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Abstract

Engaging the Burden of Rural-Urban Migration in a non-regulatory System: the Case of Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the countries in the world with very high rural-urban dichotomy. Although the nation is generally characterized by poor social amenities, both in quality and quantity, rural communities are disproportionately more disadvantaged than urban centres due to governmental neglect. Consequently, the number of rural inhabitants that migrate to cities with high hopes of overcoming powerlessness consistent with rural life is unprecedented. Resulting population densities in these destinations and corresponding disadvantages require effective regulations that will engage the push factors on one hand, and how in-migrants could adjust to destination cities without infringing on existing social equilibrium on the other. This paper argues that Nigeria practices a non-regulatory internal migration system with families and communities, most times, forced to adjust grudgingly to unforeseen human additions. Investigating how these recipients are coping with this recurring contingency is critical to understanding the burden and contradictions of non-existence of registration systems and haphazardness in spatial allocations, land use, distribution of public resources and compliance to laws. Suggesting appropriate context-specific intervention strategies to a non-regulatory migration patterns and processes, as in the case of Nigeria, is strongly recommended.

Keywords: In-migrants, powerlessness, contingency, haphazard approach, and social equilibrium

Background and Problem Statement

Nigeria is among the few countries of the world characterized by contradictory socio-economic and development scenarios (Nwokocha 2007). Despite her enviable human and material resources, the country and its peoples are still classified among the very poor (Okunmadewa, 2001) with no fewer than 54% of Nigerians living below poverty level (Akinyele, 2005). Multiple environmental, political, religious and cultural factors have been implicated in Nigeria's underdevelopment (Okafor, 2005; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1997). The political factor is considered, in most quarters, as most crucial in understanding the Nigerian crisis. In a way, this paper subscribes to the above position but argues, and in line with systemic analysis, that distortion of Nigeria's development agenda could have resulted from any component given that parts of the society function collectively to sustain the whole with emphasis on interdependence.

Specifically, long years of military dictatorship and the consequent tele-guided mentality impinged negatively on the psyche of Nigerians. Throughout those dark periods, mediocrity displaced excellence in all spheres of life thus leaving the society without laws and values. For the most part, amenities and welfare were not provided as and when due, with rural communities disproportionately more disadvantaged than urban centers. The situation did not improve at those few intervals of military-supervised democracy. With the return of a fairly military-independent democracy in 1999, Nigeria has made little progress in re-situating itself in the realm of sustainable development. Poverty is still a visible aspect of the people's culture. The dilemma is exacerbated by recurring unimaginable level of unemployment and frustration that have increased the army of disenfranchised people incapable of participating directly in the growth process (Okunmadewa, 2001).

For some individuals, especially young boys and men, out-migration into cities is a necessary approach to overcoming poverty and attendant powerlessness in rural areas notwithstanding the implications of such migration for individuals, families and groups in destination locations. In some instances, the recipients are hardly aware of the impending human additions; yet most strive to accommodate the in-migrants in line with the African extended family tradition and hospitality, at times at severe costs. The volume of internal migration in African countries was aptly highlighted by Findley (1997:110):

By any measure, millions of Africans are migrating from one place to another within their countries. Without regard for migration type ... one in five Africans is no longer living in his or her birthplace ... migration to urban areas or particular cities ranges from 12 percent to 66 percent. In many cities and regions, the proportions are well above 33 percent.

Although the essence of mobility to the survival of any nation is well documented (Filani, 2005), un-preparedness by prospective migrant-recipients to adjust to consequent change in structure is the main source of burden, which readily manifests in distorted social equilibrium. The effects of this disequilibrium are short-lived in some cases while in others are long lasting or even permanent.

Interestingly, Nigeria is practicing a non-regulatory system which allows for uncontrolled internal migration. Hence, the decision to out-migrate to urban centers is not usually agonizing as a result of the perceived advantages of so doing. Perhaps, this very easy mental process, more than unavailability of infrastructures, explains mass movement of rural dwellers to cities. If the latter were the reason, the out-migrant later discovers that infrastructures in most urban centers in Nigeria are mere camouflages, hardly able to improve human conditions. We now examine the recurring effects of rural-urban migration in a non-regulatory system such as Nigeria.

Rural-urban migration in Nigeria: whither the agony?

The burden of rural to urban migration in Nigeria is multifaceted and intertwining. As such, an analysis of one decomposable component or consequence, such as unbearable population density, impinges on other issues within the identifiable cycle of burdens. For instance, in examining the immediate effect of rural to urban migration, which is increase in population or at the extreme its explosion, various other subsequent effects are expected to be considered. Population explosion activates the housing challenge both at micro family and macro society levels. Congestion in households and communities has implications for both the health and psychology of victims.

Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Kano, Onitsha among others are characterized by human traffic, vehicular congestions, environmental pollution, consistent in-migration and spurious expansion of territories to accommodate human additions. This paper argues that although maternal and infant mortality have been

identified as accounting for a significant number of deaths in Nigeria (Okolocha et al 1998; Isiugo-Abanihe 2003; Population Reference Bureau 2005; Nwokocha 2006), frustration, conflicts, poor sanitary conditions and frequent road accidents, which have associations with dense population, collectively contribute most significantly to mortality statistics. Research shows that life expectancy among Nigerians dropped from an average of 52 to 44 years between 2002 and 2005 (Population Reference Bureau 2002; 2005), even when there was marked reduction in HIV/AIDS prevalence from 5.8 percent in 2001 to 4.4 percent in 2005 (Olaleye et al 2006)

Unplanned population increases in most cities explain infrastructural decay in relevant contexts. This is especially the case in Nigeria where maintenance of existing amenities, which *ab-initio* are haphazardly situated due to unprecedented corruption and biased award of contracts, is not prioritized (Okafor, 2005). It is interesting to note that most roads in the country are impassable, hospitals lack human and necessary material resource, schools are dilapidated and electricity supply is very far from stable – in most rural communities though, none of these infrastructures exists. The people's agony is visible in frustrations arising from avoidable diseases and deaths, lack of access to portable water, subsistent economic activities, various kinds of unemployment, child abuse in all its ramifications and dwindling focus on societal norms and values.

The burden inherent in normative conflict and social maladjustment in a non-regulatory system is enormous (Kammeyer and Ginn, 1986). Given that individuals are culture-bearing, in-migrants do not immediately adjust sufficiently to cultures at destinations, while others are for very long time guided by ethnocentric orientations hardly adapting to the realities of new locations. High crime rate has also been linked to rural-urban migration given the anonymity provided by urban environments.

Rural communities share this burden through loss of manpower necessary for agricultural activities and production. The impoverishment of rural areas in Nigeria is partly explainable by out-migration of able youths in search of employment in cities. Consequently, agriculture which prior to discovery of oil was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy was far relegated to the background leading to the country's mono-economy status. Overdependence on oil, it is argued here, has led to employment crisis and avoidable importation of agricultural products, which together have over the years had

negative net effect on local industries and productions as well as international trade balances. Several analyses of Nigeria's economy insist that petroleum resources have been more of a curse rather than a blessing to the development of the country (Iwayemi, 2006)

It is imperative to note that some migrants in the category discussed in the present paper overcame their locality-imposed powerlessness in new destinations, while a large majority of others became more impoverished to the point of becoming social misfits otherwise known as "area boys and girls". Another burden imposed by rural to urban migration is the increasing number of cohabitation and consensual unions that results among the married and the not yet married. Although it could be argued in some quarters that such union, especially when it involves people from different ethnic backgrounds, could have positive implications for the country's unity at macro level, the negative consequences on existing marriages and family unity at the micro are enormous. The above issues constitute the burden and in some cases agony of rural-urban migration in Nigeria for which organized critical thinking and context specific intervention strategies are essential.

Intervention strategies: can the code be broken?

A non-regulatory system does not lend itself to critical investigation, update and adjustments on the basis of its "anything goes approach". Like other aspects of demographic events, monitoring migration activities in Nigeria is either clumsy or non-existent probably because of the intergenerational orientation that thrives in evasion and/or ignorance related to the essence of keeping track of records. For instance, vital statistics related to births and deaths outside the formal/orthodox facilities are most times not undertaken. The situation is worsened by the inability (or lack of will) of the authorities to keep population registers for periodic updates; yet censuses are both irregular and largely unreliable. As such, planning is undertaken from a very weak projection base. The critical implication of this lack of emphasis on demographic data is that population policies neither synchronize with nor derive from the true situation of things in the country. Consequently, development is generally lopsided or out-richtly undermined. Sustainable growth is only achievable when inherent agonies of a non-

regulatory system, as is the case of Nigeria, are broken through context-specific interventions.

Although the essence of overcoming the burden of rural-urban migration in Nigeria cannot be overstated, it has been particularly difficult to achieve. Part of the difficulty is in non-prioritization of reduction in development gaps between rural and urban centers on one hand and the seeming elasticity of families and communities to adjust to human additions, even without prior information, all in the name of African hospitality on the other. This paper argues that the contingency approach has not improved the conditions of individuals and groups, it has rather impinged negatively on the well-being of these recipients.

The most realistic strategy to engaging the burden of rural-urban migration in Nigeria is to provide basic amenities in rural communities to the extent that they alleviate life and economic activities among rural dwellers on one hand and as a result discourage unnecessary relocation to cities. On the other, to propel return-migration among urban inhabitants whose activities do not contribute substantially to family and urban growth as city-dwellers. Although this strategy does not amount to regulation in a strict sense, it will however contribute to maintaining some equilibrium in rural and urban populations. This latent function wherein the push and pull factors activate some measure of relevance in balancing the movement of people make predictability, planning and even-development feasible. The present paper argues that going by the level of hardship faced by most urban-dwellers in Nigeria, achieving the proposed attitudinal and behavioral change will not be difficult. By either not being pulled to cities or those already in urban centers opting to return to rural localities, a kind of moderate population size can be maintained.

Moderate population eases housing, congestion and health problems in relevant localities. It also undermines pressure and over-use of infrastructures to the point of untimely decay. In addition, the challenge related to school enrolment that results from dense population in some urban centers can be eliminated. Experience shows that enrolment explosion in primary and secondary schools, in most Nigerian cities, without corresponding provision of facilities is the major reason for the regrettable diminishing academic standards in the country.

Manageable population size also has implications for security of lives and property in a given community. High rate of crime and insecurity in Lagos, Nigeria, for instance, has been attributed to its population density, which has made it extremely difficult for security operatives and law enforcement agents to undertake the task of safeguarding individuals and materials effectively. The issue in Nigeria is therefore not that of official regulation of rural to urban migration but how such migration could be occurring without infringing on existing social equilibrium.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the burden of rural to urban migration in a non-regulatory system to establish that receiving families and communities face some agony as a result. Although it is difficult to introduce and sustain a workable regulation system in Nigeria given the existing pervasive extended family ethos that supports the convention of mandatory hospitality in African culture, inherent burden and agony can be eliminated by resituating rural communities developmentally. The incontrovertible conclusion that derives from internal migration in Nigeria is that population equilibrium in both rural and urban settings can be achieved by making rural communities economically and infrastructurally viable. In that way, out-migration is discouraged while in-migration is, at the same time among some urban inhabitants, encouraged. Achieving that will require demonstrable political will and vision since resources are already available.

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