INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, NIGERIAN RETURNEE MIGRANTS, AND CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATION INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to examine the complexity of international migration, particularly irregular migration, and challenges of reintegration of returnees into their communities, specifically, in the context of Nigerian returnees. It adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach, and, content analysis of data obtained from secondary sources. Findings reveal that developed countries of Europe and America are increasingly becoming apprehensive of the inflow of migrants from Africa. Unemployment, lack of opportunities, urbanization, insecurity, or the forced movement of people fleeing from violent conflict or national disaster drive people to migrate. Due to a lack of coherent strategy to provide more legal avenues for migration, people are pushed to travel irregularly through the sea and deserts, with the attendant risk of exploitation from a complex mix of black markets, smugglers, robbers, and slavers, resulting in many deaths. The situation, involving many African migrants, particularly from Nigeria trapped in Libya, attracted the global community's attention. This necessitated the International Organization for Migration (IOM), supported by the European Union (EU), to initiate a program of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) of migrants to communities of origin, of which, more than 8000 have returned to Nigeria. The article examines the diverse challenges experienced by Nigerian returnee migrants due to a lack of proper reintegration into their communities. Findings reveal that the challenges experienced by Nigerian returnees stem from poorly conceived economic and social

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reintegration programs, stigmatization, difficulties in securing sustainable employment, threats from traffickers, and in some cases outright abandonment by the government. The article concludes by recommending that the Nigerian government and stakeholders should address the root causes of irregular migration and also work closely with the Nigerian returnee migrants to ensure that they are properly reintegrated into their communities.

Keywords: International migration, Nigeria, returnee, and reintegration.

Introduction

The focus of this article is to examine the complex dynamics of international migration, irregular migration, the return of migrants, and the challenges of reintegrating Nigerian returnees into their communities. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller have argued that we live in the 'Age of Migration', a period during which "international migration has accelerated, globalized, feminized, diversified and become increasingly politicized" (Castles & Miller, 2009, p.12). An important manifestation of global governance is the significant expansion of regional consultative processes focusing on international migration. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) report of 2001, several reasons account for the regional focus on international migration. These are the post cold war increase in irregular migration, including human trafficking; the increase in the number of states and areas affected by international migration; and the informal, nonbinding nature of the consultative processes themselves. Until a few decades ago, international migration was not generally seen by governments in developed and developing countries as a central issue. Rather, migrants were divided into categories, such as permanent settlers, foreign workers, or refugees, and dealt with by a variety of agencies, such as immigration departments, labor offices, alien police, welfare authorities, and education ministries. Since the late 1980s, international migration began to be accorded significant attention. For example, as the European Union (EU) countries removed their internal

boundaries, they became increasingly concerned about strengthening external boundaries to prevent an influx of migrants from Africa and Asia.

The recent attention on international migration stems from the increasing international concerns that have trailed migration issues in recent times. European countries and the United States of America (USA) under President Donald Trump have become increasingly apprehensive of the inflow of migrants from African countries, especially those that find their way irregularly traveling through dangerous and inhuman routes such as deserts and seas with many losing their lives in the process (Africa Business, July 2017). Some migrants that manage to reach their destinations are not welcomed because they were not invited in the first place. There is no doubt that the movement of people has been, and remains an essential component of economic development, social change, and political organization.

With a population of more than 180 million people, Nigeria is not only the most populous country in Africa, but also occupies a significant position in international migration as a sending, transit, and receiving country. As a sending country, feedback on Nigerian emigrants, especially in contemporary times, has been negative. The negative feedback has largely resulted from irregular migrations outside the country. According to Adepoju and Wiel (2010) African countries such as Nigeria are grounded by poverty and the emigration pressure is severely compounded by issues of unemployment, unstable politics, insecurity, and ethnoreligious conflicts amongst others. Thus, due to a lack of coherent strategy to provide more regular avenues for migration, people in search of greener pastures or safer havens are pushed to travel irregularly through the sea and deserts with the attendant risk of exploitation from a complex mix of black markets, smugglers, robbers, and slavers, resulting in many deaths. The situation involving many African migrants including Nigerians trapped in Libya attracted the attention of the global community. This necessitated the United Nations Migration Agency, International Organization for Migration (IOM), supported by the European Union (EU) to undertake a program of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR).

This has led to the return of more than 8000 Nigerians to states such as Edo, Delta, and Ogun, amongst others (Africa Business, July 2017). The article, which examines the issue of international migration, return migration, and the diverse challenges experienced by Nigerian returnee migrants due to a lack of proper reintegration economically and socially into their communities, is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, section two provides the conceptual clarifications and theoretical foundation. While section three discusses international migrations and the challenges of irregular migration by Nigerians, section four examines the conditions of migrants trapped in Libya and the nature of the return. Section five assesses the challenges and prospects of reintegrating return migrants and section six is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Issues And Theoretical Foundation

Concepts that require clarification as used in this study are international migration, irregular migration, return, and reintegration. In terms of classification, migrations could be rural-urban, country-to-country, internal or external migration. International migration refers to the movement of people outside their country of origin into another country. For international migration to take place, a nation-state border has to be crossed. The term 'irregular migrant (s)' is used throughout this study instead of illegal migrants. According to the Global Commission on International Migration report (GCIM, 2005), it is better to use the term 'migrants with irregular status, while clarifying the legality of migration and migrant status. Irregular migration covers a variety of situations, ranging from those who arrive in a country without valid immigration documents to those who enter legally but overstay or those employed without a work permit. Many Nigerians, especially the youth, do leave the country in irregular situations, by failing to obtain travel documents, including valid international passports before commencing their journey through unofficial routes. According to Adepoju (2006), such persons may enter transit through the Maghreb and host countries of Europe through unauthorized or unofficial routes without appropriate entry documentation, especially

visas. Though the term 'reintegration' is seriously contested, for this article, it refers to the process through which a migrant reintegrates into the society of his/her country of origin within the context of return migration, enabling him/her to reengage in the social, cultural, economic and political life of his/her country. For there to be reintegration, there has to be a return of migrants. Return must be understood in greater depth than simply whether migrants decided to return home of their own volition or through an assisted scheme, or were forcibly removed. Distinctions within 'voluntary' return should be drawn to differentiate between 'spontaneous' and 'assisted' return, and between 'chosen' and 'compelled' return. While both 'spontaneous' and 'assisted' return can be either 'chosen' or 'compelled', 'spontaneous' return refers to the return of an irregular migrant who has done so of their own accord without intervention from the authorities, whereas 'assisted' return indicates that an irregular migrant has been encouraged or assisted to return by the authorities. In most cases of 'assisted' return, irregular migrants participate in an Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) program which provides them with a package of support to help them return home and reintegrate. These distinctions are critical, as Pennington and Balaram (2013) noted that irregular migrants who are compelled to leave, whether 'voluntarily' or through deportation, tend to have worse reintegration outcomes than those who returned without coercion. Return and reintegration policies and programs should not only encourage irregular migrants to return but enable them to return with the right mindset for reintegration. We now turn our attention to the theoretical foundation of the article.

Though a detailed survey of international migration theory is not possible here, a useful distinction may be made between three of the main approaches used in contemporary debates: the economic theory, the historical-structural approach, and migration systems theory (Castles & Miller, 2003, p.23). The economic theories of migration locate the economic reasons why people migrate. Propounded by an early scholar named Ravenstein (1885), such general theories emphasize the tendencies of people to move from densely to sparsely populated areas or from low to high-income areas or link migrations to fluctuations in

the business cycle. These approaches are often known as 'push and pull' theories because they perceive the causes of migration to lie in a combination of 'push factors', propelling them to leave areas of origin, and 'pull factors', attracting them to certain receiving countries. Push factors include demographic growth, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities, and political repression, while pull factors are demand for labor, availability of land, good economic opportunities, and political freedoms. This model is mainly found in neo-classical economics, which assumes that individuals maximize utility and individuals search for the country of residence that maximizes their well-being.

An alternative explanation for international migration known as the 'historical-structural approach' was provided in the 1970s. This theory of migration has its roots in Marxist political economy and stresses the unequal distribution of economic and political power in the world economy. Migration is therefore seen by this school of thought as a way of mobilizing cheap labor for capital. It perpetuated uneven development, exploiting the resources of the poor countries to make the rich even richer (Castles & Miller, 2003, p.25). For world systems theories, labor migration was one of the ways in which links of domination were forged between the core economies of capitalism and its underdeveloped periphery. Even though both the neo-classical perspective and the historical-structural approach provide us with insights to understand international migration; both theories only provide one-sided explanations of contemporary migrations. For instance, the neo-classical approach neglected the historical causes of movements and downplayed the role of the state, while the historical-functional approach paid more attention to the interest of capital while undermining the motivations and actions of individuals and groups involved. A new approach, which emerged out of these critiques, is the migration system theory.

The migration system theory attempts to include a wide range of disciplines and to cover all dimensions of the migration experience. A migration system consists of two or more countries that exchange migrants with each other. The tendency is to analyze regional migration

systems such as West Africa or Latin America and also link distant regions such as Western Europe, North America, and others. While drawing lessons from the tenets of other migration theories, for this article, the migration system theory is adopted because it provides explanations of both ends of the flow and studies all the linkages between the places concerned. As far as the migration systems approach is concerned, the migration of Nigerians to the UK for instance is linked to the British colonization of Nigeria. Microstructures are informal social networks developed by migrants to cope with migration and settlement. In line with this thinking, the family and community are crucial in migration networks. In some countries, Nigeria inclusive, migration decisions are made not by the individual alone, but by the family at large providing some support, including the financial resources needed for the trip. Family and community networks abroad also help the new migrant to settle down in the new country. Such links and networks serve as cultural capital as well as social capital and this helps in community formation. With this network formation, a migration industry may be formed consisting of recruitment organizations, lawyers, agents, smugglers, and other intermediaries. Evidence also suggests that such people may play the roles of both helpers and exploiters of migrants. Especially in situations of irregular migration, the exploitative role seems to predominate, as many migrants are being swindled out of their savings with the promise to smuggle them to Europe through the Maghreb with many stranded in Libya and several others dying either in the desert or at sea. These issues are further examined in the next section of the article.

International Migration And Challenges Of Irregular Migration By Nigerians

Countries are divided between those who want to find more legal pathways for migrants to travel and others who completely want to stop irregular migration to their countries. Contemporary international migration as is the case with the EU and America under President Donald Trump is increasingly taking the dimension of 'open' borders to migration or 'closed' borders to migration for some people and

countries. For example, for the EU, there is an openness of internal borders within the EU versus the restricted external border of the Schengen area (King, 2011). In July 2018, the United States Supreme Court ruled that President Donald Trump has the power to ban the entry of persons so long as he can provide convincing evidence that they pose a threat to the US security interest. In December 2017, the Supreme Court ruled on the third revised version of the travel ban against travelers from Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, saying it can go into full effect, pending legal challenges.

Though Chad has been removed from the list of banned countries, having provided sufficient evidence of cooperation with the US in information sharing on counter-terrorism, the implication of the recent Supreme Court ruling is that the travel ban against the other countries would subsist. A major implication of this anti-migration policy under Trump has been the separation of parents that are detained at the border from children including infants. Migration policies of this nature are complicit in the increasing trend of irregular migration. Since irregular migrants tend to avoid being registered, the estimates of the total number are far from accurate. The IOM (2008) estimated that there were about 20-30 million unauthorized migrants worldwide; out of which an estimated 11 million live in the United States and 7-8 million live in Europe. According to the IOM, the numbers of irregular African migrants in OECD countries are 1.5 million; the IOM also puts the number of irregular Nigerian migrants in OECD countries at 100,000. However, Adepoju and Wiel (2010) argued that the majority of Nigeria's irregular migrants are found in Western African countries and the Maghreb region. The route through the Maghreb to Europe for irregular Nigerian migrants has emerged as a thorny issue of concern.

The growing numbers of irregular Nigerian migrants are fueled by several factors some of which are demographic pressures of a rapidly growing young but unemployed labor force, poverty, distorted information on labor market conditions in the rich countries, and increasing professionalism of traffickers, scams, and bogus travel intermediaries with promises of passage to greener pastures abroad (Adepoju & Wiel, 2010). Due to worsening youth unemployment and

poverty, many opt for irregular migration in response to the pull of opportunity in rich countries and the push of abject poverty in poorer countries. The situation, in turn, has led to the intensification of the trafficking of migrants. Of course, migrants are confronted with strict immigration control measures and increased barriers to illegal entry into European countries and America. In desperation to enter these countries, irregular migrants adopt more daring, evasive, and dangerous methods to enter Europe and America. Because of tougher measures against irregular migration, most people are further pushed into the hands of smugglers, traffickers, and slavers, a situation which has increased their vulnerability.

Migration to Europe in particular is being driven by certain global issues. Europe's declining birth rate and the rapid aging of its native-born population are creating space for jobs. Meanwhile, the African population is expected to double in the next 30 years. Conditions of poverty, insecurity and increased conflicts, unemployment, and low living standards are propelling more African populations to migrate in search of greener pastures, especially in Europe. The EU responded to the increase in immigration by tightening its external border controls, especially on the Mediterranean coast.

Rather than enhancing regular migration, the introduction of tougher measures regarding migration pushed irregular migrants from African countries, including Nigeria, to use complex routes through the Maghreb to enter Europe. In the process, several countries including Niger, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, and Libya, amongst others, have become major transit migration countries, with migrants financing their journey. Irregular migrants from Nigeria often travel through these routes, and in particular through Agadez to Dirkou, in Niger, before crossing the Libyan border.

The journey to the 'promised land' in search of 'greener pastures' is often very hazardous, with people traveling on foot, buses, rafts, fishing boats, speed boats, trains, and lorries, and seeking to maneuver their way through bush paths, deserts, creeks, and high seas to avoid checkpoints and being caught by relevant authorities such as immigration and border police. The irregular migrants face huge

dangers along the route, including shipwrecks, dehydration and malnutrition, sexual exploitation, diseases, extortion, deaths, and in recent times, reports of human slavery in Libya (CNN, November 14, 2017). According to data provided by the IOM, 73,189 migrants and refugees reached European shores by sea between January and June 11, 2017. Even though the number is less compared total of 362, 753 people in 2016, the number of people that died before reaching Europe remains high (Africa Business, July 2017). A total number of 181,000 migrants arrived by boat in Italy in 2016 alone (Africa Business, July 2017).

Most of the migrants traveling through the sea are from Africa with their main countries of origin being Nigeria, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, and Senegal. According to the UN, Nigeria is a top source country - as of May 30th, 2017, accounting for 9,286 arrivals (Africa Business, July 2017). The increase of people that are crossing the dangerous Mediterranean Sea or deserts to travel to Europe results from a complex mix of reasons, including poverty, human rights abuses, and deteriorating security such as conflicts and terrorism. Libya has not only emerged as a major transit country for irregular migrants traveling towards Europe, but post-Gaddafi Libya has also emerged as a dangerous route for irregular migrants, several of whom have been subjected to dehumanizing conditions including slavery, a situation which has attracted the attention of the international community (The New York Times, November 19, 2017).

Trapped In Libya And Return Of Nigerian Migrants

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya became a state without a stable government. While a weak central government tries to administer some territories, the huge ungoverned spaces are left under the control of different militias. With the collapse of law enforcement and judicial system in the country, unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and indiscriminate attacks, are widespread. Post-Gaddafi Libya has also emerged as a breeding ground for gangs that kidnap, enslave, and extort money from migrants, and people-smugglers who force their human cargo onto unseaworthy vessels in the knowledge they may never arrive at their destination (Oxfam, 2017). Already, as a

result of the civil war, most Libyans are also internally displaced. In 2009, two years before the overthrow of the dictator Muammar Gaddafi, Libya hosted on its territory 2.5 million migrants, coming mostly from Africa (Toaldo, 2015). The migrants and refugees living in Libya face additional difficulties due to widespread racism and, for many, a lack of legal status. In the absence of a formal registration system in Libya, there is no exact figure for the number of refugees or migrants currently in Libya. The IOM estimates that more than 381,000 migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, are trapped in Libya (IOM, 2017, p.4). The situation has been further complicated by the EU's approach since 2015 which prioritized policies and measures designed to deter people from coming to Europe by sea, ensuring they do not leave Libya (Oxfam, 2017). The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa also shows how the EU is trying to keep migration at arm's length. By encouraging development money to be spent on measures to reduce mobility at the borders of African countries, the EU is effectively moving its borders so they are out of sight and out of mind. This is a move away from development aid's actual purpose, which is to improve opportunities in developing countries, combat poverty, and promote sustainable development.

In February 2017, an agreement was signed between the Italian and Libyan governments to reduce the number of people leaving Libya to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. The agreement, endorsed by EU heads of state and government at the informal Malta Summit, stipulated that migrants would be held in camps in Libya subsidized by the Italian government while awaiting repatriation to their country of origin. In the joint Malta Declaration signed on February 3, 2017, EU Heads of State laid out their approach to migration in the Central Mediterranean (Leghtas, 2017). Their priorities include: "training, equipment, and support to the Libyan coast guard and other relevant agencies;" "seeking to ensure adequate reception facilities and conditions in Libya for migrants, together with the UNHCR and IOM;" and "supporting IOM in significantly stepping up assisted voluntary return activities" (Leghtas, 2017, p.12). The EU also prioritized the development of local communities in Libya, working with, and supporting the Libyan

authorities and the authorities of neighboring countries towards checkmating the activities of smugglers. In essence, the Malta Declaration does not lay out solutions for people in need of international protection.

This agreement led to more detention facilities being set up in Libya to house migrants before being repatriated (Oxfam, 2017). Unable to cross Libya into Europe, most irregular migrants become trapped in Libya. Unable to continue their journey, most found themselves in detention camps or prisons. The agreement between the EU and Libya would see migrants being detained in Libya where they became vulnerable to violence and other forms of abuse. The inhuman condition that migrants are subjected to attract lots of attention in recent times. According to a report by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the United Nations Human Rights (UNHR), Office of the High Commissioner, migrants are held arbitrarily in detention centers run mostly by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) (UNSMIL & UNHR, 2016, p.1). They are brought to centers where there is no formal registration, no legal process, and no access to lawyers or judicial authorities. The report also states that conditions in detention are generally inhuman, severely overcrowded, and without adequate access to toilets or washing facilities, food, or clean water. In several detention centers visited by UNSMIL, migrants were observed in large numbers in a single room without even sufficient space to lie down (UNSMIL & UNHR, 2016). The situation is worst for migrants that found themselves in the territories controlled by the militants.

There have been increased reports of abuses of migrants held captive in detention camps. According to Oxfam, cases of torture, slave labor, sexual violence, and cells full of dead bodies are common (2017, p.3-5). The UNSMIL and UNHR also reported gross human rights violations and abuses against migrants in Libya including violations related to interception at sea, arbitrary detention and inhuman conditions of detention, torture and other ill-treatment, forced labor, and sexual violence against women and girls (UNSMIL & UNHR, 2016). The gory and horrifying experiences of migrants are further complicated by the practice of modern-day slavery in Libya - where

people are bought, sold, and resold by smugglers and slave traders (CNN, November 14, 2017). According to Senator Jamaal T. Bailey of the State of New York, the practice started before the death of Gaddafi but got worse after his death (Bailey, 2017). He also noted that most of the victims of slavery in Libya are migrants coming from countries such as Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, and Chad.

As stated earlier, the EU has been seriously concerned with the influx of irregular immigrants into its member countries. Accordingly, the EU has taken major steps to encourage irregular migrants to return to their countries of origin through 'stick' and 'carrot' approaches. While the stick approach seeks to restrict entry into its territories, and access to the labor market and public services within the EU, the carrot approach is designed as packages of support offered to migrants in the EU and those seeking to enter the EU, but barred or trapped in Libya, to agree to return home (Pennington & Balaram, 2013). This raises lots of questions about the degree of the 'voluntary' and 'assisted' nature of such return migration. Alongside policies to encourage irregular migrants to return, European states also forcibly return irregular migrants, a practice that raises its own issues and problems. For example, legal and human rights concerns have been raised over the use of indefinite detention and methods of forcible removal (ILPA 2012).

The population of Nigerian migrants living in Europe is significant. It is estimated that in 2009 there were 166,000 Nigerian people living in the UK, 35,000 living in Italy, and 38,000 living in Spain (OECD, 2013). Just as many are legally living in Europe, many others enter illegally. In recent years, there have been reports of an upturn in return migration most of whom are Nigerian migrants. Against the backdrop of the agreement between the Italian and Libyan governments as well as the Joint Malta Declaration signed on February 3, 2017, the Libyan government policies the central Mediterranean, arrests and detains migrants in Libya. The deteriorating political situation in Libya and other North African countries saw around 3,000 Nigerian migrants leave on planes chartered by the Nigerian government and the IOM (Osuagwu 2012). Our specific focus in this article shall be on the return of Nigerians from Libya. Recently, there

has been a return of many migrants trapped in Libya, with gory tales and accounts of experiences of their journey to irregularity and subsequent return.

Facilitating the return of Nigerians, the IOM, supported and funded by the EU has played a major role in this regard. The IOM initiated the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) program, which has given way over the years to programs comprising a reintegration support component known as Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). Since 2000, the AVRR has also been offered to migrants in some transit countries, such as Morocco, Niger, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen (Altai Consulting, 2017, p.1). Towards addressing the return and reintegration of migrants the EU established the EU Trust Fund project, which is being implemented in 14 African countries - Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, the Gambia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal (Africa Business, 2017). Funding has been extended by the EU under the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) for the EU–IOM Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants.

The initiative, which was launched in Nigeria on 20 July, has helped in the return of Nigerians, particularly those trapped in Libya. While CNN reported that over 8,800 individuals opted to voluntarily return home on repatriation flights organized by the IOM in 2017, according to the IOM, as of 14 February 2018, 7,012 stranded migrants were received (CNN, November 14, 2017; IOM, November 14, 2018). The migrants received comprised 52% from Edo, 17% from Delta, 5% from Ogun state, 4% from Imo state, 3% from Oyo state, and 19% from other Nigerians (IOM Nigeria, November 14, 2018). The main countries of transit were 91% Libya, 8% Niger, 1% Mali and less than 1% for Morocco, France, Poland, and Burkina Faso (IOM, November 14, 2018). Records also indicate that the bulk of returnees was from Libya. The IOM undertakes the return of migrants with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Nigeria, while reception and post-arrival assistance of migrants is provided in partnership with Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS), National Commission for Refugees Migration and IDPs (NCFRMI), National Emergency

Management Agency (NEMA), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and Nigerian Port Health Services (IOM Nigeria, November 14, 2018).

A study carried out by Altai Consulting for IOM in 2017 noted that the goal of AVRR is not only to facilitate the reintegration of returnees but also to ensure that it has a direct positive impact on the local community. As part of its efforts towards assisting Nigeria's efforts, under the project "Promoting Better Management of Migration in Nigeria" under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), the EU provided 20 million Euro project co-implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (IOM, 2017). IOM works in collaboration with both governmental and non-governmental and religious organizations to develop new partnerships on reintegration delivery within communities.

Key partners from the government include the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI). Return migration is an integral and significant element in the cycle of international migration. Research has shown that unless a return is followed by reintegration, the majority of returnees consider leaving again. Moreover, given the extent to which communities in countries of origin remain in touch with communities in European destination countries, if returnees have poor experiences after return, information will filter back to irregular migrants in Europe and further reinforce their resistance to returning.

Challenges And Prospects Of Reintegrating Returnee Migrants Into Nigerian Communities

According to the IOM Nigeria AVRR activities progress report, reintegration targeting is conducted based on the date of return of migrants, while at the same time giving priority to the most vulnerable groups. Vulnerable returning migrants are victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated migrant children, and theses with health issues, amongst others. Three forms of reintegration assistance are

provided by IOM Nigeria (IOM Nigeria, November 14, 2018, p.2). These include individual reintegration assistance, collective reintegration assistance, and community-based reintegration assistance. While individual integration is provided to vulnerable groups, collective reintegration assistance is provided to returning migrants as a group to establish a common project such as agricultural projects or open shops.

As of 31 January 2017, 151 Nigerian returnees had gone through the group formation phase for collective reintegration support. Generally, returnees are trained on concepts of cooperatives, value chains, and supply chains along with business skills training. Not less than 224 returnees also participated in the three-day training in Edo state in December 2017 and Lagos state in January and February 2018 (IOM, November 14, 2018, p.2). Community-based reintegration seeks to promote a participatory approach to the reintegration process by involving families and communities in the reintegration. By involving families and communities, social integration could also be achieved. IOM Nigerian has undertaken reintegration in partnership with government agencies and civil society organizations such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) to deliver business skills through training to returnees.

The return and reintegration of Nigerian migrants into their communities have not been without challenges. According to Altai Consulting (2017, p.44), the major challenge of integrating returnee migrants into their communities are as a result of the inability of concerned stakeholders such as the IOM, government, and others to meet the migrants' needs in terms of assisted voluntary return and reintegration. These needs are not only many but also varied and require huge funding, proper management, and commitment to the implementation of AVRR programs. For instance, regarding AVRR, IOM is currently facing some challenges in finding funding for reintegration assistance and managing donor requirements to limit the number of subsidies that can be offered to returnees.

Returnee migrants in Nigeria face challenges in their efforts at reintegrating into their communities. Many Nigerian returnees do not have jobs waiting for them upon their arrival or the possibility of

resuming income-earning activities in their countries of origin. For many Nigerian migrants, unemployment or lack of satisfaction with their income is the main factor underlying their departure. Although some returnees could find work in the sector in which they worked before their departures such as saloon/hairdressing business, welding, and fabrication, Okada (motorcycle riders), many had sold their businesses, land, properties, and borrowed from friends or family to finance their travels. A returnee from Libya, who was one of the 6,000 Nigerian migrants the IOM repatriated to Nigeria on a chartered flight from Libya after reports of endemic abuse and modern-day slavery, stated that she was jobless since her arrival in Lagos. The joy of returning to Nigeria was short-lived by the reality she escaped when she left the country in 2014 (Al Jazeera, 2018). Another returnee pointed out that: "I sold off some of my property and started the journey. According to the returnee, "I sold the property for ₦720,000 [$2,300] and I paid about ₦550,000 [$1,700] to the connection man I met through my brother, who is in Italy" (Al Jazeera, 2018).

The imperative of providing economic support to returnees cannot be over-emphasized. However, in the economic context of Nigeria, it is difficult for returnee migrants to find jobs. The unemployment rate is high, especially among young people. Another challenge to employment upon return is that majorities of Nigerian returnees have no qualifications or professional experience before migration and therefore have little hope of finding jobs. Under these circumstances, most returnees seek to create their own income-generating activity. To that end, they need start-up capital, which poses another challenge which is the funding of reintegration assistance.

Funding is a major challenge to reintegrating returnee migrants in Nigerian communities. IOM faces difficulties in mobilizing adequate funding for reintegration assistance, managing the demands of donors, restricting the operating costs of individual assistance, and encouraging the harmonization of the AVRR program (Altai Consulting, 2017, p.49). As a result, the amount of reintegration assistance that can be offered to returnees may be insufficient to launch a sustainable activity. Some Nigerian returnees complained that IOM and the Nigerian government

did not fulfill promises made to them to provide skill acquisition training and start-up capital for them (Al Jazeera, 2018). Sometimes donors may place more priorities and hence fund on the "return" components of the AVRR programs than on the "reintegration" components.

In December 2016, the European Union Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) launched the EU-IOM joint initiative in 14 African countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. In Nigeria, it was launched in May 2017 to help stranded migrants in Libya. As part of the reintegration and support program, IOM organized a workshop on business skills and cooperatives for returned migrants in Lagos state. Returnees were invited to Lagos and lodged in a hotel for the four-day training course. The main purpose of the reintegration, support, and this business skills training was to give returnees an alternative - to stay back and resolve one of the push factors, which is the economic aspect. IOM Nigeria budgeted for just 3,000 migrants, but the number of returnees in 2017 stood at 6,500. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for the program to be effective. For instance, though IOM Nigeria works with federal and state government agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in the reintegration of returnees, funding remains a huge challenge in achieving sustainable reintegration of all returnees.

Another challenge that migrants face in terms of reintegration is a lack of psychological support. The social and psychosocial dimensions are sometimes overlooked, downplayed, and given insufficient attention during the design of assisted reintegration programs, which focus instead on economic reintegration. Returning migrants sometimes find themselves in a psychological situation that requires support. Many have been sexually abused and tortured; accompanied by broken dreams, return shock, feeling of failure, or trauma related to travel or living conditions in the host country.

Without psychological support, it will be difficult for them then to concentrate on the creation of any business. In addition to the psychological challenges, a major challenge facing all return migrants is meeting the high expectations of relatives and community members. In some cases, returnees do not want to return to their communities because of expectations from family members, relatives, and other members of the community. There is also the problem of the negative perception of returnees. They are expected to display a higher standard of living than other residents in the community, in the absence of which they are seen as failures. They are also expected to make substantial and generous donations at social events such as weddings, funerals, church programs, and associational, and club meetings. Demands and expectation of returnees are not only unreasonable but also poses a huge challenge to their sustainable reintegration into communities of departure.

The challenges of reintegrating returnee migrants in Nigerian communities are surmountable. This requires an understanding of the needs of returnees as well as a comprehensive study of each community of origin of migrants for sustainable reintegration. Migrants' needs in terms of AVRR include, first, constant information, support, and advice on his/her rights in the country of return, reintegration program, design and implementation of return project, and other existing assistance measures and opportunities. Secondly, migrants urgently need economic reintegration upon return. Whether returnee Nigerian migrants wish to find a job or create their own income-generating activities, the returnees, that had not completed their education nor received vocational training, also need to strengthen their capacities. The beneficiaries of AVRR who wish to implement their businesses need training that is specific to their business sectors and will need advice for project management and activity development and, often, general educational support.

Returnee migrants do not only need economic integration, but also social integration. The availability of a social support network and the attitude of the local population towards returnees are critical factors for the sustainability of return. Migrants need to be accepted into their

communities and be able to rely on contacts to inform them and help them in difficult situations. Enlightenment programs need to be carried out through means of communication to various communities, not only on the dangers of irregular migration, but also on the need to accept, and socially reintegrate returnees into their communities. The shame and stigma caused by the return may also have an impact on the entire family of the migrant. Family members can be huge social capital in ensuring a successful reintegration. The family can provide, in addition to financial support, moral and psychological support to returnees, and help them re-establish a social circle.

Conclusion And Recommendations

In conclusion, the article has examined the complex issue of international migration by focusing more specifically on irregular migration and the challenges of reintegration of returnees into their communities. The article, which focused on Nigerian returnees, argued that developed countries of Europe and America are increasingly becoming apprehensive of the inflow of irregular migrants from Africa. While the United States under President Donald Trump has placed a ban on some countries from travelling to the USA, the EU reached an agreement with the Libyan authorities to prevent irregular migrants, most of whom are from Africa, from reaching Europe.

The situation has resulted in the detention of migrants in Libya in camps, cells, and prisons. We also examined the challenges faced by irregular migrants, especially the inhuman treatment of many migrants, including Nigerians trapped in Libya. Under its AVRR, supported by the EU, more than 7000 Nigerians have been returned; however, migrants experienced challenges in the areas of economic and social reintegration into their communities. The challenges do not only result from the funding of reintegration programs, but also stigmatization, difficulties in securing sustainable employment, threats from traffickers, and in some cases outright abandonment by the government. In conclusion, the article recommends that the Nigerian government and stakeholders address the root causes of irregular

migration and work closely with the Nigerian returnee migrants to ensure that they are properly reintegrated into their communities.

Adequate funding of AVRR programs by all stakeholders, which should go beyond donors to include federal, state, and local governments will go a long way in ensuring that such programs lead to sustainable reintegration of returnees. The Nigerian government, federal, state, and local, civil society organizations (CSO), and the media (electronic, print, and social), should continue to enlighten and educate Nigerians, particularly the youth, on the dangers of irregular migration.

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