

YOUTH MIGRATION FROM AFRICA: ADDRESSING CAUSES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

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Africa is unarguably a blessed continent, not only with natural resources, but with a teeming population of able and vibrant youths. The United Nations describes Africa as the youngest population in the world because over 200 million people in Africa are aged between 15 and 24 years. The African Union Commission agrees with this fact by stating that 65 percent of the total population in Africa is aged below 35 years and 35 percent is between 15 and 35 years. The African Youth Charter (AYC) defines a youth in 2006 as, "a person between the age of 15 and 35 years". Some scholars have argued that the phase within this age range is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

That the youth population as a blessing to Africa is not in doubt. That is, the role of youths in fostering Africa's development cannot be ignored. In fact, Africa's future prosperity rests in the hands of the youth and without them, there will be no future for Africa because our aims and objectives as a continent can never be realized when the youths are neglected. The youths in many ways, hold and are the future and hope of Africa. Unfortunately, however, the enthusiasm, vim, edge, verve, and dynamism of African youths, which constitute the continent's asset, are fast depreciating. And so, the question is: what is the social vice that is threatening the bright promising future of Africa? While there are many vices that are clog in the wheel of Africa's development, prominent among them is the issue of youth migration.

Migration has been defined as the movement of persons across borders with the intention of settling permanently or temporary in the new location. That movement of persons

across borders of the world has now become a regular occurrence among Africans. The former United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon noted that "of the annual total of 214 million international migrants, young people constitute more than ten percent (10%), yet little is known about their struggles and experience." It is disheartening to know that majority of this migrants from Africa are youths in search of greener pastures. Dishonorably, this exodus is being facilitated through fake documents, forgery of passports and visas, false asylum claims, and bogus marriages.

In Africa, young people migrate for countless reasons. Foremost in this regard is the issue of wide-spread poverty and weak regional economies. In recent years, the youths have been pushed to the edge as unemployment and underemployment continue to worsen. Of Africa's 420 million youths, one-third is unemployed, another third is vulnerably employed, and only one in six has a steady paid job. Therefore, in a quest for employment

opportunities, better living conditions, and a quality life which successive administrations in their local government areas have failed to provide, many young men and women continue to leave underdeveloped and developing states in Africa to embark on journeys which for many of them tragically end in the Mediterranean Sea or Sahara Desert.

Most young Africans migrate with the major aim of increasing their earning power and the number of such people increases daily. The economic situation of many African countries, their increasing population as well as the inability of political leaders to provide basic infrastructure for job and wealth creation,

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continue to create migratory pressure for young Africans.

Another motivating factor for this increase in youth migration has been the issue of insecurity, especially in the areas affected by conflict, civil war, and terrorism. Africa has been classified as one of the most volatile continents across the globe with the number of Internally Dispersed Persons increasing on daily basis as a result of violence and terrorism in various African states. Therefore, those who feel their lives are being threatened would see migration, legal or illegal, as an option.

In addition to the above, is the issue of bad governance. Over the years, African political leaders have paid little or no attention to the interest and welfare of the youths. They are constantly being employed by unscrupulous politicians as tools and stooges, and subjected to selfish political tricks and manipulations. Rather than being considered as partners in development, some of these youths are used by politicians as means to their selfish political end. There is such a massive gap between Africa's young majority and their leaders; the average age of an African president is 62, while the median age of Africa population is 19.5. Ostensibly, this is the world's largest age gap between governors and the governed, and it raises concern about how well decision-makers understand the needs and aspirations of young people.

Furthermore, greed and laziness on the part of some African youths cannot be ruled out as some young men and women want everything on a platter of gold and unwilling to diligently engage their skills and intellect for a meaningful living. To this set of persons, migration serves as an alternative to a life of responsibility, hard work, and diligence. More so, the mindset of some youth is an issue due to poor orientation about western countries. Many African young men and women believe they can only make it abroad and will therefore do everything to leave their country. They believe life is better and rosier in developed countries

and that money can be made quickly in places like the United States of America and in Europe. Unfortunately, most of these uninformed migrants are disappointed when they arrived at their destination.

The consequent challenges and impact of this migration on youths, their family, community, country, and continent cannot be overemphasized. While only a small fraction occasionally reaches their destinations - where they face disappointment and frustration, anecdotal evidence suggests that some of them usually perish on the way. From the accounts of some of the returnees, many who made it to Europe, or the Middle East are usually forced into prostitution, slavery, and even used as organ donors while those who attempt to resist are either beaten, starved or subjected to other forms of inhuman treatment. Also, discrimination against youth migrants by

host communities is another problem. Furthermore, a high rate of youth migration leads to brain drain - a scarcity of skilled workers currently affecting the quality of African nations' workforce and causing a huge economic setback for the continent.

In recent years, migratory pressure has increased and is expected to intensify in the coming decades,

given the widening gap in wages between developed and developing countries, and their differing demography. This will in turn lead to an increase in the exposure of young people to exploitation, trafficking, and discrimination in their bid to migrate. It is an irony that during the transatlantic slave trade which lasted from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, African agents of Europe slave traders hunted men and women and forcibly sold them off to be transported across the Atlantic to the New World. In the present however, Africans are willingly subjecting themselves as fodders and merchandise for enslavement across the Mediterranean.

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nation's most energetic, feisty, and entrepreneurial citizens. Often, they contribute remarkably to the development of their host countries while their original countries stagger in underdevelopment and backwardness. However, an intelligent question at this time will be: what are the possible solutions to this menace of youth migrations in Africa? Several measures can be introduced to curtail the challenges of migration from Africa. However, we must first realize that solutions to Africa migration are in Africa.

Most people migrate from Africa to pursue economic opportunities; hence, closing economic loopholes will, in the long-run, address the migration issue. African Union (AU) and its member states should create an economic and social climate where Africans can peacefully live and thrive at home. The AU needs to actively take steps to bring population growth to a sustainable level and promote the rule of law which will protect not only their people, but also foreign investors who have the means and the capacity to create jobs.

The youths should be oriented on the dangers of embarking on such suicide missions, and encouraged to desist from get-rich-quick syndrome by engaging in meaningful endeavors. There is a dire need for governments to set in motion attitude transformation programs as part of their national development strategy. Without this, an attitude crisis will be another major driving force for illegal migration to the developed countries. It is therefore a crucial step forward to re-orient and re-educate average African youths to make them realize that they can realize their potentials and dreams in Africa and that they are not necessarily poorer than their contemporaries in the countries they have intention of migrating to.

Furthermore, African youths should be carried along in governance and not relegated to the background. This is why the 'Not Too Young to Run' bill, which was passed into law recently in Nigeria, is a welcomed development. Other nations of Africa should follow suit. Other long-term solutions to mass exodus in Africa include diversification of our economy, industrialization, increasing productivity, quality healthcare services, quality education, and good infrastructure.

In conclusion, the AU and its member states must recognize that the wealth and peace that are attracting African migrants to Europe and other continents did not occur by accident, but rather, a sheer result of hard work, personal and collective sacrifices, and above all, the rule of law which protects everyone without fear or favor. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Africa confronts the fierce urgency of now, there is such a thing as being too late.

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