

Migration in Edo State: Vocational Skill Acquisition Centers to the Rescue

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Abstract. This paper advocates that vocational skill acquisition centers can be a vital tool in curtailing the menace of migration in Edo state. It identifies certain factors such as lack of livelihood opportunities, unemployment, and poverty amongst others as some of the major triggers responsible for the seemingly irrepressible steady rise in the number of people seeking greener pastures abroad and amongst the West African Nations. However, Bernd and Alexandra (2018) stated that most of the trafficked women from Europe are believed to be from Edo state or its immediate neighborhood. A proactive action through Vocational skill acquisition centers in Edo state can help redeem the image of the state. This paper x-rays the line of relationship that exists between vocational skill acquisition centers and irregular migration trend in Edo State. And advocates that perhaps the most effective way to put a leash on the staggering trend of migration is to set up Vocational skill acquisition centers in nooks and crannies of Edo State as well as equip existing ones with programmes and modern sought-after skills that can make them relevant in their home country and empowered them to be self-reliant.

Keywords: Migration, Vocational Skill Acquisition Centers.

1. Introduction

While migration simply refers to the movement from one country or place to live and work in another, the movement of persons to other countries that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination is known as irregular migration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines irregular migration as the movement that takes place outside the regulatory

norms of the sending, transit and receiving country. It is an all-encompassing term used to describe all forms of movement into a foreign country without satisfying existing rules and regulations for such travel. Irregular migrants also refer to foreigners living/working in a foreign country without proper documentation and/or satisfying the regulations and laws for migration.

According to the report by IOM (2017), migration from Edo state and Nigeria in general to Europe has gained increased and extensive attention through popular discourse and media coverage over the last years. The report further gave an appearance of African migrants, based on three main assumptions: migration from the African continent is steadily increasing, it is mainly directed toward Europe, and its main drivers are poverty, lack of opportunities, and general violence. Over the years it has become a sort of normalized practice that a considerable number of Nigerians (an evident proportion from Edo State) escape year in year out through any possible means, route or conditions with the goal of migrating into Europe and other developed Nations as they run from economic, social and political problems inherent in developing nations like Nigeria (Mohammed 2016). Human trafficking, modern slavery, smuggling of drugs and all forms of socio-economic vices are some of the problems associated with irregular migration as illegal migrants are rather inclined to all manner of crimes just to survive or fulfill the demands of their sponsors. The singularities and havoc associated with this type of migration has maligned the image and values of Nigeria amongst the community of Nations.

According to Crawley, Düvell, Jones and Skleparis (2016), there are certain drivers that influence this trend of irregular migration and until these drivers are

identified and addressed, irregular migration from Edo State and Nigeria in general would continue to be a cause of worry. Crawley, et al (2016) further opined in a survey carried out with respondents along the Central Mediterranean route on the triggers why people decide to travel abroad, amongst the triggers identified are lack of livelihood opportunities, as well as the insecurities created by unemployment and poverty. This goes to show the level of relationship that exists between economic engagement for citizens and irregular migration. The failure of the state to create an industrialized society that can engage our youths and give them a sense of economic security and productivity is a motivational factor leading to irregular migration (Solesi, 2014). Unemployment and the shortage of vocational skills are some of the developmental problems faced in Edo State and this is one of the major reasons why youths are constantly trying to cross borders illegally in search of greener pastures. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019) the national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2000 and 2019 showed that the number of unemployed persons constitutes 31.1% in 2000 and 23.1% as at June 2019. In light of the shortage of industries, technological advancements and the staggering rate of unemployment, Solesi further posits that the key indices necessary for adequate national development, capacity for improvement and sustenance of human development must be predicated on development of competent skills. These key indices are monitored by the establishment of structures and processes for transferring of such skills and competencies from one group of workers to another and from one generation to another.

Vocational skills acquisition is the process of learning skills that one can make a career off. It involves the development of new skills that can enable one become economically self-reliant and gainfully employed. Ogundele, Akingbade, and Akinlabi (2012) stressed that the contribution of Vocational Skill Acquisition Centers and Training on unemployment reduction through youth empowerment and social welfare service improvement will be much significant if introduced at all levels of the state. This will help curtail the excessive ambitions to find greener pastures abroad. Akpama, Esang, Asor, and Osang (2011) observed that acquisition of vocational skills lead to significant reduction of poverty among young adults who participated in vocational skills acquisition programmes.

The skills acquisition centers monitored by government in Edo State include: Edo Food and

Agricultural Cluster (EDO-FAC) located at Ehor: A cluster that caters for everything agriculture. Edo Innovates Hub located at Institute of Continuing Education, Wire Road: A hub for ICT-based trainings. Edo Production Centre located at Magistrate Court, Benin-Sapele Road: A center to support growth of small and medium scale businesses. Edo Creative Hub; proposed to facilitate skills needed in the entertainment industry. In spite of these emergent responsibilities by State and Federal Government, the Human Development Index still shows a low level of development in the country (IOM, 2009). Based on the IOM report, the low Human Development Index value indicates that Edo State and Nigeria scores low in all the three dimensions of human development: that is, living a long and healthy life, being educated and having a decent standard of living.

2. Overview of the Trend of Irregular Migration in Nigeria

According to the report from IOM (2009) not less than 59,000 Nigerians were then in Northern African countries without valid travel documents. This number represented those who were in transit waiting for the opportunity to migrate to the West. In 2007 alone, almost 6,500 Nigerian citizens were apprehended in the European Union for illegal immigration. This number represented the largest population among the countries of the ECOWAS region. The large majority of apprehensions were carried out in Italy (2,523) and Spain (1,243). In the same year, 1,422 Nigerian citizens were removed from the European Union and as in the case of apprehension; removed Nigerians represented the largest number in the ECOWAS region (IOM 2009).

Irregular migrants come under two categories: those who enter the destination countries legally and overstay their visa, and those who leave Nigeria without proper travel documentation or entered the destination countries improperly. In addition, the categories of migrants who enter through the unofficial routes fall under the definition of irregular immigrants (IOM, 2009). In Nigeria figures indicate that more people are moving out of the country as emigrants than those coming in as immigrants. This trend has been confirmed in recent years and it appears it could further increase in the future.

3. Relationship between Migration and Economic Performance

Earlier in the 1950s emigration began with the elites and it was mainly for educational and administrative

purposes. This trend increased after Nigeria gained independence in 1966. These movements to the UK and the US were mostly people with professional skills leaving for school, work and business (Mberu & Pongou, 2010). However during the 1970s Nigeria experienced a substantial influx of foreigners which was caused by Nigeria's oil wealth after 1973 and many West-Africans seeking employment in Nigeria (De Haas and Flahaux, 2016). Conversely, in the early 1980s oil prices began to drop and the economy faced a downturn along with political repression and violence. As a consequence many of the labor migrants, about one million Ghanaians, were forced to leave Nigeria. The declining price of oil was what set Nigeria on a reverse gear from a highly sought after nation to a nation where citizens are scrambling to leave. This suggests that there is an incontrovertible relationship between economy of a nation and its migration trend. This period was described by Black, Kniveton, Skeldon, Coppard, Murata and Schmidt-Verkerk (2004) as Nigeria's "reverse migration transition" as the country was transforming from being a net immigration to a net emigration country. Ogundele et al (2012) suggests that Vocational skill acquisition centers have an important role in economic revival, one can therefore suspect that to undo this migration trend and set Nigeria back to a nation where citizens will prefer to live, work and invest, the role of vocational skill acquisition centers cannot be over emphasized.

4. Edo State in Focus

According to Bernd and Alexandra (2018) the Nigerian State of Edo is a primary source area for women and girls who are trafficked to Italy for sexual exploitation. Most of the trafficked women in Europe are believed to be from Edo state, with Italy being the most important destination for trafficked persons from Nigeria. Also, from a small survey sample of 65 Nigerians who did manage to make their way to Europe, half came from Edo State. Both the domestic and international press has also reported on the unusual place Benin City occupies in the migration corridor to Europe (Bernd and Alexandra, 2018). From January to September 2017, IOM "helped more than 2,400 stranded Nigerian migrant returnees from Libya . . . more than half of them are from Benin City or nearby villages in Edo state.

The status of Benin City as the single most important point of origin of Nigerian migrants dates back to the 1980s, when a number of Edo women were recruited for agricultural labor in Italy, but many ended up working as prostitutes (Okonofua, Ogbomwan, Alutu, Okop, and Aghahowa, 2004). Trafficking

networks continued to foster, as migration became a generic and normalized option in Benin City, propagating through family and other social networks. Traffickers in turn benefit from economies of scale, because Benin City's pool of potential migrants is large. It is a sizable city, relatively educated population, and home to one of the largest universities in the country, but lacks as much economic opportunities available in a city like Lagos.

4.1 Factors that influence Migration in Edo State

Regardless of the state, the same factors are always put forward to explain the reason for the departures:

- Economic factors; poverty, unemployment.
- Demographic factors; population growth, urban growth.
- Environmental factors; flood, erosion, drought.
- Political or religious unrest.

According to a research conducted for the ICMPD on the root causes of irregular immigration, it highlights an even more detailed aspect of the reasons underlying these factors. Emigration is not simply described as a search for better living conditions, but a means to escape the humiliation linked to the inability to provide or maintain a fulfilling lifestyle (Lucie and Nelly, 2018). Economic factors such as extreme poverty, or other form of economic insecurities create a major potential for migration, while certain circumstances help transform this potential to actual migrations. The Eurostat survey enabled a detailed analysis of the reasons behind irregular migration. Two major reasons that influenced migration were: economic reasons; improving jobs, better income, better standard of living. Family reasons; family reunification with successfully escaped members or facilitators. Other reasons include educational studies, fear of war or persecution, retirement, end of employment contracts, homesickness, expulsion. (Lucie and Nelly, 2018).

West Africans who would migrate if given the means and opportunity were far more likely to cite economic benefits as their primary motivation (better jobs and pay, and the opportunity to send money home) than to mention gaining personal freedom, furthering their education, or escaping insecurity. Focus groups held with West Africans headed to Europe via Libya confirmed the survey results that migrants are motivated primarily by quest for economic opportunities (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018). The number of Nigerians leaving the country for a better life abroad is alarming and this is not only

injurious to the image of Nigeria as a country but also to the migrants themselves; the xenophobic looting and killing of foreign nationals in South Africa in recent years and several reports by the BBC of Edo citizens and other West African migrants in Libya, Europe and far Asia who are captured, mutilated and sold as merchandise, a phenomenon that has been popularized as modern slavery are some of the problems associated with the failure of the West African States, Nigeria and Edo State especially to create a sense of economic security and purpose for citizens (Hegarty 2018). It is therefore reasonable to suspect that if migrants especially from Edo State had the means and opportunity in their hometowns, they would be less motivated to travel to other countries or continents, notwithstanding the perilous journey and opportunistic wrongdoings ahead.

5. Concept of Vocational Skill Acquisition

Skills are abilities that come from knowledge, practice and objective to do something well. **Vocation** is a type of work undertaken for utilitarian purpose such as the earning of a living or for national development. Vocational skill acquisition is therefore defined as the process of acquiring skills that don't require excessive mental intelligence for the purpose of becoming economically self-reliant (Foluke, 2013). It is a state of being able to do or decide a thing by oneself rather than depending on other people for help. Vocational skills include Barbing, Fashion Design, Automobile Repairs, Painting, Tiling, and Catering. Aside from these simple skills, we have another type which allows educated people to get the skills that would help them become experts in certain fields such as information technology, computer work (web design, software development, cyber-security), management and administration (project management, communication skills), media skills (cinematography, video editing, script writing, sound editing, performing arts).

Presently in Edo state, less than ten skill acquisition centers provide these trainings and various categories of persons have developed skills for employment in each of the centers for Edo residents and indigenes. Some include:

- Skill Acquisition Center Evbomodu Benin-Auchi Expressway.
- Pathons fashion academic Ihama Road GRA.
- Edo Production Centre located at Magistrate court Benin-Sapele Road.
- D.O.F Institute of Catering and Hotel Management, Upper Sakponba.

- Edo Food and Agricultural Cluster (EDO-FAC) located at Ehor.
- Edo Innovates Building at Institute of Continuing Education road, off Wire Road.

Okere (2018) in a news media reported that a total of 302 Libyan returnees recently graduated under skills development program organized by the Edo State Government. The Chairperson of the State task force against human trafficking, Prof. Yinka Omorogbe, explained that the two-week vocational training was part of efforts to ease the re-integration of the returnees into the society. She said, "Specifically, 163 of the returnees acquired skills in make-up, 92 in basic sewing, while 47 were trained in the art of bead making." The State Government also promised to assist the returnees who had successfully acquired skills in different trades to enable them set up small-scale businesses. One can argue that if these empowerment programs and open support were brought within the reach of these returnees before their journey began, they would have thought less about seeking for unsafe prospects elsewhere

6. Vocational and Technical Education

In Edo State, Vocational and Technical Education is offered in both Junior and Senior Secondary school levels. At the junior secondary level subjects offered are grouped under pre-vocational subjects. While at the senior secondary school level subjects offered are expected to conform to the general objectives of vocational and technical education in the country as contained in the National Policy on Education. Nigeria introduced a new senior secondary education model that emphasizes the skills as well as the academic development of learners. The skills component of the model is being pursued through the teaching and learning of vocational (trade-based) subjects developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Nigeria's agency for curriculum development. The trade subjects which are taught together with the academic oriented school subjects, allow students to acquire specific vocational skills in at least one trade area, based on students' choice. A fundamental gap was observed after five years of implementing the new education model. It revealed that, while students had learned the trades, they lacked the entrepreneurial skills and ingenuity to deploy the acquired skills for profitable economic ventures. In 2017, the curricula were reformed and a new trade and entrepreneurship curriculum was introduced to provide students with practical opportunities to acquire entrepreneurial competences alongside their trade-specific skills, by taking part in in-school

small-scale businesses ventures, to prepare them better for the world of work (International Bureau of Education, 2018).

7. Conclusion

The paper concluded that if the Federal Government aids the state in their development - on economic, social, political and environmental levels – through vocational skill acquisition policies, perhaps the citizens of Edo State will no longer be attracted by the idea of leaving: there will be no reason motivating the desire to leave one's country. Irregular migration would be eradicated.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- Seeking to create more opportunities from Vocational Skill Acquisition for the country's ever-growing population.
- Empowering the youth population with marketable skills by setting up vocational skill acquisition centers and engaging every member of the society with diverse skills.
- Taking deliberate steps in revitalizing the economy and utilizing its rich human and natural resources.
- Developing aid programs and policies to monitor the structures put forward.
- Vocational Skill Acquisition Centers and Programs should be centered on the eradication of poverty, through the promotion of economic growth, job creation and promotion of good governance and human rights.
- Evenly distribution of these centers across the state to reach out to even those settled beyond the state capital, as these ones are identified as the most vulnerable.

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