

YOUTH MIGRATIONS FROM AFRICA: ADDRESSING CAUSES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

OMOKAGBO EMMANUEL MARABE

"Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family", Ban Ki-Moon, a former United Nations Secretary General once stated. Migration is as old as man. Humans have always moved from one place to another in search of food, water, or better living conditions. To further support this, Ellsworth Huntington once stated that, "history in its broadest aspect is a record of man's migrations from one environment to another."

Africa has suffered from the problems of migration, from the era of forced emigration (transatlantic slave trade) to the era of willful emigration to Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. This prompted Sam Akaki in the Financial Times of July 13, 2017 to refer to African migration as the biggest crisis of our time and I am forced to partially agree with him. The problem of migration in

Africa's economic condition has become so bad that several youths have resorted to illegal ways of crossing the African border into Europe. These include journeys across deserts and oceans where many lives have been lost over the years. The loss of lives which ought to serve as a deterrent to youths trying to ply such routes have ironically served as a catalyst, propelling more youths to their early graves. It will therefore not be inappropriate to refer to the problem of migration as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the society and as a result, it has to be nipped in its bud.

One of the major causes of youth migration in Africa is the search for knowledge and better

education. The situation of the educational system in Africa has become so bad that students jump at any opportunity to study outside the continent. Take Nigeria for instance, the standard of education over the years has been dropping at an alarming rate and the government seems to be less concerned about it. Few private universities that offer quality education are a no-go-area for average Nigerians because of the exorbitant and sky-high fees they charge students. In fact, several images and videos have surfaced on social media describing the plight of some African students in their various school environments.

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This include images of pupils sitting on bare floor to sitting under dilapidated roofs, sitting in classroom with domestic animals, and sometimes, students sit under trees to receive instructions. Tertiary institutions do not fare any better as most lecturers use outdated teaching aids and equipment which government and school administrators are not willing to maintain or update.

Another cause of youth migration is internal conflicts and wars, although this is not limited to youths alone. Conflicts in North and South Sudan for instance have resulted in loss of lives and properties, and it is one of the reasons for youth migration in the region. Also, the problem of Boko Haram insurgents in the north-eastern part of Nigeria has prompted people to abandon their homes and seek asylum in Western countries because of the increasing maiming, kidnappings, and killings in the area.

The list of internal wars, conflicts and insurgency in Africa is endless and this has served as one of the reasons causing youth migration in the continent.

Unemployment is another cause of youth migration in Africa. Whitney M. Young once stated that, "the hardest work in the world is being out of work" and William Beveridge also stated that, "unemployment is like a headache or a high temperature – unpleasant and exhausting but not carrying in itself any explanation of its cause". The rising rate of unemployment in Africa, the low per capita income (PCI) in most country, and the lack of entrepreneurship spirit in African youths have triggered youth migration over the years. Also, the number of youths losing their jobs on a regular basis is quite alarming. This gets worse as governments in African countries are not trying to create job opportunities but instead, retrenching and relieving some people of their jobs.

The private sector is not left out as they also downsize the number of their staff which has for long resulted in growing unemployment. As Vladimir Zhirinovskiy said, "we must force the government to stop the bird migration. We must shoot all birds, field all our men and troops... and force migratory birds to stay where they are". To tackle this problem of youth migration, the first step is to accept that there is indeed a problem.

Once we accept it, we can then begin working towards the solutions. Improving the standard of education at all levels will go a long way to reduce the rising rate of youth migrations from Africa. In this regard, governments, individuals, and private sector all have roles to play. African governments can start by renovating already existing schools and classrooms instead of building new ones. Apart from renovation, government should endeavor to furnish such schools with modern laboratory and workshop equipment, computers and any other educational materials that will boost academic excellence among youths. If need be, teaching staff should be sent abroad for training.

The private sector also can help in this regard by reducing the tuition fees of privately-owned educational institutions, hence making them affordable for a larger population. Individuals,

mainly lecturers and teachers, can also play their part by upgrading their lecture materials and teaching methods. Extortion of students through sales of unnecessary handouts and materials should also be discouraged while active learning should be as interesting and interactive as possible in these educational institutions.

Developed countries also can play a role in this regard, not only by awarding scholarships to youths in order to study in their educational institutions, but also by giving educational aids and grants to developing countries in Africa. They can also help by building educational institutions in these countries, making such institutions affordable through low tuition fees and scholarships to deserving students. Peace, some scholars argue, is relative.

Man, as a social animal engages in conflict, either peaceful or otherwise. Peaceful coexistence can also serve to reduce the rate of youth migrations from Africa. Instead of

fighting more wars, there is always an option of dialogue which is a more potent conflict resolution technique than violence. War only breeds more wars as violence begets more violence, which only serves to continue the cycle of violence.

The international community, regional organizations, national

governments and individuals all have roles to play in this regard. The United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional organizations should do more in ensuring peace in their respective capacities. Governments should also do more to promote democracy and peaceful resolution of conflicts instead of using violence and force. Individuals should lead by examples by living peacefully and in case of any conflict, approach the appropriate channels such as the court for redress instead of violence.

According to William Barrett, "hunger is not the worst feature of unemployment, idleness is." In solving the problem of unemployment and

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youth migration, work has to begin from the basic building block of the society, that is, the people. The Holy Bible supports the notion that, "there is no food for a lazy man" and in this regard, idleness and laziness on the part of individual youth should be discouraged as much as possible. Instead of spending money on luxurious lifestyles and unnecessary expenditures, governments should channel financial resources into providing jobs for their citizens. The private sector on the other hand should provide a leveled playing ground for job seekers instead of putting up unrealistic job requirements to deter youths. They should also avoid putting up contracts that can best be described as "selling of one's soul" with employees.

The individuals and citizens on the other hand should be encouraged to inculcate and instill the spirit of entrepreneurship into themselves. Instead of waiting on the government and private sector to provide jobs, they should make attempt to get short-term loans or credit facilities from reliable financial institutions to start-up a business of their own. Government and financial institutions should also make these loans and grants available to individuals and entrepreneurs who are willing to think outside the box.

African youths often migrate under the delusion and misguided belief that life is better and rosy abroad. This belief is further supported by what they see on social media and television. These migrants most times get disappointed when they arrive their destinations only to find out that it is not so, as they are met with prejudice and racism. Some of these migrants sometimes end up with demeaning jobs in order to make ends meet.

To solve the problem of youth migration from Africa, everyone has a role to play. The individuals have their roles to play as well as the government, the private sector, developed countries and, international organizations. But we must start from somewhere – that is, at the individual level since people are the building block of any society. Once we can influence the mindsets of individuals positively, we can be hopeful that the solution to this problem is not farfetched.

I will conclude by quoting Ellsworth Huntington who asserts that, "although mountains may guide migrations, the plains are the regions where people dwell in greatest numbers". In this regard, if we can do away with the mountains (unemployment, poverty, conflicts and so on) guiding the migrations, we will be able to get plains (better environment and society) where the youths and every other person will dwell in great numbers and not think about migration.

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Omokagbo Emmanuel Marabe
Electrical/Electronic Engineering
University of Benin