

From Brain-Drain to Brain-Gain: Interrogating Migration, Deskilling & Return Migration in Contemporary Nigeria



**Missouri
State**TM

Oyeniya, Bukola Adeyemi
Missouri State University, Springfield.

Objectives...

- Examines how non-migration policies in both countries of origin (CoO) and countries of destination (CoD) influence:
- (a) migration decisions,
 - (b) stimulate → different → layers of migration,
 - (c) affect aspirations of migrants in country of destination.

2 policies, 2 narratives...

Between 1986 and 1993, Nigeria under General Babangida implemented IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP).

Under President Obasanjo between 1999 and 2007, Nigeria also implemented the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

- ✦ As a program, SAP entails deregulation of the non-oil sectors, privatization of public enterprises, devaluation of the national currency, among so many others things.
- ✦ It stimulated both national and international migration;
- ✦ At the national level, it stimulated a 3-D flights (urban to urban, rural to rural, rural to urban, and urban to rural migration dynamics);

- ✦ At the international level, it stimulated the flight of highly skilled professionals, most especially lawyers, doctors, nurses, professors, etc. to Europe, the United States of America and the Gulf states.
- ✦ While SAP-induced internal migration involved low and semi-skilled workers; its international migratory trend involved highly-skilled professionals.

- ✦ NEEDS seeks a synergy between government and private sector operators in wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation;
- ✦ Unlike SAP, which was externally-mediated, NEEDS was a homegrown policy, which sees promotion of private enterprise as the engine of growth;
- ✦ It intensified privatization, institutionalized best practices in procurement process; made anti-corruption campaigns more proactive and made anti-corruption institutions more pragmatic and effective;

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- ✦ Made anti-corruption campaigns more proactive and made anti-corruption institutions more pragmatic and effective;
 - ✦ It also reformed the public service while promoting budgetary discipline and disclosure;
 - ✦ As Ezekwezili Obiageli (2004) noted, NEEDS led to reforms in telecommunications, transportation, banking, insurance, etc. also helped in stabilizing the polity, especially after many years of military rule.

- ✦ Following the implementation of NEEDS, many Nigerian migrants, especially since year 2003, have been returning home - 'Brain-Gain'.
- ✦ The return of these Nigerian professionals is touted as NEEDS-mediated;
- ✦ Is this truly a single-story? Or are there other exogenous factor at work?

Beyond a Single-story...

- ✦ Yes, non-migration policies (such as SAP and NEEDS in CoO might) induce both out-migration and in-migration; however, in the case of Nigeria between 2003 and 2007, NEEDS was not the sole variable necessitating return migration.
- ✦ In the case of the US, visa category/classification also plays crucial roles in determining return migration decision.

Visa Type	Description
A-1/A-2 Visa	Diplomats and Foreign Government Officials
A-3 Visa	Domestic Employee of an A-1/A-2 Visa holder
B-1 Visa	Business visitors, Domestic Employees, Academics, Researchers and Students
B-2 Visa	Tourism and Medical Treatment
C-1 Visa	Transiting the United States
C-1/D Visa	Crewmembers working on Air or Sea Carriers
E-1/E-2 Visa	Treaty Trader/Investor
F-1/M-1 Visa: Students	Academic and Vocational
G-1/G-4 Visa	Employees of an International Organization
G-5 Visa	Domestic Employee of a G-1/G-4 Visa
H-1/H-3, H-4 Visa	Employment based visas including the H-3 trainee visa; H-4 dependents of H-1B visa holders
H-2A	Seasonal Agricultural Worker
I Visa	Journalists & Members of the Media
J-1 Visa	Exchange visitors, Academics, Interns, Summer Work & Travel

Visa	Description
L-1 Visa	Intra-company transferees
O-1/2 or P-1/3 Visa	Persons with extraordinary ability in Sciences, Arts, Education, Business or Athletics
Q-1 Visa	International Cultural Exchange
R-1 Visa	Religious Worker
T Visa	Victims of Human Trafficking
U Visa	Victims of Criminal Activities

Prevalent Visa categories among Returned Migrants

- H4 (Dependents of H-1B visa holders);
- B1/B2, B1 visas
- H4 visas
- F visas

- ✦ While a highly skilled migrant employed on H1B visa is allowed to work, his or her dependents – who carry H4 visas – are not.
- ✦ This is irrespective of whether or not they are professionals with similar or far better qualifications as their H1B visa-carrying spouses.

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- ✦ H1B visa holders are outstanding researchers and persons with extraordinary ability.
- ✦ The USA issued 135,000 of such visa yearly.

Is Deskilling a Factor?

- ✦ How many of such high skilled professionals were victims of deskilling?
- ✦ How many return migrants were victims of deskilling and what was their experiences and coping measures?
- ✦ What is the roles of deskilling in the decision to return?
- ✦ Other notable factors driving deskilling include non-recognition of off-shore diplomas and professional qualifications of migrant workers, discrimination due to race, color, religion, and minority status.
- ✦ What are the roles of these factors in the decision to return to Nigeria, especially since the NEEDS years?

By Way of Conclusion...

- ✦ Like SAP and NEEDS, migration and non-migration policies in both CoO and CoD plays fundamental roles in migration decision, patterns of migration and whether or not migrants would achieve their aspirations;
- ✦ In the case of Nigeria during the NEEDS year, NEEDS provided the environment that allowed Nigerian migrants in the US to return; it was not the sole explanation for return migration;
- ✦ Other factors play fundamental roles.