

Migration and Development of the Source Community: A Study of Akwa Ibom State Migrants at Port Harcourt, Rivers State

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Abstract

For many decades, migration theorists created the impression that the incidence of migration on source regions only constitutes itself into imperatives that undermine progress and development in the regions. This position presents a single sided view of the phenomenon where only the ugly picture of dearth of labour at source regions and the attendant abandonment of agriculture and agro-allied activities have aggravated the conditions of poverty and under-development in these regions. The study examines the factors responsible for an unrestrained movement of Akwa Ibom State indigenes to Port Harcourt, in Rivers State and its impact on the source region. An integrated theoretical approach combining the micro-level and macro-level models was adopted. Using the chi-square statistics, findings show that migrants make substantial remittances and other contributions for the development of the source region.

Keywords: *Migration, Development, Source region, Destination region.*

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Background to the Study

Incidence of migration has often been felt from the weight of social problems created by its occurrence both at source and destination regions. As widely believed, and obviously so, the source region loses the most needed labour force required for economic production and distribution, while the destination region is bloated with increasingly high population. Though this increasing population may ensue in infrastructural crises due to increased pressure on existing social services such as water supply, transportation, health services and general sanitation and housing; followed by such crimes as armed robbery, kidnappings, and other forms of criminalities (Ekong, 2010), it serves as a source of cheap labour supply for the urban economy.

Overtime, rural-urban migration theorists have been concerned about the dilemma of city life on the one hand; which is triggered by uncertainties due to high unemployment among urban populations, and rural labour depletion on the other, which supposedly sink the source region into economic impoverishment. For these reasons, rural-urban migrations have often been presented with negative consequences.

It is now known that considering only the attendant problems of migration without corresponding consideration of the alternative effects; present a lopsided view of migration outcomes, especially as explanation on the phenomenon is diffused depending on type and pattern of migration, age of migrants and reason(s) for movement.

Discussing reasons for movement in terms of causation, Ekong (2010), argued that absolute causative factors are difficult to establish, therefore correlates of migration rather than absolute causes place theorists on a more comfortable platform in their effort to explicate the concept. In Akwa Ibom State and indeed Nigeria, the dominant form of movement is rural-urban. This agrees with the postulation (Short, 1982) that the dominance of rural-urban migration in a society is a pointer to a case of developing economy, stressing that this migration type is the dominant form of movement in third world countries in the present time, just as it was in the present developed worlds during the 19th century.

Migration can be classified into two categories, namely, voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary migration refers to movement borne out of internal free Will, while involuntary migration refers to movement borne out of external compulsion. Referring to the study by Ekpenyong, Ukpong-Umo (2013), averred that during pre-colonial period, wars, trade in human cargo and political upheavals were some of the most common factors that propel involuntary mass population movements, whereas, voluntary movements were provoked mostly by the desire for better hunting grounds, better grazing fields for cattle, better farmlands and desire for long distance trade.

All over the world, migration is induced by widespread economic and non-economic factors which are often grouped as either push or pull factor in the migration theories (Udo, cited in Ukpong-Umo, 2013). In his critique, Ekong (2010), objects to the application of 'push' and 'pull' factors to represent situations where certain undesirable factors tend to thrust people away from their original localities and residence, while other more favourable conditions

existing elsewhere are so attractive as to induce people to move into it respectively. For him, such classifications should be avoided because of the difficulty in aligning and distinguishing between 'push' and 'pull' factors especially where these factors interwove and juxtapose. Stressing further, he emphasized that the concepts are problematic in that what they are meant to describe at any point in time tend to have different effects on people within the same geographical location thereby suggesting that perhaps the characteristics of the individual are more important correlates in migration decision than external pull and push factors per se (Ekong, 2010). He concludes that the concepts also imply an indirect comparison of the source and destination areas on the basis of just a few variables.

Viewing from the perspective of labour mobility, Ukpong-Umo (2020), and Ani (2002), point at the economic imbalance existing between places and the resultant asset inequality as some causative factors to any form of migration. Going by this argument, most of those who move are believed to have been induced by the opportunities that the urban cities hold particularly for the unemployed. Ekpenyong (2010) and Ekong (2010), have aligned several factors that thrust people out of source to destination regions. These include denial of local assets, inaccessibility to water and other natural resources, lack of social and infrastructural facilities, non-availability of raw materials, soil infertility, erosion, pests, drought, flood, witchcraft, secret cult and other obnoxious socio-cultural practices. Particularly, Ekong (2010), while pointing to "adverse physical conditions" in the environment as reasons for out-migration recalled the influx of aliens from Niger Republic into Nigeria in the 1970s, asserting that it was partly due to the Sahelian drought. Attention is also drawn to parts of Udi, Nsukka and Awka in present Anambra and Enugu States where the problem of soil infertility was aggravated by gully erosion which destroyed houses and farms to the extent that some villages particularly in Awka area had to be abandoned under the Augulu soil conservation scheme in 1945. Those affected by the disaster had to migrate to other parts of the country to establish as tenant farmers.

Accordingly, Farley (1990) pointed to several other factors that have been identified as constituting themselves to pull people out of source to destination region. These include, opportunity to earn ready cash income at destination region, availability of social and infrastructural amenities such as potable water, good road network, availability of safe and comfortable transport services and recreation centres. It is these social amenities that Giddens (1986), referred to as economic stimulants, which according to him attract migrants.

Studies have shown that migration is not aimless or haphazard, but systematic (Ekong, 2010; Aziz, 1978). This purposeful and directional movement may be understood when the type and pattern of movement is obvious. Therefore, migration may be rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-rural or urban-urban. Short (1982) observed that migration in most third world countries tilt toward rural-urban than other directions. On migration patterns, Bovenkerk's study (as cited in Ekong, 2010) distinguished six major forms that movement of people may assume, and these include;

1. Emigration – describes movement of people from their place of origin to settle in other places

2. Return migration – describes movement of people back to their places of origin after emigration for the first time.
3. Transilient migration – describes movement of people from the first destination on to a second.
4. Re – emigration – describes when people immigrate once again to the same destination after having returned for the first time.
5. Second time emigration – describes when people immigrate to a new destination after having returned.
6. Circulation – describes when the to and from movements between two places include more than one return.

Akpan (2000), observed a trending decline in rural community over time, resulting from emigration. This decline in rural community has been a recurrent theme in theories of society since the pre-modern era. During the immediate post independent period in Nigeria, a general loss of rural labour due largely to an unrestrained mass population movement to various destination regions was witnessed (Akpan, 2000). This may have been a result of the post-war effect due to the reconstruction, rehabilitation and restructuring policy of the federal government which only benefited towns and cities at the time. Between 1975 and 1995, an estimated 17,000 adults (mostly youth) is said to have left the rural area now known as Akwa Ibom State (Akpan, 2000), to seek economic fortunes in various cities across Nigeria.

He further stressed that this continuous and increasing massive movement brought about an increasing sense of isolation due to loss of kin group members; neighbourhood and other acquaintances. The mass movement was so pronounced that within a short period of time, some rural areas of the area now known as Akwa Ibom State became unusually deserted, leading to a depletion of rural labour force ensuing in skyrocketing cost of labour, the abandonment of agricultural sector and the attendant overall dwindling of rural economic fortunes that aggravate the already growing conditions of poverty and underdevelopment in the region. Based on the above concerns, the study aims at examining the factors responsible for an unrestrained movement of Akwa Ibom State indigenes to Port Harcourt, in Rivers State and its impact on the source region.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts an integrated approach that combines the micro-level and macro-level models in explaining the Akwa Ibom State – Port Harcourt migration trend. Supporting the integrated approach, Peil and Sada (1984), observed that the integrated approach to the theory of migration provides the most adequate explanation because widespread causation variables render single theory inadequate. The micro-level model is an individual motivation model and argues that migration results from the rational decision on the part of individuals to maximize alternatives (Haris, cited in Ekpenyong, 2010). Here, the individual is considered to be rationally conscious and therefore weighs his/her qualifications and capabilities and the opportunities that are available at the source region against what he/she is likely to find at the destination region. If those of the destination are favourable, he/she then migrates. Therefore, it is based on individual choice.

Despite criticisms that individual decisions are not always rational, if they were, the individual would have been aware of the difficulties including possible unemployment at destination region, and would have been deterred, Haris, cited in Ekpenyong (2010), argued that migration is like playing a lottery. The individual knows he/she may remain unemployed for some time at the destination region, but also knows that one day a job will be found and when found, he/she will be more than compensated for that long period of unemployment. According to this view, during that period of unemployment, the migrant can make a living from the informal sector of the economy.

On the other hand, the macro-level model does not place 'choice' as a Free-Will decision to migrate, but rather it is the structural changes in society that place the said choice within a socio-economic context, combining push and pull factors. This model argues that inequalities between regions is the result of capitalist development, and that in capitalists' development, some regions are made to advance much ahead of others while those other regions remain basically underdeveloped. Labour will always flow from the less developed to better developed regions to take advantage of existing opportunities (Ekpenyong, 2010).

Using this model, Samir Amin in South Africa observed that those regions that send out migrants (vibrant part of their labour force) will perpetually remain underdeveloped. Joel Gregory in Burkina Faso (formally Upper Volta) made the same observation as people were leaving Burkina Faso during dry seasons for Ghanaian cocoa farms to make quick money and return to Burkina Faso at the onset of rain for farming (Amin, 1974). He also argued that the incorporation of a region to the status of labour reserve completely deprive migrants of any choice. From all indications, the imperial structural features that hitherto pervaded the whole of Africa and some other continents well into the 20th century presently unfold consequences that strengthen this incorporation. The embers of the imperial woodfuel of old eventually is still burning and exerting extant influence in most former colonies especially those of third world countries. This is evident in contemporary migration channels which are means where such influences become covertly exerted.

Contemporary migration channels are structures of society that serves as routes or avenues through which migrants leap away into various destination regions. Destination regions are often made to be attractive particularly to secure cheap labour, and migrants are often left with no option of choice, but to grab whatever stares at them as an opportunity to raise their social status. In contemporary times, many Nigerians as well as citizens of other less developed economies travel to Europe and America through existing migration channels like lottery, foreign university admission opportunities, deployment into foreign football clubs, and other seemingly fantastic and irresistible opportunities. Emigrants to these countries are not just making free will choice, but merely responding to structural imperatives in the areas where these opportunities exist.

However, as cited in Ekpenyong (2010), Mabogunje and Peil disagree with the conclusion that areas that send out migrants can never progress. Margaret Peil for example argued that this conclusion loses sight of the remittances which migrants send back to source regions which have been used to put the younger generation through schools and to construct better houses in

the village. Mabogunje on his part observed that rural migrants in the city bound themselves into associations. These associations collect money from members in terms of dues and such money are used in developing the rural areas by embarking on projects such as building classroom blocks in schools, health centres, bridges, roads, market-places and town halls (Ekpenyong, 2010). These have gone a long way in transforming rural areas. Several researches have shown the role assumed by return migrants in the development of the rural area through intellectual, financial and moral inputs. Migrants who left home continue to see themselves as part of the community and so they make material contribution as well as ideas that reform their communities.

Findings/Discussions

Table 1: Respondents' Reasons for Migrating

| Reasons for Migrating | No. of Respondents | % |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Acquiring a job for the first time | 210 | 55.3 |
| Improve income | 106 | 27.8 |
| Flee violence | 23 | 6.0 |
| Obnoxious cultural practices | 29 | 7.6 |
| Witchcraftcy | 12 | 3.0 |
| Total | 380 | 100 |

On the research question - What factor(s) are responsible for the persistent massive movement of Akwa Ibom State migrants to Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the above responses were obtained. An analysis of responses confirm that the movement was in the most part prompted by economic reasons since responses from most respondents are in one way or the other connected to a search for better economic fortunes as major reason for moving. However, about 64 of them (17%), had subsidiary and /or ostensible reasons as causes, including communal clashes, obnoxious cultural practices and witchcraftcy.

Table 2: Frequency of Respondents' Contribution toward Source Region Development

| Respondents Contribution frequency | No. of Respondents (f) | % |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Very regular (monthly) | 150 | 39.4 |
| Regular (bi-monthly) | 88 | 23.2 |
| Not at all | 142 | 37.4 |
| Total | 380 | 100 |

All respondents expressed desire to support source region development through regular remittances, but due to financial challenges however, 238 out of a total of 380 respondents, constituting about 63%, (Table 2) have regularly made contributions and also ensure their remittances are forwarded through the appropriate channels for the development of source community projects.

Some of the projects are targeted exclusively at youth development such as organising of football tournaments with cash awards for winners and entrepreneurship training. Others are

general, and include; provision of water facility and electricity, construction of family residence, among others. Apart from the contribution to association Dues meant for community-wide development, individuals make regular remittances to families and friends; as well as church organizations for upkeep.

Table 3: Number of projects funded by migrants' contributions across the 3 senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State for a- ten year period

| Facility | Number and Location by Senatorial District | | | Total |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| | Akwa Ibom North West | Akwa Ibom North East | Akwa Ibom South | |
| Water bore hole | 25 | 18 | 20 | 63 |
| Electricity | 13 | 11 | 21 | 45 |
| Town Halls | 13 | 15 | 19 | 47 |
| Entrepreneurship programmes | 12 | 12 | 12 | 36 |
| Road/culvert construction | 05 | 07 | 09 | 21 |
| Football competition | 09 | 09 | 09 | 27 |
| Total | 77 | 61 | 90 | 228 |

A total of 228 projects spread over a period of ten (10) years were funded by migrants' remittances. Some of these projects were co-funded with migrants' remittances from other locations such as Lagos, Calabar, Enugu, Kano and Abuja. Most migrants preferred Port Harcourt because parents, friends and other acquaintances resided there earlier.

Summary

The migration of Akwa Ibom State indigenes to Port Harcourt in Rivers State is rural-urban; and in the most part, voluntary. However, more than half of the migrants' population resided at various adjoining rural and sub-urban areas, while working at the city of Port Harcourt.

The study explores the socio-economic conditions of Akwa Ibom State migrants at Port Harcourt, the contributions of these migrants toward the development of the source region and the total effect of these movements on the economy of the source region. Obviously, the harsh conditions in the rural areas, posed partly by the inability of the agricultural sector to provide a corresponding means of livelihood for the rapidly growing population that is tied to the agrarian sector contribute in no mean measure to this movement. Consequences of this movement at the source region include; rising cost of rural labour, rising cost of food stuffs, food crises and starvation among others.

Conclusion

The study confirms that despite attendant social problems at both ends of the divide; including rising cost of rural labour, rising cost of food stuffs due to food shortages, infrastructure breakdown occasioned by bloated population pressure on limited urban facilities and recurrent criminalities among others. Rural-urban migration has potentials for developing the source as well as destination regions, provided it is pursued deliberately and consciously with objectivity and orderly programmes. The source region derives benefit

through mobilization of remittances from migrants for investment and development of material and human capital which is an index to rural social transformation. At the destination region, increased influx of people makes available cheap labour for local business, creates market for local goods and services, as well as opportunity for additional income for the urbanite through rent, levies, land-lease and the informal sector economy.

Local government agencies may also mobilize revenues from visitors through their various town unions and associations and other models for the development of social facilities in the area. The study has brought to fore, a nomenclature gap in migration studies. This is in regards to the status of children and young adults born to migrants at destination region. These category of people at destination areas are neither migrants (as they have not moved anywhere themselves) nor indigenes, since there is no constitutional backing. In other words, they have acquired neither migrant nor indigenous status. The study examines factors responsible for the unrestrained movement of Akwa Ibom State indigenes to Port Harcourt, Rivers State and their contributions to the development of the source region.

An integrated theoretical approach combining the micro-level and macro-level models was adopted. Findings show that migrants make substantial remittances and other contributions for the development of the source region. This was measured in terms of the observable physical and social infra-structures put in place by various town unions and associations as evident in various communities across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendation

Government should create an enabling environment for a forward and backward flow of labour and requisite skills in both rural and urban settings so as to create social homeostasis or balance. This can be achieved through the following;

1. Harmonising rural income earnings with that of the urban workers by providing infrastructure and rural industries
2. Provision of education and training institutions that offer relevant and functional training for rural labour
3. Provision of basic social amenities such as potable water, good road network, reliable power source and good transport systems, among others.

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