

AFRREV IJAH

An International Journal of Arts and Humanities

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (4), S/No 8, September, 2013: 134-150

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

Migration and Economic Challenges in West Africa

Ndubisi, Ejikemeuwa J. O.

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,

Tansian University, Umunya, (Oba Campus),

Anambra State, Nigeria.

E-mail: ejikon4u@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348062912017; +2348028011298

Abstract

This paper burdened itself with the examination of the economic challenges of migration in West Africa. The movement of people from one place to another is what is basically known as migration. It is that aspect of life which human beings share with other animals. Migration is a common phenomenon in human history. Every country has been affected in one way or the other by migration. West Africa is said to have a long history of movement of people within and outside the sub-region. Therefore, employing the philosophical method of hermeneutics, the paper observed that the movement of the skilled and unskilled West African nationals outside the shores of Africa limits

their contributions to their country of origin and thereby poses some challenges to the economic development of the sub-region. The paper therefore submits that the return of the skilled workers of West African origin will go a long way in stabilizing the economy of the sub-region. It is also the submission of this paper that migration has to be properly channelled for the economic development of West Africa.

Key Words: Economic Challenges, Emigration, Immigration, Migration, West Africa.

Introduction

The belief that the grass is greener at the other side has been with the human person from time immemorial. This understanding accounts for the movement of people from place to place. Some people find it easy to stay in one place for a long period of time, while other people find it very difficult to stay in a particular place for a long period no matter the condition. People have different motives for their movements. Some people from the east move to the south, the south move to the east, the north move to the west, the east move to the north, and so on. The reasons for the movements of people are varied depending on the situation and the people involved. The reasons may be political, religious, economic, etc. These factors necessitate the movement of people.

Africa, in general, and West Africa in particular, has faced massive movement of people. The movement of people is an existential reality. It is something we have experienced and will continue to experience as long as we live. It has been observed that West Africa has a long history of movement of people (Yaro, 2013). West African nationals move within and outside the sub-region. This movement has some effects on the sub-region. The concern of this paper is to investigate the effects of migration on the economic development in West Africa. The paper takes a look at the understanding of the concept of migration, the causes of migration and the factors responsible for emigration in West Africa; the trends of migration in West Africa and

also economic problems of migration in West Africa. It later ends with evaluation and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

Etymologically, the word migration is derived from the Latin word *migratio* which simply means the movement of human beings or animals from one place to another. The 10th edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defined migration as "the movement of people from one country, place, or locality to another." Generally, migration is seen as the movement of people from one place to another in search of food, shelter or security. For Enegho (2005:191), migration is "a general term indicating a permanent change of habitat ie, a more or less serious intent to take up permanent residence in the new country." Migration as an existential reality does not necessarily indicate permanent residence. The movement of people to a place can be on temporary basis or permanent basis as the case may be. The fundamental fact is that migration involves the movements of people. Enegho (2005:191) further observed that migration is:

[T]o move from one place to another, to change location ... especially to leave one's country and settle in another. It can also mean leaving one region within a country to another region of that same country. It may also be with the intention to settle permanently or stay temporary.

The reality of migration is as old as the history of the human person. The human person as a dynamic being has always been on the move. It has been observed that the movement of populations from place to place is one of the earliest social phenomena history records (Guthrie 1913:291). This fact presupposes that the issue of migration is not new to human history. For Amadi (2008:16), the "movement of people has been as ancient as the human society." The earliest migration recorded in human history was in the Bible (Gen. 11:8). The movement of the Jewish people from Egypt to the Promised Land is a typical example of migration in the earliest times. In fact, human

history is dotted with history of migration. It is said that human life would be much more cumbersome without migration.

Migration can be understood as the movement of people out of a country of origin or movement of people into a new country. These can be referred to as emigration and immigration. Simply put, emigration means the movement of people out of their place of origin. On the other hand, immigration succinctly means entry into a particular country. It involves the movement of people into a region or a particular location which may be temporary or permanent. Also, migration can be voluntary or involuntary. People can move into or out of a place voluntarily or involuntarily.

There are different types of migration which include seasonal human migration, rural to urban migration, urban to rural migration and International migration. Seasonal human migration has to do with the movement of people for the purpose of agriculture (which is seasonal) or for tourism. Rural to urban migration is common in developing countries; as industrialization takes place people move from rural areas to urban areas leaving the rural dwellers in a poor condition. Urban to rural migration is characterized by the movement of people because of high cost of living in urban areas or because of population congestion in the urban areas. International migration simply involves the movement of people outside their country of origin. It is important to note that the concern of this paper is more on international migration. Movement of people is an existential reality. It has been observed that migration in the recent times is different from what it used to be in the past. Guthrie (1913:292) argued that “Down to a quite recent date peoples moved as tribes, nations, or races, moving and settling *en masse*.” Some people from Asian or African countries moved to Europe or America; likewise some people from America or Asia moved to Europe or Africa as the case may be. The reason behind the movement of people may not be the same. It all depends on the need of the people at the point in time. Let us now take a look at the causes of migration.

Causes of Migration

It is generally accepted that the basic needs of every human person include food, shelter, clothing and security. Every human person would like to always have food on his table. Nobody likes to be starved to death. It is in a bid to find solutions to the basic human needs that necessitates the movement of people from place to place. According to Guthrie (1913:292),

The primary cause of the migration of peoples is the need for larger food supplies ... migration results when the forces of increasing population and decreasing food supply are not in equilibrium, it tends to equilibration of food among the societies of men: equilibration of food in relation to authority.

The fact is that the major cause of migration is the need for food. But apart from the need for food, there are other needs that necessitate the movement of peoples. Some people may move from one region to another in search of shelter. In a world full of conflicts, wars and natural disasters, the issues of shelter, security and clothing become a problem.

People tend to move from place to place because of the need to escape violence, political instability, drought, congestion in various dimensions and suspected or real persecution. Also adverse physical conditions such as food, landslides (erosion and earthquake), insects and pests, soil infertility contribute largely to the reasons why people leave one environment for another (Guthrie, 1913:292).

The features enumerated above are existential factors that can cause migration either in Europe, America, Africa, Asia or Middle East. They are not particular to a set of people or region. Human beings are always allergic to violence. So in a place where violence thrives, most people may likely migrate to a more stable environment. It is pertinent

to note that in recent times migration occurs as a result of economic development. The economically under-developed migrate to the developed economy. The fact is that the major cause of migration in recent times is economic development. It accounts for the relationship between countries and regions. West African nationals' main purpose of moving to Europe or America is basically economic. The interest of some Europeans or Americans in West African countries is also based on economic gain. Having taken a brief look at the causes of migration, the next section shall concern itself with the migration issues/trends in West Africa.

Migration Trends in West Africa

The movement of people from one geographical location to another is not a new phenomenon in West Africa. Many people in West Africa move within and outside the sub-region. It has been observed that West Africa has a long history of population mobility, both regionally and internationally (Yaro, 2013). Yaro (2013) further noted that "rural – urban migration is a major pattern of flow of migrants in West Africa." The major trend of migration in West Africa is the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas and from the major cities to outside the shores of the sub-region. In the traditional society, the movement of people was basically in search for food and better farm land. Hardly did anybody move outside the community. Amadi (2008:19) holds that "In previous migrations, Africa did not move beyond their region except as slaves." The position of Amadi shows that though migration was a common phenomenon in the primitive era, it was basically within the region. For Adepoju (2005), "in pre-colonial times, migration occurred largely in search of security, new land safe for settlement and fertile for farming."

In the contemporary era, migration within or outside West Africa is no longer as a result of slave trade. There is a new trend of migration in West Africa. The development in the areas of transportation and communication has reduced some of the problems associated with

migration. Hence, many people now find it easier to move from one region to another. Yaro (2013) observed thus:

The development in rail and road construction and other infrastructure works as well as growth of cities such as Accra, Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Abidjan, Lome, Dakar and Cotonou triggered major rural – rural migration and rural – urban migration of skilled and unskilled workers, traders and students.

In traditional society, movement was restricted because of lack of modern means of transportation. African people are said to be characterized by their communal spirit. So the fear of not being in communion with one's family members hindered migration in traditional Africa. But with the later development in information technology, such fears have been surmounted. A person can now be in Nigeria and discuss freely with somebody in Europe or America. So the movement of people from one region to another is no longer worrisome as there are fewer hazards associated with such movements.

In West Africa, the trend of migration has seriously increased in the recent years. The establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has facilitated migration within the region. In recent times movement across national borders within West African has been facilitated by the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement and establishment (Yaro, 2013). As it is, a citizen of a member nation can move across the border without much ado.

The treaty signed in Lagos on 28 May, 1975 creating the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) covered wide areas of economic activities. Article 27 of the Treaty affirms a long-term objective to establish a community citizenship that could be acquired automatically by all nationals of

Member States. This reinforces the preamble to the treaty that outlined the key objective of removing obstacles to the free movement of goods, capital and people in the sub-region (Adepoju, 2005).

One thing to note is that ECOWAS has facilitated the new trend of migration within the region. With the policy of ECOWAS on ground, Nigerians can now move freely to Ghana or Togo without visa and any person from Ghana, Togo or other member states can move into Nigeria without visa. But the new trend of migration in West Africa is characterized by the movement of West African nationals outside the shores of Africa. There is this impression that life is more comfortable in Europe or America. Travelling to Europe, America or Asia from the sub-region is now perceived as a thing of joy and celebration. This new trend of migration has continued to bother the critical minds of some concerned Africans. This necessitates the question: What are the factors responsible for the new trend of migration in West Africa? The attempt to address this question shall be the target of the next section.

Factors Responsible for Emigration in West Africa

West Africa is characterized by high level of poverty, joblessness and underdevelopment. These constitute factors that facilitate the new trend of migration in the sub-region. Many people within the region migrate to Europe or America in search of greener pastures. Amadi (2008:21) rightly noted that “The grave poverty and joblessness in almost all West African countries have encouraged the mass exodus of young men and women through the second ‘Middle Passage’ of the Mediterranean Sea into the living infernos of Europe.” The problems associated with joblessness, poor housing, famine, poor medical care, desertification, loss of wealth, poor condition of living and poor quality of education are among the factors that facilitate emigration in West Africa.

It is evidently clear that the new trend of migration in West Africa is rooted in socio-economic, political and historical-cultural factors which have shaped the direction of development and types of

economic activities and laid bold imprints on especially international migration (Adepoju, 2005). We can now say that the major factor that facilitates migration in the recent times in West Africa is economically based. It is the poor economy or economic instability that encourages emigration.

Since the 70s, highly skilled migrants, including doctors, paramedical personnel, nurses, teachers, lecturers, engineers, scientists and technologists moved from Ghana first to Nigeria and later to other African countries, Europe and North America, attracted by relatively higher salaries and better prospects of living conditions. Many students also remained behind at the end of their training as political, economic and social conditions at home deteriorated (Adepoju, 2005).

If the economy is good and stable, the citizens may not have the need to leave their country of origin. The rate of emigration among Nigerians now is different from what it used to be in the 70s and 80s. It has been observed that “until the early 80s, few Nigerian professionals emigrated because domestic working conditions were attractive and internationally competitive” (Adepoju, 2005). But the reverse is the case now with the poor economic condition of the country.

Another factor responsible for the emigration of West Africa nationals is the nature of the policies of non-African countries. The policies of Europe and America have given rise to the migration of selected members of the West Africa society. The policies are made in such a way that only the highly skilled are attracted to European countries.

In the wake of mass migration of Africans to Europe, European countries have skewed their migration policies to sort out the highly skilled from the low skilled. Whereas highly skilled Africans are wooed to come over under different kinds of working visas, the

low-skilled and non-skilled Africans are left at home to attempt irregular migration (Amadi, 2008:21).

Why would the European countries woo the Africans? The answer is not farfetched – it is to help boost European economy. This goes to explain the reason why Lord Rooker, the former United Kingdom Immigration Minister in Kapur and McHale (2005:3) advised that immigration plan should “maximize the benefits to the UK of highly skilled workers who have the qualifications and skills required by UK business to compete in the global marketplace.” One fact is quite evident regarding this new trend of migration in West African. The migration of West African nationals poses some challenges to economic growth and development in West Africa.

Economic Challenges of Migration in West Africa

The movement of West African nationals out of the region poses some economic challenges. The current trend of migration, especially between Africa, Europe and America, has really increased in the recent years with great implications (Tanka as cited in Amadi 2008:5). The reason for this high increase, as stated above, is economically based. The International Labour Organization (ILO) observed that migrants from Africa constitute about one – fifth of the global migratory flow. In view of this observation, ILO (2002) predicted that in 2005, one in ten African would live and work outside his or her country of origin. This observation poses a great threat to the economic life of the region. Amadi reveals that the real problem of migration in West Africa is three-fold:

The first [problem] is the increasing rate of migration of skilled and unskilled labour outside of the region in search of better opportunities ... The second component of the problem is the dehumanizing experiences of West African migrants to Europe and other regions of the world from departure to arrival and settlement in the host countries. The third component of the problem is the harrowing

experience and human rights violation of deportation of irregular migrants (Amadi, 2008:20).

Considering the problems of migration in West Africa as stated above, and also taking into cognizance of the nature of this paper, the concern now will be on the first problem: migration of skilled and unskilled labour outside the shores of the region. Amadi (2008:31) is right in his remark: “That a large percentage of West African brainpower is outside the region is also a heavy burden on development.” The remark of Amadi is quite logical.

The poor condition of living in the region has actually made the region unattractive. Also the poor salary structure has pushed many skilled persons out of the region. It is undeniable the fact that economic development of any country is highly dependent on both the skilled and unskilled workers. But in a situation where most of the skilled workers migrate out of a given country or region there is bound to be serious economic problem in their country of origin since their major contributions will be to the economic development of their host countries. Galbraith as cited in Amadi (2008:22) rightly noted that migrants contribute to the economic development of their host countries. Migration affects the economic development of West Africa.

Amadi (2008:9) pointed that Europe and America “attract the most talented and skilled labour from Africa and leave the weak to suffer at home. By so doing, they weaken the capacity of African countries to build strong institutions to support economic and political development.” It has been noted that about 25 and 50 percent of West African nationals living in Europe and America are graduates (Kapur and McHale, 2005:3) These are persons who supposed to be contributing to the economic growth and development of the region. There are instances of West African nationals who have spent over 30 years outside the region, contributing to the economic growth of their host countries to the detriment of their country of origin. It is no longer news that many medical doctors, engineers, computer

scientists, nurses, etc. from West Africa are living and working outside the shores of Africa. Lamenting on the problem of migration, Amadi (2008:22) has this to say: “These doctors and engineers who fled to Europe and elsewhere could be saving lives and constructing bridges in West Africa.” It is quite unfortunate that most of those who are supposed to build and develop the economy of the region are nowhere to be found. Kapur and McHale (2005:3) said:

Countries have limited supply of people willing and able to take on entrenched interests to reform schools, establish clinics, and fight for the rule of law. The dilemma is that potential institution-builders are most likely to leave where institutional quality is worst. And the very individuals most likely to be institutional builders by talent and temperament, be it professionals or managers, are most likely to be internationally marketable. If people of talent and drive are essential for building institutions, then loss can have severe consequences.

It is no gain-saying the fact that the absence of most of the skilled West African nationals is seriously telling on the economy of the region. The emigration of skilled workers has contributed to the weak and unstable economy in West Africa. It has been observed that the emigration of high skilled workers has the potentiality to impair economic development.

...high skilled emigration can also impair development by reducing the supply of critical services; reducing the potential for innovative and creative activities that are at the core of long-term growth; and limiting contributions to the health of social, political and economic institutions. (Ratha, Mohapatra, Ozden, Plaza, Shaw and Shimeless 2011:7).

A typical example of the brain drain is the situation in Nigeria. Nigeria, just like other West African countries, has great minds. But most of these great minds are not found within. This explains the reason for sending patients abroad for medical treatment and for relying on foreigners for any engineering or construction contracts. The implication of this type of action is simply economic deterioration on the part of the region and economic boost on the part of the receiving countries. The fact is that something has to be done to overcome the challenges posed by migration on the economic development in West Africa.

The Way Forward

It is an existential fact that most of the best brains in West Africa are living and working outside the sub-region. This group of Africans makes a lot of contributions to the economic development of their host countries. It is also an undeniable fact that the absence of West African skilled nationals is contributing to the economic problem of the region. The question now is: what are the ways to minimize the economic challenges posed by migration in West Africa?

One thing we have to state clearly is that migration can enhance economic development if properly managed. No country or region has the monopoly of knowledge. Hence, there is need for a proper channeling of migration for the benefit of both the sending and receiving countries. There is no gainsaying the fact that Africa is said to be a developing continent economically. So in order to boost the economy of West Africa, there is need for the return of West African skilled workers from Europe and America. The reason is to help build the economy of the region. Amadi (2008:23) is of the view that unless the skilled persons of West African origin come home, their absence will continue to haunt Africa economically. If most of the West African graduates living and working outside the region come home, there will be a remarkable growth and development in the economy of the region. The view of this paper is not that West African nationals should not move outside the region, but that they should go outside of

region to improve their knowledge with the aim of returning home to help their own people. This is the way, in the opinion of this paper, which can guarantee economic development within the region. Shaw (2007:29) argued that “Migrants may become more productive from their overseas work.” This position is amplified by a survey conducted on 304 returning migrants to Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire in 2000-2001. It was discovered that most of the returnees had increased their education or professional experience, and a large majority felt that the knowledge obtained abroad was important, or very important for their current work (Shaw:2007:29). Dilip Ratha, Sanket Mohapatra, Cagler Ozden, Sonia Plaza, William Shaw and Abbe Shimeless are of the opinion that emigrants can be of help to their country of origin. They opined:

The emigration of skilled workers can generate substantial benefits for origin countries through remittances, contacts with foreign markets, technology transfer, enhanced skills of returning emigrants, and perhaps increased demand for education in the origin country (2011:7).

Another point in tackling the economic problem posed by migration in West Africa has to do with the West African leaders. The political leaders of the region should be able to make the environment favorable for healthy competition. There should be adequate security and improvement in the standard of living. Provision of good roads, constant power supply can also help to attract the return of the West African emigrants. The fact is that when the living conditions are improved the emigrants will be attracted back home. Yaro (2013) noted that following the political stability in Ghana, many Ghanaians in Diasporas began to return home. This singular act had tremendous positive effect on the economy of Ghana with most returnees going into self-employment and investing huge sum of money. So, political stability is one of the major factors that can attract emigrants back home.

Furthermore, there is need to enforce stay-at-home policy within West African sub-region. The policy should be able to state that any person going for studies abroad must come back home after graduation. Also, government and non-government organizations should help to give scholarship to people to study abroad on the ground that they will return home to make their contributions to the economic development of the region. On another note, West African leaders can facilitate Diasporas networks by encouraging Diasporas to invest, assist local communities and provide policy advice (Ratha et. al., 2011:11). The important thing to note is that there is need to formulate policies to minimize the ills of migration and to maximize the opportunities.

Conclusion

So far in this work, we have been able to establish that migration as the movement of people from one location to another is as old as the history of the human person. The simple interpretation is that migration is not new in human history. More so, the history of African people in general and West Africa in particular, is characterized by migration. People engage in migration for varied reasons which may be political, religious or economic. This paper states that the major reason for migration especially in West Africa is economically based. Many West African skilled nationals live and work outside the shores of the region. Also the immigration policies of Europe and America have made it easier for West Africa to be robbed of her best brains. This type of attitude is contributing seriously to the economic crises in West Africa. Migration has denied West Africa of many skilled workers who could have made indelible contributions to the economic growth of the region.

It is therefore the submission of this paper that migration has to be channelled for the benefit of the sub-region. The skilled workers of West African origin need to return home in order to rescue West Africa from the dungeon of economic problems. Also, all hands must be on deck to make the environment conducive for economic

development. The issue of security and other related issues should be taken seriously. These will go a long way to attract the return of emigrants back to their country of origin and invariably enhance the economic development in the sub-region and also in the entire continent of Africa.

References

- Adepoju, A. (2005). "Migration in West Africa", (A Paper Prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration).
- Adewale, J. G. (2005). "Socio-Economic Factors Associated with Urban-Rural Migration in Nigeria: A Case Study of Oyo State, Nigeria" in <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-journals/JHE/JHE-17-0-000-000-2005-web/JHE-17-1-001-084-2005-Abst-PDF/JHE-17-1-013-016-2005-1203-Adewale-J-G-/JE-17-1-013-016-2005-1203-Adewale-J-G.pdf> (Accessed: 21/04/13)
- Amadi, S. (2008). "Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Managing Migration and Deportation in West Africa" in Amadi, S. (ed), (2008). *Migration and Deportation in West Africa*. Dakar: Open Society Initiative for West Africa.
- Enegho, F. (2005). "Migration: A Historical and Ethical Assessment" in Iroegbu & Echekwube (eds.) (2005). *Kpim of Morality: Ethics, Special and Professional*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Guthrie, W. B. (1913). "Migration" in Charles G. Herbermann et. al. (eds.). *The Catholic Encyclopedia (15th vol.)*. New York: The Gilmary Society.
- International Labour Organization (ILO), (2002). "Summary Report and Conclusions", (ILO Tripartite Forum on Migration in Southern Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, 26 – 29, November, 2002).

- Kapur, D. & McHale, J. (2005). *The Global Migration of Talents: What Does it Mean for Developing Countries?*. Washington DC: Center for Global Development.
- Ratha et. al. (eds.) (2011). *Leveraging Migration for Africa: Remittances, Skills and Investments*. Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- Shaw, W. (2007). *International Migration in 10 Countries*. Washington DC: Development Prospects Group, 2007.
- Yaro, J. A. (2013). “Migration in West Africa: Patterns, Issues and Challenges” in <http://www.waifem-cbp.orgv2/downloads/MIGRATIONINWESTAFRICAPATTERNS.pdf> (Accessed: 21/04/13)