Cross Border Migration between Nigeria and Its Francophone Neighbours: Policy Challenge

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Abstract- *Migration between Nigeria and her francophone neighbours is a very pertinent and sentimental issue as the people are historically, culturally, ethnically and socio-economically intertwined. Nigeria has always adopted cooperation rather than confrontation even in the face of provocation. It is this attitude that has always eased off tension and even wars with neighbours. Nigeria has persistently been guided and occasioned by her policy of concentric circle. This paper therefore underscores the content and nature of cross-border migration between Nigeria and its francophone neighbours (Cameroon, Chad Republic, Niger Republic and Benin Republic). It also examined the policy challenge of the pervasive menace of illegal migration. It is recommended amongst others that Nigerian government should as a matter of necessity and urgency initiate a more functional Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on General Agreement on the Movement of Persons (GAMP) with her francophone neighbours to reasonably curb the existing trend of illegal cross-border migration.*

Indexed Terms- Cross Border, Migration, Nigeria, Francophone Neighbours, Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Regulating migration flows and containing border disputes remain central to border security agencies across the world. The reality, however, is that controlling access to territories and citizens is difficult in the globalised security context, as technology has enabled the increased flow of goods, people and ideas across national boundaries, while global inter-connectedness has increased interactions between people around the world whether for work, sport or entertainment.

According to Blum (2014) borderlands are meeting points between two nation states. These are security hot spots of nation-states due to the movements of migrants in and out of the nation state. While Naziru, Azhar and Ruslan (2015) say that borders are an invisible line that demarcates one nation state from another. Nation states are now conscious and alert of every move around their borders. According to literatures, the Nigerian borders is not efficiently controlled due to the porosity of the borders as it has a land mass combining land and water, also coupled with the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) deficiencies such as manpower challenges, resulting few border presence of the officers, lack of resources, infrastructures and various needed equipments to effectively carry out their duties. Among others is the lack of leadership and sincerity of those in authorities (Nwagwugwu, Ayomola and Oluranti, 2015). A nation state who desires to benefit positively from International Migration must be conscious of the effectiveness of her borders.

Nigeria's porous borders are one of the major reasons behind her security issues and also one of the factors responsible for illegal International Migration (Adepoju, 2009:32 and Robert, 2014:7). There are various unknown path ways mostly in Damaturu and Maduguri in the Northern part of Nigeria that links other neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Chad and Niger still linking to other countries like Libya, Mali, and Sudan. These unknown pathways are unprotected and majorly used for illegal exchange or purchase of arms and other businesses that are considered illegal (Musa, 2013 and Odiaka, 2005). This explains the porosity of the Nigerian borders. Ekpemede cited in Evans (2016) reveals that there are various unprotected and unknown routes that are used by irregular migrants (Onuoha, 2013).In Nigeria there are about four thousand and eighty (4,080) routes in Nigeria out of which only ninety one (91) is legally

authorized and protected, this situation puts Nigeria in an unsecured situation. The porosity of the Nigerian borders can threaten a nation-state's national security (Nwagwugwu et al, 2015: 51). International Migration in West African region (precisely Nigeria) has experienced undocumented flows of migrants due to the fairly existence of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) presence and the porous nature of the nation state's borders. Securing Nigeria's porous borders is not going to be any easier because as the nation state begins to develop and the international system begins to engage in International Migration there will be increased movement of goods and people through land, air and sea.

Nigeria is bounded to the east by Cameroun; Benin Republic on the western side, to the south the Atlantic Ocean; to the north east, Chad and North West, Niger Republic. The people of these countries are virtually African descent with Nigeria commanding the largest population. The mainstay of the economies of the countries is agriculture even though Nigeria and Cameroun have discovered other sources of foreign exchange such as petroleum, gold, bauxite and other mineral products. Nigeria remains to a large extent the most industrialized. With the exception of Cameroun, the other Nigerian neighbours are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Migration has been part of a dynamic feature of the area as with the entire West African sub-region and most of the ethnic groups in each of the countries had settled in more than one country in the area. The artificial boundaries imposed by the colonialists were responsible for cross border population movement within the area. Compared to other parts of Black Africa including Cameroun, West Africa stands in an almost unique position. It is an area where European colonization in the form of permanent settlement never took firm roots which makes the areas in consideration as per excellence the land of Blacks (Mabogunje, A, 1972). International migration between Nigeria and her neighbours is made easy by a number of factors; the greatest being the short distance and the porosity of borders; the likelihood that no language barriers and a minimal set of intervening obstacles. These apparent less stringent factors, make migrants troop to Nigeria. The harsh conditions of weather in the Sahara leading to drought in Niger, Chad and northern Cameroun made Nigeria the ideal destination of the migrants.

II. CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

According to Iheanacho and Ughaerumba (2015) Migration can be traced to the existence of the first set of humans on earth. Migration has taken various patterns such as slave trade, colonization, urbanization, industrialization and globalization. Movement of persons (migrants) from one place to another has been a trend adopted by various individuals. International Migration in Nigeria can be traced from the pre-colonial era (precisely slave trade era) to colonial era. Although the nation-state was not recognized as Nigeria as at then as it had a kingdom and empire structure. This made it difficult to be described as internal or international structure. The most important is to note that migration in Africa (Nigeria) can be traced to this era. During these eras migration was both forced and voluntary. In Nigeria, during the 1960s International Migration became the new trend and was at its increase as Nigerians and other Africans left their respective states for Europe while the South-South pathways of migration also existed, as Africans migrated to various parts of West African neighbouring states mostly for trade purposes (regional integration). According to Fayomi (2013) International Migration is mostly influenced by economic reasons which can be for employment, trade purposes, high favourable standard of living and fair weather conditions for agriculture among other reasons.

Tacoli and Okali (2001) also explained International Migration to be a feature of globalization as the world is interconnected and interdependent on each other. This reveals that International Migration is the movement across international borders or nation-states.

International Migration is the movement of individuals from one international boundary to another. Individuals who move from one place to another are known as migrants. International Migration involves two set of individuals these are the irregular migrants and regular migrants. WHO (2007) also reveals that movement of individuals (migrants) from one boundary to another has been on its increase.

This International Migration activity can be engaged nationally and regionally. International Migration can be permanent or temporary. CREAM (2011) validates the statement that International Migration can trigger creativity, innovation, trade, entrepreneurship among others development. This subject matter (international migration) recently has become a topic for debates and discussions by nation states.

International Federal Red Cross and Red Crescent (2012) reveal International Migration to be a process of moving across borders. International Migration in Nigeria can be traced as far back as the pre-colonial era, precisely the slave trade era in which humans were seen as commodities to be traded and transported to Europe as slaves. The colonial era also experienced International Migration as various ethnic groups and other Africans transported themselves from one place to another spreading the information and educating their fellow individuals on the ideology known as nationalism at that time and also moved from one place to another for trade purposes. During this colonial and postcolonial period a policy to sponsor Nigerians abroad was also introduced so as to build up leaders who will lead and develop the nation-state since the British (Europeans) opened the eyes of Africans to western education (Akinrinade and Olukoya , 2011 : 45,72). West (2011) reveals that Africa in which Nigeria belongs has the largest source of migrants. However the economic and political activities of Nigeria in the 1960s made Nigeria officially a destination nation state and a source nation state.

For this study, International Migration is the movement of nationals from other West African states to Nigeria (South-South) and also the movement of Nigerians to the developed countries (South-North). International Migration is seen as a reaction to the "pull" and "push" factors exposed to migrants (emigrants and immigrants) as they are expected to act as human beings first before acting up as migrants. International Migration of individuals as earlier stated can be voluntary or involuntary. European Union (2011) reveals that the number of migrant grows continually as it is evidently seen. This means that International Migration will always be on its increase as it is likely to be inevitable due to the interconnected nature of nation-state and the nature of the international system .Also the various transportations for easy movement, as a result of the benefits of globalization makes individuals engage in International Migration easily. Adetunji (2014) also reveals International Migration to be the movement of individuals across national boundaries. One of the reasons behind the migrants' movement from one nation-state to another is the desire for a better life than the previous or the present status. International Migration can be a source of positivity and negativity to a nation-state as it depends on the way the particular nation state decides to handle the subject matter. This is where the efficiency of the Immigration Service (Nigerian immigration service) is needed (Fayomi, 2013). According to Zoomer et al cited in Fayomi (2013) International Migration is naturally complex. It can affect a nation state politically, culturally and socio-economically by bringing either strength or weakness. According to Aseffa (2013) International Migration will always be at its increase as countries remains interdependent on each other directly or indirectly. Also as various individuals begin to identify their various destinations where they are convinced their destinies lies due to the attractive "pull" factors and various "push" factors in their home countries. Finally, with the increasing demand for labour by various nation states most especially from the developed world, International Migration might be inevitable.

Haas (2007) reveals that International Migration in Nigeria has not been really concentrated on as no special consideration has been really given to International Migration in direction to national socio-economic development strategy, as there are highly profitable International Migration activities that can initiate development in a nation-state. Nigeria focuses more on rural- urban migration (internal migration) forgetting the benefits of international migration. This has been due to misinformation from various administrations that describes International Migration to be a negative impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development disregarding the believe that emigration of qualified and various skilled individuals are regarded as a "drawn out resource" for a nation-state's socio-economic development. In this part of the world (developing nation-states Nigeria precisely), International Migration has not been really researched on , consciously accepted as an effective instrument

for a nation-state's development and also the subject matter has not been widely educated and exposed to the Nigerian public due to the mentality of the leaders that International Migration is associated with the failed development experienced years past in the nation-state not knowing that International Migration can initiate positive transformation in Nigeria through the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) in conjunction with the help of the Nigerian federal government.

III. NIGERIA AND HER FRANCOPHONE NEIGHBOURS: THE POLICY CHALLENGE

International migration has not been a matter of public policy nor of public debate in Nigeria until the 80s, even at that, have the authorities not taken it as a serious issue of public policy. That attitude changed as cross border crimes became notorious and touched virtually every aspect of human activities - economic, social and political. Despite this change of perception, migration is an integral part of labour market and a source of livelihood. Like all over Africa and other parts of the world one of the major reasons to migrate is to find better life. It is this crave to secure employment and improve material wellbeing that have been the overriding motive of the nationals of the countries surrounding Nigeria to cross the border to Nigeria.

Cross border migration between Nigeria and her neighbours which did not attract state intervention gradually became a matter for state policy as modern mobility continue to impact dangerously on the security of the nation and the need to defend the state from external aggression and criminality which has grown along the international borders.

Interestingly, the attack on the 11th September, 2001 has brought increased awareness and relevance to security implication of international migration. A phenomenon which is often not given much attention by some countries has become a matter for public policy. Between Nigeria and her neighbours, it is viewed as economic phenomenon and largely beneficial to the migrants especially those crossing the borders from the north, avoiding the scourge of the drought and encroaching desert. All that have changed

as international migration is bringing, harsh consequences on the security and diplomatic relations between Nigeria and her neighbours, forcing Nigeria to take unpopular policy stand against security threat. International relations based on good neighbourliness and friendships continue to dictate Nigeria foreign policy towards her immediate neighbours anchored on:

- Sovereign equality of all African states
- Respect for the independence, sovereign and territorial integrity of every African state
- Non-interference in the internal affairs of other African states and
- The commitments to functional cooperation as a means of promoting African unity and economic development.

Well, like other regions of the world, state security will have to be integrated into legislations dealing with international migrations and external relations.

Despite these commitments increased cross-border crimes have forced Nigeria to intensify her security network along the borders with her francophone neighbours, posing serious migration and security threat.

Again, Nigeria and the neighbouring nations should as a matter of policy, develop and strengthen their attitudes towards global mind-set approach. This requires simultaneously recognizing situations in which demands from both global and local elements are compelling, while combining an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and nations with a willingness and ability to synthesize across this diversity (Ndum, and Onukwugha, 2012).

IV. CONTENT OF CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION BETWEEN NIGERIA AND HER FRANCOPHONE NEIGHBOURS

Although Ndum and Udoye, (2020) had indicated that in recent time, internationalization has emerged as one of the defining issues across boarder areas globally and that it is of growing significance worldwide, with economic, political and social changes driving an increasingly global knowledge economy, nations are

however prohibited from engaging in illegal movements across borders.

This part of the paper underscores the content and nature of cross-border migration between Nigeria and the francophone neighbours (Cameroon, Chad Republic, Niger Republic and Benin Republic).

Nigeria-Cameroon Cross border migration had been on without much trouble for the security operatives which made relations between the two countries cordial. This is especially peculiar to the Mfum border area in Ajassor community as well as other riverine communities in Etung local government area of Cross River State. The peaceful coexistence and migration activities are probably the resultant effect of the common ancestry, language, occupation, economy, culture and tradition they share with the neighbouring Cameroon communities. In fact, these communities in Etung, Ikom, Boki,Ogoja, Obudu, etc. have become succor-giving homes for refugees migrating from Cameroon as a result of their ongoing political upheaval.

Relations became sour as cross border migration was overtaken by criminals and armed bandits. Border clashes that have led to the killing of many Nigerians were regularly reported. The recurrence of such clashes with devastating consequences for Nigerians and Nigerian security operatives was daily reported as the dispute over Bakassi peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroun Republic came to the front burner.

However, since the judgment by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ceding the peninsula to Republic of Cameroun, international migration has continued on a larger scale as many Bakassi nationals who were bitter on the judgment and prefer to be Nigerians are being repatriated for settlement in Cross River State. As a result, the borders between the two countries are under close security surveillance against all forms of trafficking and smuggling. This measure is necessitated as a result of reports along the coastal borders of Nigeria. There have been frequent raids in the Niger-Delta by pirates, armed smugglers in boats along the coast. The security operatives have been strengthened with the navy, army, police and the customs doing joint border surveillance and protection.

Nigeria and Chad shares a 75 kilometre border, all of which is on Lake Chad. The border is porous and unreliable but because of her African policy of cooperation, invested about one million dollars in the development of a huge agricultural project called the Chad Basin Development Authority (CBDA) in the basin on the Nigeria side. The influx of migrants reached an unacceptable proportion when in 1983; forces from Chad overran many Nigerian islands on the lake. They were repelled by combined forces of the 3rd division of the Nigerian Army, the 23rd Armorial based in Maiduguri and detachment of the army in Baye and Doro on the shore of the Lake.

The Chadians were forced to withdraw before it could have resulted into war between the two countries. The issue was resolved after a temporary closure of the borders; it however exposed the economic fragility of Chad and its dependence on transit facilities in Nigeria. One lesson for Nigeria as remarked by a scholar is the propensity for international migration to interact with other factors to foment violent conflict in three ways: by providing resources that fuel internal conflicts; by facilitating networks of organized crime and by serving as conduits for international terrorism. Nigeria was quite concerned about events in Chad and in particular the rate of arms smuggled across the borders and the huge arsenal in the hands of the Chadian army most of which were either seized Libyan weapons or weapons supplied by France, the United States and Israel.

The situation led to a militarization of the border and construction of all-weather road by the federal government from Baye to Doro facilitating rapid movement of troops. Migration across the borders continues as it has always been with Kanuri and Shuwa Arabs families divided between the two countries.

The Nigeria-Niger borders appear to be the least problematic of the borders Nigeria have to contend with. The borders stretches for over 150 km and cut across one of the densely populated areas of the two countries; the southern Niger Republic and the northern Nigeria straddling such historically notable towns as Katsina, Kano and Sokoto. The two countries are linked together culturally and linguistically. The Hausa language is freely spoken by the nationals of the

two countries both sides of the borders. Despite the strong ties, there have been no serious border clashes or adverse reports of smugglers and traffickers. The reason may be due to the solid commercial links between the two countries. For example, the trade in cattle is carried freely across the borders from Niger to Nigeria. However as a result of the issue of desertification which appear to be profound in Niger Republic may be responsible to the great number of immigrants coming from Niger to flood Nigerian cities. They move into the northern most parts of Nigeria to the southern part of the country, such that lots of Nigeriens are found in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Benin city, Enugu Port – Harcourt among others. They are found in menial jobs, house gardening and security.

Despite the relative peace observed at the borders, and because of the experience of the Nigerian security operatives along the Chadian borders, the Niger borders are equally fortified under close surveillance to avoid infiltration by Muslim fundamentalists that may take the advantage of the porous borders to enter Nigeria illegally and cause uprising, as however speculated in the damaging boko haram insurgence in Nigeria.

Nigeria and Benin Republic share a lot in common linguistically and racially which explains the dynamism of cross-border migration. The Yoruba, gun (Egun) and other Ajo speaking people in the south, the Beriba (Borgwa) in the middle and Fulani and Hausa in the north straddled border between the two countries. Historically, southern and central Benin was part of old Oyo empire. The cultural affinity coupled with Nigeria's policy of good neighbourliness informed Nigeria's participation in joint economic, industrial and agricultural ventures with Benin counterparts. Such was the cement factory at Onigbolo (Queme province) and sugar factory at Save (Zou province): Both towns are located in the republic of Benin. The two companies have since been privatized. Even with this spirit of enterprising and promising neighbourliness, the borders linking the two countries are the most problematic because of the activities of internationally reputed criminals engaging in smuggling and trafficking of virtually everything from human trafficking, ammunition, arms, drugs manufactured goods, agricultural produce,

prostitution, child labour to religious fanaticism, terrorist attacks and insurgency.

It got to a point in 1985 during the regime of Buhari/Idiagbon when the borders had to be closed severally. They were not re-opened until the emergence of Babangida on August 27, 1985. The decision to reopen the borders removed major source of conflict but the politics of border surveillance and monitoring became a major public policy. International migration and security has continued to blur the difference between illegal/irregular and legal migration. The deepened and devastating activities of smugglers to the economy, security and state sovereignty has made it impossible for policy makers to effectively differentiate between policies that infringe on human rights from those that actually address illegal migration.

In 1996, following the execution of nine Ogonis including Ken Saro Wiwa for illegal murder of four prominent Ogoni chiefs by the regime of General Sanni Abacha, there were closure of borders between the two countries. Many Ogonis fled and sought political asylum in Benin Republic; the Beninois authorities denied granting political asylum to Ogonis; the tense political situation and security fragility made both countries closed their borders. The land borders were re-opened on April 18, 1996 after the two leaders, the Beninois President Mathieu Kerekou and General Sanni Abacha had had bilateral talks.

Cross border crime increased at alarming rate between the two countries again in 2003 involving and international robbery network, the leader of the gang, a Beninois national was so notorious that his operation rocked the customs and security operatives of Nigeria. President Olusegun Obasanjo had to order the closure of the borders at least two times. The second time, the President ordered the border to be closed was on August 9, 2003 and it lasted six days. It was only reopened after President Mathieu Kerekou personally ordered the handing over of the notorious criminal gang leader Hamani Tijani to Nigerian authorities to face criminal charges before the borders were reopened.

Many scholars and policy makers have commented on the effect of trans-border crime between the two

countries which has been worsened by globalization. At the moment, Nigeria economy is fast becoming a dumping ground for Asian goods as Benin Republic is more of a transit country for these goods and virtually everything shipped there are smuggled into Nigeria. A tour of our borders will unveil the eyesore of how textile materials, rice, vegetable oil, tin tomatoes, cars, among others are smuggled daily through the country's borders into the country. Such comments aired by Oshuntokun (Oshuntokun: 2003) conveys the views of most Nigerians in respect of Nigerian/Benin borders. According to him, a greater part of the trade between Nigeria and Benin Republic and other francophone countries bordering Nigeria is unrecorded because much of the trade is carried on through smuggling which is illegal business, seriously limiting the virility of Nigerian economy and a security threat to the nation.

CONCLUSION

The overall impact of International Migration (positive and negative) depends on the migrants' decision, the effective management and policies of the sending and receiving nation-states handled by their respective migration agency and nation-state federal government. As International Migration policies have direct impact on a nation state's migration success it can assist in increasing a nation state's labour force thereby paving way for desirable productivity results among other areas contributing to the nation-state's technology progress. However, the illegal migration in and out of Nigeria by its francophone neighbours is indeed a policy challenge and a clog in the wheel of progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are worthwhile.

i. Nigerian government should as a matter of necessity, initiate a functional Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on General Agreement on the Movement of Persons (GAMP) with her francophone neighbours to reasonably curb the existing trend of illegal cross-border migration.

ii. Regulating migration flows and containing border disputes remain central to border security agencies across the world.

iii. The institutions and International Migration agencies held with the legal authority for managing the Nigerian borders like the Nigerian Immigration Service, the Custom Service, and the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) among others should be more proactive and reengineered.

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