



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECTS OF HUMAN CAPITAL MIGRATION ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines human capital migration and its impact on the economic development of south-eastern Nigeria. Human capital migration has its implications on the economic development of south-eastern region of Nigeria. Social, monetary and technological remittances among others have been identified as some of the benefits that accrue to the region from its diaspora. However, the absence of good demographic, migration and remittance statistics at the regional and national levels makes it difficult to ascertain the number of south-easterners in the diaspora and the volume of their contributions in the form of remittances. It is observed that while migration has helped to relieve the densely populated region of certain problems associated with high population density, it has also led to the depletion of skilled and youthful human capital resources needed for the development of the region. Using historical method, this paper attempts to trace population movement involving individuals from the region as far back as the pre- colonial period. Hinged on human capital, and push and pull theories, the paper suggests among others that there should be a better organised and effective co-ordination and cooperation between the region (south east) and its diaspora (at all levels) to ensure a proper and sustainable socio-economic development of the region. This will make up for the massive migration of skilled human capital from the region.

Keywords: Human capital, migration, economic development.

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INTRODUCTION

Human capital refers to the productive knowledge, expertise and skills people acquires, possesses or accumulates through education and training. Becker in Jim Ogbolo (2015) viewed human capital as the outcome of an investment process and considers education and training to be the most important investment in human capital. Human capital is comprised of the abilities and skills of human resources of a country. Okojie (1995) explained that human capital is all embracing, that is, it is inclusive of persons who work, or likely to be productively employed sooner or later. This implies that human capital is the knowledge, skills and capacities possessed by people to be used productively for development of an organization, country or region etc.

Meanwhile, over the years, mainly Igbo professional traders, artisans and farmers developed the practice of moving from one place to another in search of markets and agricultural lands. In the pre-colonial period such movements of Igbo economic migrants occurred on a relatively small scale in terms of number of people involved and the distance covered, due to very difficult environmental conditions and limited demands of the traditional economy. However, these situations changed significantly with establishment of colonial rule in Igboland.

Colonialism, with its modern patterns of state organization, urbanization and efficient means of transportation created more favourable conditions that boosted the migratory process in south eastern region. New administrative centres, urban areas and market centres emerged with attractive conditions for many economic migrants. The highly mobile Igbos began to move from rural areas to these colonial urban centres within and outside to exploit available and emerging economic opportunities, (Anyaele, Akor & Amadi, 2015).

Human Capital migration as the major concern of this work is thus the movement of competent skilled human resources (productive workers) from one place to another in search of greener pastures. The movement could be internal or external. In recent times adverse economic and demographic conditions have continued to make the South East a major out-migration region. A discernible out-migration trend shows both internal movement within Nigeria and increasing international movement out of Nigeria.

Many southeast professionals and entrepreneurs live outside the South East in other regions of Nigeria and outside Nigeria. Such out-migrations certainly impact on economic development in south eastern Nigeria in very significant ways. Hence this paper examines effects of human capital migration on the south eastern (Igboland) region of Nigeria. The causes and the effects of this migration was duly examined.



COCEPTUAL AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORKS

Conceptual Discourse

Human Capital

Human capital refers to the knowledge expertise and skill one accumulates through education and training. An American economist, Theodore V. Schultz (1962) was the first to coin the term human capital to refer to stock of productive knowledge and skills. Furthermore, Becker, one of the theorists that developed human capital theory, also considers education and training to be the most important investment in human capital (Becker, 1993).

He affirmed that human capital was like any other type of capital that could be invested in through education, training and enhanced benefits that could lead to an improvement in the quality and level of production. Other theories to the development of human capital include Jacob Miner, Gray Becker and Samuel Bowles (Adelakun, 2011) in Akor (2021). According to Becker human capital refers to the knowledge, expertise and skill one accumulates through education and training.

On his own part Okojie (1995) in Ananti, Akor and Okpalibekwe (2020) viewed human capital as the abilities and skills of human resources of a country. He further argued that human capital is all embracing, that is, it is inclusive of persons who work, or likely to be productively employed sooner or later. This implies that human capital development is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and capacities possessed by people. Aluko (2011) in Jim-Ogbodo (2015) opines that human capital can be acquired and developed through education, training, health promotion as well as investment in all social services that influence man's productive capacities.

He defined human capital as the stock of accumulated skills and experiences that makes workers more productive. Hence human capital is and continues to be an important input for organizations, communities or country especially for employee's continuous improvement mainly on knowledge, skills and abilities. This implies that the more a nation has knowledgeable, skilled and resourceful people, retain them to contribute to national growth and development, the higher the value of the human capital of the nation. The value of the human capital assets of a nation is a function of quality as well as the operating environment. In any country, there can be no meaningful economic growth without adequate human and natural resources.

Fundamentally, human capital is the intangible factor of the production that brings human intellect, skills and competencies in the production and provision of goods and services. Elements of human capital would include knowledge, skills, attitude and motivation belonging to an enterprise or society and engaged in the development of that enterprise or society to fulfill its objectives (Jim-Ogbodo, 2015). This implies that it is the human capital



that organizes and rationalizes the contributions of other factors of production before result oriented productive goal can be achieved in any organization or society. This entails that human capital must be available on a sustainable basis to enhance a countries or regional development. This is more so, as developed human capital are the most important and promising source of growth and development of any country or organization. National resources are worthless until they are extracted and appropriated by competent human capital.

There is thus the need for human capital development, which is the process of acquiring and increasing the number of persons who have skills, education and experience which are critical for the economic growth of a country. Thus the human capital needs to be available, developed and retained in a country or region to enable them participate actively in their own development rather than migrating to other climes or external environment.

Migration

Migration explains the movement of people from one location to another with the intention of settling temporarily or permanently in the new place. Typologies of migration often reflect time and distance and include temporary, permanent, internal and international migrations (Igwe, 2014). According to King (2012) temporary migration leads sooner or later to return migration, whilst permanent migrants may make return visits to their home country from time to time. Migrants are also classified based on the reasons and circumstances of their migration. In line with this, Barclay (2004) highlights these types of migrants: voluntary, forced, -economic and non-economic migrants. He explains that voluntary migrants choose to move while forced migrants do not.

Economic migrants move to gain access to resources or to improve their employment opportunities, whereas non-economic migrants move to escape persecution. In movements across national borders migrants are often grouped as regular and irregular, legal and illegal and undocumented in non-origin countries. The terms illegal, irregular and undocumented are used to describe migrants who do not have valid travel permits or whose residence permits have expired (Campbell, 2004). Modern out-migration from Igboland largely involves voluntary movement within and outside the borders of Nigeria. Many Igbo migrants are also temporary or permanent economic migrants who move for the purpose of trade or to improve their economic opportunities.

Out-migration is attributed to certain unfavourable environmental conditions such as flood, famine, drought, infertile land etc, demographic factors in form of rapid population growth that renders available productive resources inadequate in a given territory and political factors such as civil wars, state failures, religious crises etc. At the same time in-migration occurs as a result of favourable environmental and socio- political conditions that attract potential migrants to an area (Barclay, 2004). Amin, (1974), Green, (1974) and Todaro and Smith, (2011) emphasized that economic forces which manifest in form of unemployment and



depressed incomes can cause individuals and groups to move from one location to another. On the other hand, existing or expected better economic opportunities attract people to settle in a particular location. Migration is also closely linked with insecurity. Conflicts can be a push factor for out-migration from affected areas. Ekop (2010) singles out ethnic conflict as the main cause of refugee and forced migration flows not only in Africa but in some other flash points in Asia and Eastern Europe. Ethnic conflicts in some cases had snowballed into civil wars and state failures triggering mass movement of people out of troubled areas.

The Phenomenon of International Migration

According to Rohrmoser and Watcher (2008) in Udumaga, Okey & Uche (2023), the migration patterns observed in contemporary times have been shaped by the historical relationships between Europeans and Africans. The phenomenon of international migration is currently experiencing a significant surge, with the number of migrants surpassing previous projections and exhibiting a notable upward trajectory. Udumaga, Okey & Uche (2023).

Factors for West African migration according to Udumaga, Okey & Uche (2023) are multiple factors, including poverty, conflict, environmental degradation, and political instability, have contributed to the massive cross border migration crises in the region. Migration, whether internal or international, results from a combination of forces, which may be political, economic, social and natural conditions. Writers may however, select certain areas for emphasis depending on local or regional peculiarities. For (Igboland) south eastern region a number of environmental, economic, demographic and political conditions act as push and pull forces for the high rate of out-migration from the region.

Theoretical Nexus

This study adopted the Human Capital Theory and the Push and Pull theories of migration as its theoretical linkage.

Human Capital Theory: Human capital theory views schooling and training as investment in skills and competence (Adelakwu, 2011 in Akor (2021). The theory holds that a more educated/skilled work force makes it easier for an organisation (state) to adopt and employment of new technologies, thus reinforcing returns on education and training.

The proponents include Adam Smith, Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker, and Jacob Miner. They justified investment in human capital as been equally or even more equally worthwhile than that in the physical training increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capital which is a product of innate abilities and investments in human beings (Almandance, 2011).

The theory is apt for the study because of its believe that it is through skilled human capital that a nation, institution or region can develop sufficient and qualitative human capital



required for national growth and development. However, our developed human capital migrates especially from the South East Nigeria to other parts of the country and outside the country depriving the region of the optimal utilization of its skilled workforce for the economic development of the region.

Push and Pull Theory: The second theory considered for the study is the push and pull theory on migration. This theory attributes out migration to discernible unfavourable conditions such as natural disaster (flood, famine, drought, infertile land etc), rapid population growth that renders available productive resources inadequate in a given territory and political instability (civil wars, state failures, religious crises etc). At the same time in-migration occurs as a result of favourable economic and political conditions that attract potential migrants to an area (Anyaele, Akor & Amadi 2023).

According to the theory propounded by Ravenstein in 1885, migration is motivated by a confluence of push forces, which encompass adverse conditions or situations in the migrant countries of origin and pull factors, which encompass appealing chances or conditions in the nations of destination. Hence Ravenstein (1885) is credited with the concept of the “pull” and “push” migration theories in his work the “Law and migration” Udumaga, Okey & Uche (2023). Todaro, Amir and Green adopted the economic theory of migration and emphasized that economic force which manifest in form of unemployment and depressed incomes can cause individuals and groups to move from one location to another. On the other hand, better economic opportunities attract people to settle in a particular location.

Migration is also closely linked with insecurity. Conflicts can be a push factor for out-migration from affected areas. Ekop (2010) singles out ethnic conflict as the main cause of refugee and forced migration flows not only in Africa but in some other flash points in Asia and Eastern Europe. Ethnic conflicts in some cases had snowballed into civil wars and state failures triggering mass movement of people out of troubled areas. Hence in these theories applies to this study as competent skilled human capital migrates from the south eastern region of Nigeria due to push and pull factors economic, demographic and political like (insecurity, marginalization, unemployment acting as factors) pushing them to move from the region. Factors like better opportunities of employment, political stability, security in other areas acts as pull factors to attract immigration to such places or countries. The immigrants from the south east region contribute significantly to the development of the place or country where they move to as immigrants to at the detriment of the south eastern region.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive design, being qualitative and non-experimental. Data was collected mainly from secondary and documentary sources like text books, conference papers, journals, articles, periodicals, monographic seminar papers, official documents and internet sources. While content analysis was used to analyze the data. Rigorous examination



of written records in the critical, descriptive, and explanatory manners will drive generalizations and meanings from such documents and records.

DISCOURSES

Historical Overview of Migration in (Igboland) South East Region

In pre-colonial Igboland the largest unit of social organization was the village group, which consisted of a number of villages each having its own market and enjoying a high degree of religious and political autonomy (Ukwu, 1967). Pre-colonial Igbo village group was agrarian. The mass of the people lived in their autonomous villages and depended largely on land for livelihood. Traditions, difficult terrain, lack of easy means of transportation in the rain forest, language barrier, and mutual suspicion among different groups made widespread movement very difficult at this period. The international trade in human beings and later the internal trade in slaves compounded the problem. Movement of people from one group to another was therefore highly circumscribed not only in south east but in Nigeria because of these environmental and technological disabilities, (Anyaele, Akor & Amadi 2023).

Despite these difficulties, increasing population and diminishing soil fertility forced certain local farmers to move in search of more fertile areas (Okafor, 2002). In addition, available evidence shows that “for the purpose of trade, a small but significant Igbo population moved to locations far from their agricultural lands. They were according to records directly and indirectly mobile enough to reach where there existed attractive pulls of trade and business” (Ogbuagu, 2006). The Aro, Awka, Nri, Abiriba, Nkwerre and Umunneoha people were in this category of professional traders and itinerant artisans who were able to surmount traditional and technological barriers to ply their trade and business within and beyond Igboland.

Onokala (2002) identified two systems in the organization of long-range commerce in Igboland; the Awka and the Arochukwu systems. The Awka system unlike the Aro did not create permanent settlements but allowed traders to move to market centres from their home base. The Aro on the other hand organized a more integrated trading system based on a network of carefully established trading colonies and effectively controlled trade routes. Such Aro trading settlements, the largest of which is Arondizuogu dotted different parts of Igboland and some neighbouring non-Igbo communities. Ample evidence therefore shows that the Igbo engaged in economic or labour migration within and outside Igboland no matter the scale or size of such movement in the pre-colonial period (Ogbuagu, 2006).

Contrary to the views of earlier writers, urban historians now believe that the process of urbanization began in Igboland long before its encounter with colonialism (Bob-Duru, 2002). This pre-colonial phase is often described as ‘traditional urbanization’ and was experienced in such traditional, administrative and market towns as Onitsha, Abo, Bende, Uzuakoli, Afigbo, Awka and Arochukwu. However, the colonial period in Igboland witnessed among



other things certain changes in the patterns of urbanization and an accelerated rate of urban development. Political and economic needs for effective colonization led to the construction of railways, ports and modern roads. These incidentally gave rise to wage labour along western lines and urban centres in Enugu, Aba, Umuahia, Onitsha, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Asaba, Agbor etc. Emergence of modern urban centres and construction of modern railways and roads increased the opportunity for the Igbo to travel not only within Igboland but to “faraway places like Yoruba and Hausa lands”.

The colonial era as well as the post-colonial period saw increasing movement of the south easterners from rural areas to urban areas across Nigeria, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Aba, Jos, Lagos, Calabar, Kano, Ibadan, Kaduna etc. By 1951 the Igbos formed “44.6% of non-Yoruba inhabitants of Lagos, 53.5% of the non-Edo inhabitants of Benin, 38% of non-Hausa-Fulani inhabitants of Kano and 40.7% of the non-northern inhabitants of Kaduna”. Igbos came into this situation in various ways. Some were posted outside their place of origin as government employees; some were conscripted to work in the construction of the eastern railway far away from their homeland’s others moved to trade in non-Igbo areas.

Migration in the south east was multi-directional and not a one-sided process. There were out-migrations from the region to other areas as well as in-migration from other lands but the percentage of out-migration far exceeds that of in-migration even in recent times making Igboland “a net out migration area”. Current migratory trend shows large scale individual based migration to other countries and continents has increased significantly. It is estimated that not less than one third of the Igbo population lives outside Igbo land in other ethnic homelands of Nigeria, in neighbouring African countries and in Europe and North America.” Presently, regions and countries with high concentrations of Igbo migrants include Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cot d’ Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon, and South Africa. Outside Africa the bulk of Igbo, Diaspora lives in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. Before the 1980s Nigerians travelled to the United States ‘to study and return home’. But from the 1980s a large number of Nigerians have been going there as immigrants” (Okeke, 2010).

Causes of Out-Migration from (Igboland) South East Region

By the 1950s many Igbo people were already living permanently in urban areas outside Igboland in places like Calabar, Benin, Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna and Kano. By the 1970s the frontiers had become profoundly extended to include many African countries, Europe, North American and Asia. A combination of factors accounts for such out-migrations from Igboland namely economic motivation, urbanization and political influences (Igwe, 2014). Economic factors perhaps more than any other explain the out-migration of the Igbo to other regions within Nigeria and to other countries of the world. Igboland is an area of high population density. Population increase over the years has its ripple effects on the region as it contributes to the scarcity of other productive resources such as land. Shortage of land led to over-crowding and over-farming which greatly reduced the size and fertility of farmland.



Many of those that lived in the country side whose livelihood depended on agriculture had no choice but to move first to urban areas in Igboland and again to urban centres outside Igboland in search of better economic opportunities. This trend of rural-urban movement began in the colonial period and has continued through the post-colonial period (Igwe, 2014). As already noted, many migrants moved to take up paid employment in public and private organizations. Others were attracted by trading opportunities that existed in these urban centres.

Since the end of the Biafra - Nigeria War, the South –East appears to be neglected in the siting of federal industries and other major properties that would help to improve infrastructure, expand the economy and create jobs for the people (Ikejiani Clark, 2002, Okafor, 2011). As a result of prevailing conditions of unemployment in the region graduates of institutions of higher learning in the South East must leave the region if they hope to get a good job. Many of those graduates that remain in the region face prolonged period of unemployment, which force some to join criminal groups (Anyaele and Njoku, 2012). Since 1999 rising graduate unemployment in the South East has led to increase in kidnapping, armed robbery and cybercrime activities. In recent times also economic migration out of Nigeria to other countries of Africa; North America, Asia and Europe have become very attractive for many young Igbo men and women. Worsening unemployment and security conditions have forced even highly educated Igbo out of the country where in some cases they take low and menial jobs (Ogbuagu, 2006).

Occasional remittances especially from international Igbo migrants in the Diaspora which because of current economic downturns in Nigeria are significant, serve as a pull factor for others to join the out-migration flow. Without being well informed about the largely poor livelihood options for those in foreign lands (Africa, Europe, North America and Asia) others still at home become desperate to leave believing often wrongly that once overseas they will become rich and successful (Kolajo, 2010). In many Igbo communities' families sometimes pool resources together or dispose valuable common possessions to send one or two family members to Europe or other destination points with the hope that in due course the migrating members "remittances would more than pay for their investment".

At the national level rapid population growth continues to trigger movement of people including the Igbo out of Nigeria. The country lacks effective population policies and programmes that can check high fertility rate. The consequence is rapidly increasing population and labour force without a corresponding increase in employment opportunities for the teeming youthful population. Unemployment and escalating poverty arising mainly from the above factor as well as economic mismanagement and uncontrollable spate of corruption in public offices force many of the more ambitious and adventurous youths to move to areas where they hope to realize their dreams. Some move to seemingly more promising countries within the continent, while others head to Europe, North America and Asia.

**Impact of Human Capital Migration on Economic Development South East Region**

Out-migration impacts on South Eastern Nigeria in a number of ways. Existing research findings reveal that remittance to the country or community of origin is a significant way the Diaspora relates to their homeland. De Montclos (2005) argues that the migrants' economic success and degree of commitment towards their kith and kin at home determine the volume and frequency of remittances. Weiss' study of Nigerian migrants in South west Cameroon shows that the Igbos retains strong attachment to the land of their ancestors, consequently almost 83% of those living in Cameroon remit money home once or twice a year.

Financial remittances from the diaspora are critical in the sustenance of a growing number of households. Such financial sources are used for the education of children, siblings, estate and other relations left behind at home. They also take care of the health, food and other basic needs of many a household with migrants outside Igboland. The 2007 World Bank estimate of financial remittances to Nigeria by her migrants outside the African continent was 3.3 billion dollars (Adebayo, 2013). This World Bank figure comes from the official channels of remittance which are mainly banks. But many migrants use cheaper and more flexible unofficial channels through friends, relatives and courier services" to remit money home.

The observed unofficial remittances are said to surpass the official figures. Remittances also flow in from other African countries where Nigerians are domiciled such as South Africa and Ghana. Even though there is no record of monetary remittances to Nigeria based on ethnicity, the Igbo outside Nigeria with their large number and expertise are believed to contribute substantially to their country's remittance in-flow. However it is not known how much of these monetary remittances from international Igbo migrants are invested in Igbo land and how much is invested in enterprises outside Igboland in other parts of Nigeria like Lagos and Abuja.

In addition to monetary remittances' scholars have also identified social and technological remittances as a major contribution of migrants to their homeland. Productive ideas and values and technical skills are often acquired by migrants from their host communities and transferred to their home lands on their return. Some educational and health institutions in Nigeria and Igboland have benefited through donation of books, computers and hospital equipment by non-governmental organizations established by Nigerians in the diaspora (Adebayo, 2013). Home town associations outside Igboland often embark on self-help community development projects in their homelands in such areas as construction of schools, hospitals and the provision of roads and rural electricity for the benefit of the entire community.

Remittances as findings show are not always for current consumption, some are invested in profit making ventures in urban areas and in farm and non-farm sectors in the rural areas. Igbo migrants invest in small and medium scale industries, commercial businesses, real and



estates. In this way, they "contribute towards increasing employment and other legal income generating opportunities, as well as easing unemployment and under employment" (Barclay, 2004). Existing research identified high population density in most parts of Igboland as the major factor behind out- migration from the region. Such emigration in a way has beneficial impact as it relieves the area of the burdens of surplus labour force. The impact of out migration from Igboland is complex and has negative ramifications as well. Large numbers of skilled and talented Igbos move to other parts of Nigeria, Africa and the developed world.

This movement of skilled labour especially from the developing countries to the developed parts of the world is often described as brain drain. As it concerns Nigeria and Igboland in particular, Ogbuagu observes that despite the lack of accurate data on brain drain from Nigeria and Igboland, reports show that the Igbo Nation contributes a high percentage of emigration of highly skilled manpower to the global labour market.(Ogbuagu, 2006). The reason for this emigration wave is not farfetched. Since 1999 economic downturns and especially rising spate of insecurity manifesting in form of kidnapping and armed robbery and recently cesession agitations, Ipob etc have forced many Igbo professionals and the unskilled out of Igboland to other parts of Nigeria and the developed world, thus depriving the region of the needed human resources for industrial and agricultural development.

Southeastern migrants (mainly Igbos) are known to contribute positively to the development of their host communities and countries. Even though they retain ties with their homeland, they do not shy away from investing heavily in their host communities. This explains why Igbo small and medium enterprises are located in different parts of Nigeria and other countries where they live. Due to this practice, the Igbos suffered great economic loss when their investments and buildings were labeled abandoned property and confiscated in some parts of Nigeria, immediately after the Biafran- Nigerian war in 1970. Most recent is the constant demolition of Ibo properties often tagged illegal structures especially in Lagos State and other parts of the country. This sad experience taught most Igbo entrepreneurs with businesses in other parts of Nigeria "to set up a branch of their businesses and manufacturing ventures in their areas of origin" (Ogbuagu, 2006). This notwithstanding, south east migrants still tend to invest more in their host communities than in their homeland.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Human capital migration is an important feature of the south-east (Igbo) nation in modern times. The Igbos are found in major cities in most countries of the world. Emigration from Igboland is a function of a combination of certain push and pull factors; economic demographic and political. The Igbo diaspora retains strong links with the homeland; expressed in occasional visits, monetary, social and technological remittances. However, ward, local and state authorities should keep reliable population migration and remittance data that can be used for planning and public policy formulation to enhance sustainable development of the South East region of Nigeria. The region' development is however below optimal level due to out-migration of its skilled human capital resources.



Recommendations

The south east needs the education experience and skills of its professionals and entrepreneurs (developed human capital) in the diaspora. Some who are willing to return and work or invest in the south east economy may be discouraged by the prevailing environment of poor infrastructure insecurity and official corruption. There is need to address the issues and attract investment.

Co-ordinated partnership with the diaspora is critical in the development of the south east, the role of governments in the region will be to improve infrastructure, beef up security and develop attractive tax packages and transparent practices that can pull Igbo and non-Igbo professionals and entrepreneurs to work and invest in the region.

Competing Interest

The author declares that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.

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