

SELECTED COUNTRIES STRATEGY FOR HARNESSING LABOUR MIGRATION OPPORTUNITIES: INSIGHTS FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Labour migration present challenges, and also opportunities for economic growth and development. In Nigeria however, there is no sufficient indication that the nation is fully harnessing this non-formal source of foreign exchange, despite its vast labour mobility coverage across the globe. The paper examine Nigeria's policy measures in harnessing labour migration opportunities, while providing insights into strategies adopted by selected countries. The New Economics of Migration (NEM) theory was adopted to explain casual variables. The qualitative content analysis of secondary data was applied. Findings revealed that Nigeria has viable policy blueprint on labour migration, but defective in pragmatic engagements for exploiting its inherent economic opportunities. Nigeria currently lacks concise data regarding its citizens abroad, as well as channels and precise worth of international remittances inflow, which constitutes the basis for effective diaspora engagement and quantifiable economic benefits. On the other hand, countries under review have demonstrated functional strategies for exploiting the benefits inherent in labour migration evidenced in comprehensive record keeping and concrete bilateral agreements to guarantee the welfare and prosperity of citizens abroad. Others are initiatives that attract social capital for development funding, tackling poverty and reintegrating skilled diaspora in critical sectors of science and technology, as well as investment, and maximization of international remittances. The paper recommended that the Nigerian state needs economic revival, and should reengineer its labour migration strategies to incorporate the required political will for profitable engagements. In order to achieve this, Nigeria has to address its internal contradictions such as corruption, foreign exchange crisis, weak and defective institutions, insecurity, and the issue of ease of doing business.

Key Words: Labour migration, diaspora potentials, institutions, growth and development

Introduction

Contemporary international migration can be traced to human dynamic capability to aspire and survive amidst environmental threats and opportunities. The crudity of life infused in humans the ingenious instinct to generate means and techniques of adaptation, which also include mass movement and resettlement to more tolerable locations with less exposure to existential confrontations (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). In Africa, earlier migration experience climaxed with the emergence of slave trade dating back to the 19c., characterized by forced movement of Africans to Europe and the Caribbean to work in plantations. This was followed by the colonial era, spurred by industrial revolution of Europe; an epoch of massive exploitation of the continent, culminating in the incorporation of the African economies into the international capitalist

system in a competitive disadvantage (Rodney, 1972). Bedeviled by post-colonial contradictions; poor governance, economic dislocation, insecurity, political and social crises, conflict and wars, Africans are once again faced with the dilemma of mass exodus either as internally displaced, refugees, irregular migrants or as asylum seekers (Adepoju, 1991).

In the contemporary era, human movement have also been associated with factors such as; globalization, increase in global productivity, and higher network of interconnectivity among nations aided by innovative technology in communication (Sikdar, 2002). As reported by ILO (2004), more than a third of African migrants head for the industrialized North, including movements to high-performing economies like Saudi Arabia, Brunei, United Arab Emirates, South Korea, and Singapore.

Labour migration has been a contentious issue among development experts as perspectives varies regarding the accrued benefit and loss. The movement of people across borders, in search for job opportunities especially from less developed to richer countries has a substantial impact in several dimensions. First, it affects the migrants themselves by allowing them to achieve higher income, as a result of higher productivity in the destination country, not insulating the risk involved. Second, it affects the destination country through the impact on labor markets, productivity, innovation, demographic structure, fiscal balance, and criminality. Thirdly, it also impact on the countries of origin; it has shown to create a flow of remittances and increased international connections in the form of trade FDI, and technological transfers. It is also argued that labour migration has lead to loss of human capital, in what is referred to as brain-drain (Borjas, 2014).

The challenge of brain-drain arises with the persistent moving out by citizens who possess valued technical skills and expertise as well as professionals in various fields of endeavor (e.g. doctors, nurses, engineers, technologists, university lecturers, engineers, computer scientists, business managers, etc) to countries rather than their own, for better conditions of services (Dauda, 2018). Nigeria is faced with the problems of labour migration and brain-drain with attendant economic and development implications. It is however argued that, foreign remittance from the diaspora is much valued in stabilizing and growing the nation's economy, especially mitigating the challenge of unemployment, chronic poverty and development crisis. It is also argued that skilled and semi-skilled Nigerian migrants has proved helpful in mitigating against the nation's crime rate and other criminal activities as youths are gainfully engaged; taking up skilled and semi-skilled jobs abroad to achieve their dreams, while providing for their families back home (IOM, 2016).

Faced with the opportunities and threats of international labour migration, countries with dynamic capabilities, through deliberate institutional framework and political will, attempt to harness the inherent benefits that abound. This research therefore attempt to examine Nigeria labour migration policy and the extent of implementation. It also review some selected countries labour migration exploitation strategy, and how Nigeria can possibly consider some of these viable approaches in the quest to benefitting from labour migration.

Conceptual Discourse

Labor Migration and National Development

According to International Organization for Migration (2019), migration is the movement of person or group of persons, either across international border or within a state, either on temporary or permanent basis. It can also be referred to as people who in an effort to improve their lives, move from a temporary or permanent place of their birth and who do not necessarily enjoy the same right and entitlements available to non-migrant individual of that place. According to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2015), labour migration refers to the movement of people from one location to another in search for better economic opportunities. It implies movement of people from their place of origin to another destination in search of employment. The main actors in labour migration are migrant workers, who include all international migrants currently employed or unemployed and seeking employment in their present country of residence. The UNCPMW (2000), defines a migrant worker as a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a citizen.

The diaspora are people who have been spread or been dispersed from their homeland (Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). According to International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2008), diaspora are members of ethnic and national communities who have left but maintain links with their homeland. For the African Union (AU), "The African diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union (AU, 2005).

According to Streeten (1982), development in context of this discourse can be redefined as an attack on the chief evils of the world today such as malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, slums, unemployment and inequality. In other words, development must be measured in terms of jobs created, justice dispensed and poverty alleviated. While national development according to Imhonopi & Urim (2010) is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people namely, by providing social amenities like good education, power, housing, pipe-borne water and others. The components of national development include economic development and socio-cultural empowerment, and how these impact on human development. Without the development of human

capital, national development can be thwarted or defeated. In fact, human development is one basis for judging the effectiveness of the economic development component of national development. That with the increase in economic growth, families and individuals will likely increase expenditures with the increase in income. This increase can lead to greater human development (Ogboru, 2007).

Labour migration is argued to have a positive effect on poverty alleviation, in mitigating the shocks of unemployment and in job creation, as well as in closing the gaps of rapidly growing inequalities (Khadria (1999). Hunt (2008) explained background factor that propels immigration as income and financial circumstances, household contexts and motivations, health, social and political contexts, and educational challenges. In the view of Chand (2012), it is substantial difference in incomes between countries that constitutes the main driver of economic migration. As a consequence, many migrants experience a large increase in income when they move to richer economies. Ahituv and Kimhi (2002) further stated that market imperfections and household characteristics such as the human capital endowments influence decisions on labour allocation to income-generating activities such as migration. According to Pritchett (2018), the productivity level of a person might not be due to their own efforts or assets or choices, but the productivity of the place in which they utilize those assets, as moving from a low wage place to high wage place changes incomes by factor multiples (Adepoju 2009).

Labour migration is used by households as a livelihood diversification strategy to fight poverty and improve living standards. Households may use migrant remittances primarily to supplement income, or conversely, to invest in productive activities. The remittance from migrant workers creates variations in the household's sources of income and provides extra income for their recurrent expenses. Remittances do not only increase and stabilize household income, but also contribute to cash inflows into the reserves of any nation. However, despite the benefits, labour migration could translate into reduced labour supplies and human capital resources in the place of origin, particularly among agricultural households that depend on family labour for their production activities (De La Garza 2010; Sapkota, 2018).

In Nigeria, factors such as high levels of population growth, unemployment, poor governance, ethno-religious conflicts, poor economic conditions and poverty are the major drivers of mass movement of

people across and outside the country (Darkwah and Verter 2014). The existence of inequalities between rural and urban areas in Nigeria in terms of access to economic resources and development also promotes both internal and international migration (Ogunniyi, 2018). However, developing countries like Nigeria often suffer from deficits of trained workers, especially in sectors such as health and technology, as people tend to move to countries where they are attracted by better employment conditions and training opportunities (Azam and Gubert, 2006).

The National Policy on Labour Migration (NPLM)

The National Policy on Labour Migration (NPLM) in Nigeria 2014 addresses the following three broad objectives:

1. Promotion of good governance of labour migration;
2. Protection of migrant workers and promotion of their welfare and that of families left behind;
3. Optimization of the benefits of labour migration on development while mitigating its adverse impact.

Source: NPLAM - <https://publications.iom.int/books/national-policy-labour-migration-2014>

Theoretical Framework

The New Economics of Migration (NEM) theory came up in reaction to some of the assumptions of the neoclassical approach, which tends to narrow labour migration to the simple econometrics of demand and supply. The NEM approach considers diverse migration determinants by shifting the focus of migration research from individual independence to mutual interdependence (Stark, 1991). The main focus of this theory is that migration decisions is not made solely by isolated individual actors, or based on purely individual utility-maximizing calculations, but by a comprehensive set of factors which are shaped by conditions in the home country. One of such determinants is household response to income risk resulting from economic failures which impact on the labour market, credit market, or insurance market. That is, the decisions of migrants are influenced most often collectively by the households or families. It also argues that household strategy behind migration often aims at changing the source of income rather than maximize the income.

Argument regarding other influences to labour migration is captured in the cases of migration in the absence of wage differentials or the absence of migration in the presence of wage differentials, which does not imply economic irrationality but other variables related to relative deprivation (Massey, 1993). Thus the theory helps us to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of migration, as to why individuals of a particular community are potential migrants. The theory also argues that the poor are less inclined to migration compared to the rich due to the high costs of migration (IOM, 2003).

However, there is consensus in the fact that labour migration portends remarkable implications for the host countries political, economic and social life. Nigerians are leaving the country in droves in search of jobs, or to earn more pay than they earn in Nigeria. Some who appears to be gainfully employed by the Nigerian standard quit their jobs, while others sell off their asset to seek higher paid jobs abroad. This reinforces the argument that the most prominent factor propelling labour migration is remuneration and work conditions. It is this economic sense that governments, especially in developing economies, strive to develop workable strategy to turn the tide of migration by addressing economic issue and providing attractive job opportunities at home to reverse the trend of brain drain, while others devise strategies for exploiting the opportunities that abound in international labour migration.

Harnessing Labour Migration Opportunities: The Nigerian Experience

In Nigeria, international remittance currently account for the second-largest foreign exchange earner. Prior to 2003, remittance inflow into the country was under USD 2.0 billion; five years later, it had reached 10 times that amount. In 2017, Nigeria was ranked as the 5th largest remittance receiving developing country in the world, and the highest in Africa, with an estimate of 22 Billion US dollars (KNOMAD, 2017). The massive remittance index is generated from over 17 million Nigerians living in the diaspora, with millions of them residing in the Americas, particularly in the United States of America and Canada, while a significant number live in Europe with the United Kingdom as the destination of choice, others are in African states, Asia, Oceania, and the Middle East (ILO 2019). Remittances in 2019 amounted to 25 billion dollars, representing 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nigerians also make up high percentage of highly educated skilled labour worldwide and occupy important positions of influence in multinational

corporations, industries, and organizations worldwide (<https://nidcom.gov.ng>, 2021).

Efforts have been made in Nigeria to harness the opportunities of labour migration. One of the strategies is to ensure effective participation of the diaspora in economic and infrastructural development. Nigeria is a signatory to the African Union Diaspora Declaration at the Global African Diaspora Summit in 2012, which emphasized the need to engage the African diasporas at various levels. For proper regulation of labour migration and its attendant employment issues Nigeria ratified both the Migration for Employment Convention, 1949 (No. 97) of the ILO in 1960 and the International (UN) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990, in January 2009.

In 2001, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, the Federal Government established the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization (NIDO). NIDO was set up to serve as an umbrella diaspora organization of all Nigerians abroad and a vehicle through which Nigerians in the Diaspora can be galvanized to participate in national development processes. It currently has branches in five continents: Europe, Americas, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. NIDO blueprint also included the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) regulation of financial remittances and international money transfer through recent policies.

The Diaspora Bond is also one of the efforts to harness labour migration potentials. The Diaspora Bond is managed by the Debt Management Office, aimed to raise funds from Nigerians in the diaspora. The funds raised are directed to the objective of obtaining relatively cheap foreign exchange for financing capital projects, while also providing an opportunity for the Diaspora to participate in the development of Nigeria. Previous issues of the Bond, in 2013 and 2017 were fully subscribed, indicating a great interest by Nigerians in the diaspora in Nigerian investments, especially those backed with Government support. However, poor regulation of the bond subscription process has raised issues of ownership of the bond (Adepoju, 2009).

As part of the effort to provide an institutional framework for involving the diaspora in the affairs of the country, the government in 2003 established the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS), which had the responsibility of facilitating the engagement of the Diaspora in the development process at home. This effort has now been expanded with the establishment of the Nigerians in diaspora

Commission by the enactment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (Establishment) Act, 2017. The Commission is empowered by the Act to amongst other things, provide a direct link for Nigerians in diaspora to participate in the development of the nation. The establishment of the Nigerians in diaspora Commission has provided the platform in the coordination of Diaspora related activities, with aim of removing the obstacles to all diaspora related activities.

Nigeria is however criticized for its limited commitment in harnessing the huge potential that labour migration/diaspora presents. There is the challenge of credible real time data for planning and engaging issues relating to labour migration and the diaspora in the country. Availability of reliable and timely labour statistics for research and information is crucial in accounting for residents and migrants in a given country. Migrants are often poorly informed, or misinformed, about the conditions governing entry, work, residence, skills required, cultural issues, and their rights and obligations in destination countries, as such, many Nigerians fall prey to forced labour, while so many women and children are trafficked and lured into commercial sex work. Imperative for comprehensive data which Nigeria lacks is essential for better understanding of the crisis situation confronting migrants. Evidence based lenses will go a long way to address challenges associated with irregular migratory flow. Nigerians are stranded abroad, due to irregular migration or without adequate documents to guarantee their stay and welfare in their effort to escape economic hardship at home. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not have the capacity to disseminate data on these issues according to international regulations (Zulu, 2020).

Nigeria lacks adequate mechanism of harnessing the critical skills, expertise, experience, and technical knowledge that can effectively be employed for the development of the country to reverse the current brain drain dilemma. At the 6th edition of the Nigeria diaspora Investment Summit (NDIS), the solicitation for government support and partnership with the diaspora by Hon Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the chairman Nigerian Diaspora Commission, (NiDCOM), in achieving the nation's developmental goals becomes instructive. As stated "In the quest of the federal government to go far in repositioning the economy, there is a need to partner with diaspora in achieving these goals ... as we are saying we want to have diaspora direct investment". This statement is informative in deducing the extent of gap in government engagement effort in harnessing labour migration opportunities in Nigeria (Mom, 2023).

How Countries are Harnessing Labor Migration Opportunities for National Development

Assessment is carried out on strategies adopted by countries in harnessing opportunities inherent in international labour migration. Countries reviewed include; the Industrialized State of China, the Developing States of Mexico and Philippine, and African States of Mali and South Africa.

Industrialized State of China

China has long continued to reverse its brain drain by encouraging its nationals trained overseas to return and work in China, with many levels of government (central, provincial and municipal, etc.) and organizations actively promoting the return. While the national government sets broad policy guidelines and creates the overall socio-economic and political climate, many government backed institutions are working to encourage migrant return. The central government policy in improving science and technology in China is to permit its nationals freely to go abroad, train and compete in the international marketplace, and attract them back by creating an attractive domestic environment. Market forces, facilitated by national government reforms, have been the most important factor bringing many citizens back into the Chinese economy (Zweig, 2013).

Developing States of Mexico and Philippines

The Mexican Government created a specialized agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) to address the needs of its nationals abroad. The Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) serves as consultation and advisory council, consisting of 105 elected community representatives, many of whom are migrant workers and leaders of migrant associations in the United States. By bringing together government agencies involved with Mexicans working abroad, the IME ensures coordination of migrant workers concerns in the policymaking process and implementation. The IME also commissions research, develops assistance programmes for migrants and transmits information relevant to migrants and their families through the media (<http://portal.sre.gob.mx/ime/>).

In furtherance to the IME initiative, the Mexican government initiated the Fund-Matching Remittance Investment Programme called the Citizen Initiative 3 X 1. First initiated by migrant associations and local governments, was taken over by the Federal Ministry for Social Development in coordination with states

and local governments and migrant associations. Under this initiative, migrant workers who provide remittance funds, also submit proposals for infrastructure development, public services or job creation to the local government or a Mexican Consulate. If the Government approves the proposal, every dollar provided by a migrant association is matched by one each from the local, state and federal government. The 3 X 1 programme has strengthened the role of hometown associations in both the United States and Mexico. Also, the New Alliance Task Force (NATF) was initiated by a Mexican Consulate General in 2003 with the United States Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), brings together 30 banks, 25 community organizations and government agencies to participate in the remittance market and promote banking, mortgage and credit services among migrant workers (<http://www.businessindevelopment.nl/>).

The Banco de Servicios Financieros (BANSEFI) is a programme designed to increase financial products and services available to migrant workers, particularly low-income workers. Under this programme, the cost of remittance transfers is reduced from more than 20 per cent of the principal sent to between 4 and 10 per cent. Favorable exchange rate is also promoted. As part of its Partnership for Prosperity Programme between the Mexican and the United States Governments, the BANSEFI disseminates information about the costs of remittance transfers from the United States and provides information on the benefits of the account-to-account transfer system. It has also created a pool of popular banks, micro-finance institutions and credit unions to act as remittance distributors (Orozco, 2010).

The Philippines

The Philippines also has well contemplated initiatives designed to exploit labour migration opportunities, for the realization of the country's development objectives. This is premised on a strong belief that the country cannot really speak of development when a large segment of the population remains extremely poor (Calzado, 2016). The approach aim to manage migration in a manner that seek to ensure the protection and welfare of overseas Filipino workers, while initiating policies that will enable it maximize labour mobility for national development. One of such initiatives is the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP); working with NGOs and the Government to provide better protection for migrant workers, including women domestic workers. The TUCP works with the NGO

(Kaibigan) who are also members of the Migrant Workers' Council of the National Anti-Poverty Commission, which is attached to the Office of the President of the Philippines. The public services union called the PS-Link, conducts preparatory sessions for those seeking to migrate, where they are informed of their rights and given contacts in the destination countries (Trade Union World, Briefing, No. 3, p. 9 (ICTFU, May 2004); <http://www.tucp.org.ph/>).

The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is set up for the purpose of licensing and monitoring recruitment agencies, administers regulations, and reviews employment contracts to ensure that they meet requirements. Departing migrant workers who do not have POEA-approved contracts are taxed at the airport. Recruiters must post a bond to provide remedies for workers in case of violation of their rights. They must also sign a power of attorney holding them liable for contract violations of employers. Incentives are provided to reward recruiters for good performance. Migrant workers who register their contracts with the POEA are given electronic identity cards in collaboration with Philippine banks, which enable them to transfer remittances from destination countries to their families in the Philippines at low cost. Low-cost remittance transfers can also be made through mobile telephone companies (<http://www.poea.gov.ph>).

African States of Mali and South Africa

Direct bi-lateral agreement with Industrial West is one of the ways Mali is exploiting its labour migration opportunities. The Mali-France 2000 bilateral agreement is focused on consultation on migration, provide for an annual discussion at the ministerial level on the integration of Malians in France, co-management of migration flows and cooperative development in emigration areas of Mali. Under this agreement, France provides travel costs and funds to start businesses for migrant workers to encourage their voluntary return. For 2002-04, France provided funds for Malians to work in the Malian education system and small business development. The fund also supplements the financing of local projects by the Malian diaspora. Some state banks under partnership with the Malian government are designated to guarantees loans to small businesses for expansion needs of Malian diaspora. The specific skills of Malians in France are categorized and registered, and the information managed by a French-Malian committee. The Malian government sponsors delegates from the ministerial-level positions on public relations visits in

destination countries to provide information, offer assistants and to ensure that emigrations goals are met. Information is provided to Malians on job and residence requirements in destination countries before they depart. Consulates in major destination countries provide assistance to Malian migrants, including with their return, and encourage the sending of remittances to Mali (Martins and Weil, 2007).

South Africa

The South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA) is the South African migration initiative targeting thousands of South Africa's expatriate graduates in medicine, education and engineering, particularly those in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition to an electronic network, there is a database of more than 2,000 members. There is also the South Africa-United Kingdom, 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Reciprocal Educational Exchange of Healthcare Personnel between the United Kingdom and South Africa provides for the reciprocal exchange of skills and knowledge. The MOU also promotes the recognition of the qualifications of South African health professionals and enables them to work for a specified period in organizations providing National Health Services in the United Kingdom. They then return to South Africa with newly acquired skills and experience (<http://www.doh.gov.za/>; <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria has levels of policy framework regarding labour migration, but the extent to which it is able to exploit this policy measure to benefit from its massive spread of citizens working abroad remains in doubt. While not ruling out that the country has recorded remarkable amount of remittances from its diaspora, there are still approaches it can employ as seen in the countries under review. The challenge therefore has not been the lack of viable policy framework or human capacity to implement, but lack of political will, weak regulatory and enforcing institutions, weak and myopic leadership, corruption and insecurity in the country culminates in hindering Nigeria harness its labour migration opportunities or diaspora potentials. Therefore the following recommendations will be of benefit to Nigeria if considered:

- a. Develop a functional diaspora database for information and the management of diaspora affairs.
- b. Creation of adequate environment for diaspora investments in the country.
- c. Provision adequate infrastructure and security guarantee for technology transfer and capacity development
- d. Addressed the issue of high cost of remittances through bilateral agreement as seen in other countries.
- e. Develop information on investment opportunities in critical sectors and take concrete action in attracting diaspora investors
- f. Adopt the Chinese model on return of skilled professionals in critical sectors by providing security and other vital incentives.

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