger Delta, the world's third largest wetland, covering a vast coastal plain estimated at 70,000 square kilometers. This delta area has a highly extensive freshwater swamp forest characterized by a high concentration of biological diversity and endowed with vast natural resources particularly hydrocarbon deposits like oil and gas (Okorie, 2002, p.34). Presently, exploitation of oil resources is going on in all the states of the region except Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi States. The region also has an impressive array of over forty ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups include the Igbo, Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio, Annang and Ikwerre.

In the 1960s, the eastern region had high economic growth rates. The economy was purely agrarian, sustained by one major export tree crop- the oil palm (*Elaeis guinensis*). The region was also reasonably self-sufficient in such food crops as cassava, yam, cocoyam, maize, various vegetables, fruits and plantation crops. Cassava (*Manihot spp.*), an important food crop,

was produced in such large quantities that one year's harvest usually overlapped into the following years. Rural households took pride in ever-growing size of barns consisting of several varieties of yams. Production of such fruit trees as oranges (*Citrus spp.*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), pear (*Dacryodis edulis*), coconut (*cocus nucifera*) and cashew (*Anarcadium occidentale*) was so successful that marketing was a problem. Aggressive marketing including wholesale auction of entire trees with their fruits had to be adopted to check spoilage (Okorie, 2002, p.36).

In recent times, the bulk of the food needs in the region is met from outside. Major staple foods like rice, yam, and beans as well as beef, onion, tomatoes, pepper and groundnuts come from the northern states while a considerable quantity of cassava flour (garri) comes from the mid-west states. The contribution of the eastern region to food production in Nigeria has become marginal.

A historical perspective of the region shows that the region lost over a million people to starvation during the Nigeria-Biafra war in the late 1960s. The region suffered mass starvation in the 1960s because it was under an embargo that prevented all forms of food imports (OKORIE, 2002). The region appears not to have recovered from this. Other considerations for the poor food situation stem from poverty, traditional farming systems, the relatively small land and higher population densities relative to the rest of Nigeria, socio-cultural factors, political factors and macro-economic factors. These have resulted in low investment levels and productivity of the people. According to Nwajiuba (2011, p.8) Rapid rural population in a hitherto predominantly rainfed, low technology, agrarian area leads to a low level poverty stricken life. The agricultural sector consequently holds no attraction, especially for the youths. Massive rural-urban migration results from this.

The production unit is the household. Households defined as farming households also engage in off-farm activities, and these activities provide most of the household cash income. Women in particular devote time to the sale of the surplus produce and petty trading. Off-farm employment plays a more important part nearer the larger towns than in more remote areas, where less non-agricultural employment opportunities exist. The labor potential of the rural population exceeds the land carrying capacity. Available farm labor amounts to about 1.4 man-days per hectare of potentially cultivable land. This considerable over-supply of labor is no doubt a major cause of the increasing rural-urban migration particularly on the part of the young and ablest segment of the population. The farm family uses less than 50% of its labor potential of 960 man-days (Akinsanmi, 2005, p. 22).

The rate of migration in the region is one of the highest in the country and is fueled by population growth and the adverse economic and political situation in the country. This has led to a continued removal of potential human resource from the primary production sector of Agriculture to other areas such as “ spare parts trading” in urban areas across the nation. In the southeast of Nigeria only about 22% of the people are rural residents. There is a very high degree of rural-urban migration with 78% of indigenes residing outside their homes. About 32% reside within the southeast region but not in their home communities and 14% reside in locations within Nigeria but outside the south east (Nwajiuba, 2011, p. 10)

Adverse economic conditions refer to a state where unemployment and under employment create despondence in the society. Typically in most rural areas, most farm families have excess labor during the peak seasons; those areas located in peri-urban zones may have access to off farm income opportunities which are viable. Those which are not usually get involved in one form of off-farm/household activity which may not be economically viable. The

implication is that families are unable to meet their basic needs for a minimum standard of living most of the time. This leads to poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition and general poor health status. In extreme cases despondence and hopelessness may arise and to prevent or forestall other dire consequences, the quest to search out a better living elsewhere is succumbed to.

The poor state of the economy also limits the extent of infrastructural development in the area; these are characterized by poor roads, poor water supply, poor health facilities etc. On the other hand, most towns and cities have a better share of such facilities and better job opportunities. As such inequality in the availability of resources and infrastructures are push and pull factors for the youths. This coupled with increasing population heighten food insecurity and poverty because food supply and employment opportunities will not match the increasing demand. Population growth leads to an increased pressure on existing social infrastructures and poverty and food insecurity in the poor areas. The reflections of poverty in the rural areas include under employment of labor and over use of resources particularly land. This enforces a vicious cycle of low income-low productivity-low resources which pushes individuals or whole families to migrate.

The Consequences of Rural Urban Migration

Agriculture

The combination of poverty, environmental degradation and unemployment has led to the desertion of agriculture leading to increased cost of production and labor scarcity. The farming population is aged and often unable to take advantage of new or improved technology or labor saving devices. Shifting cultivation was practiced in the past to enhance soil regeneration but increased pressure led to its reduction and it eventually led to soil mining, not that the youths are

not there the state of the soil does not encourage increased productivity. Rather farmers tend to shift to fringe forests that still exist in order to provide for themselves. Often this brings the farming communities with other migrant farmers which sometimes lead to conflicts. Livestock production is generally low in the area and migration only serves to reduce it further. However, the economic potentials and the relative ease of production compared with cropping are making it more attractive to the aged and women who are left behind.

Rural Communities

The family structure is very traditional in the area so migrants maintain close links with their nuclear and extended families. These links are maintained through cash and kind remittances to their families, social or kinsmen associations in the cities through which political and economic development in their home communities are monitored. Also through such associations funds are raised for development objectives in their villages. Such development objectives include building town halls provision of water and 'political' pressure on more successful indigenes to bring development to the villages. Another evidence of such development is the building of foreign styled houses in the villages even though the owners are not there to live in them. The presence of such houses further motivates the youths to migrate because it indirectly opens them up to economic and environmental circumstances abroad. Building such structures often require deforestation which further reduces land area for food production and exposes opened up areas to erosion.

Urban Areas

Urban centres such as Owerri, Aba, Onitsha, Lagos, Ibadan are recipients of migrants from rural areas. Their arrival at such cities on one hand leads to cheap labor on the other hand it heightens unemployment in the cities. It also puts pressure on existing infrastructural facilities making them more expensive to maintain. It eventually leads to rapid slum development because most of those who move there are ill prepared to take proper jobs in cities. They end up taking low paying jobs, quite a number end up as social miscreants thereby raising crime rates in those cities. Most of these immigrants make up the urban poor who experience ill health, malnutrition and a low quality of life. The uncontrolled influx of immigrants to major cities makes planning for a sustainable development of such places extremely frustrating. As such old settlements are become crowded, while new formation emerge at the urban periphery without preliminary design and planning, and without infrastructure. These movements of person resulted in enormous pressure that often results in the proliferation of substandard buildings. This impact negatively on the environment and quality of life, with far reaching consequences that may affect health, crime and the security of migrants e.g. overcrowding, dirty and unsanitary environment and frequent episodes of infections and disease. On the other hand, some tend to bring new skills, funds, technology, productivity, and attitude; such people are able to set up micro and small business from which they are able to support themselves and eventually they grow and expand it to cater for other family members. This could aid the growth of the industry and economy in recipient cities but the rate of rural–urban migration in Nigeria actually exceeds the rate of urban job creation; both industry and urban economic services are ineffective and inefficient at absorbing labor.

Family Structure

The family structure is such that nuclear and extended family members live close. Often it is the young people, particularly men between the ages of 10-35 years of age who make the decision to seek their fortune in the cities. Within this age bracket would be those who are young and inexperienced; the young, matured and inexperienced and those that are matured, married and experienced. Quite a number would have concluded the senior secondary school level of education while most are school drop outs. The first impact of migration in this case is that the family unit separates geographically and begins to function differently; some household types get eroded.

When the young and inexperienced leave for cities, it is with the hope that they would either live with a relative who is relatively established and who would train him in a trade or send him through school for a reasonable length of time. However, socio-economic conditions in the cities hardly make this a smooth curve which often eventually put strains on family relationships. Some of those young boys really get maltreated that they run away right onto the streets where they learn dubious ways of survival until they can find their ways back 'home'. As such their hopes and expectations either never materialize or take longer than expected. While surviving, they kept their earnings to themselves and if in contact with the village money could be sent for specific purposes which exclude feeding.

The young, matured but inexperienced arrive the cities with a strong attitude to survive, often they are sent to towns and cities as apprentices with established relatives. Once on the training he has to apply his wits in order to earn some income for himself. It is expected that after a couple of years he would have learnt the trade and his master would help him get established in the market place in the same trade. Often some masters cheat and keep the boys longer than

expected or accuse them of a crime so that they would be sent away just before their freedom; however because of the level of maturity of such individuals, they are able to maintain a level of independence by living apart from their boss often in slums. Non-familial household structures develop in such places because people live together and make contributions towards their living. In the real sense however, there may be no obligations or caring as the house in that case is just a place to come back to for the night. The reproductive behaviors in such environments are unhealthy and breeds STDs. These young people in the process of trying to get established are often unable to send money home regularly for many years. Sometimes they live under the burden of not being available to care for aged parents and to support them financially.

The young, matured and married leave their wives and children behind; they may not even be able to care for them effectively for many years. The case of absentee fathers is increasing and women have to shoulder the burden of caring for the family. Such women get more involved in informal activities in order get additional income to the remittances received so that family needs can be met. The responses of women on the impact of such activities include:

Most women often feel free to use their own income as the need arose but they used the remittance from their husbands for specific or designated purposes. This implies that the roles and decision making of the woman is strengthened by the absence of the man. The allocation of resources also changes for example more external labor may be obtained to work on the farm during the farming season so that the woman can focus on her garden and other off farm income activities. The woman often may have to care for her mother, mother in law and attend to some extended family issues in her husband's absence. The woman and children may be able to join the man after many years or may have to leave part of the children back in the village while she joins the man. In which case two home must be maintained by them; thee education and training

are left with the grandparents. The socialization process in the family also changes as soon as it becomes a quasi single parent home; the values and culture are not quit easily passed on. The many roles that the woman has to play does not leave room for adequate child care and nurture; alternative help such as village schools or involvement of older children (some of whom need attention).

Conclusion

Migration is clearly a strategy for economic emancipation. Young people leave in order to get established and pave way for other family members in the cities. This has far reaching consequences on the family, agriculture, rural communities and urban centers. The tide will continue for as long as disparities exist in between the rural and urban centers. An effective intervention can be arrived based on a proper understanding of the development of the problem and the strategies that would improve living standard in both places. This calls for a systems approach in studying the trend and then offering solutions to the people.

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