

**THE OLUSOJI AKINWADE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION ESSAY
COMPETITION:
IMPLICATIONS OF BRAIN DRAIN AND RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION ON
SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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IMPLICATIONS OF BRAIN DRAIN AND RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian government has revealed that the country only has 55000 licensed medical doctors to serve its population of over 200 million, with over 16000 doctors having fled Nigeria in the last 5 years and 17000 transferred to other countries, according to the Premium Times(Marian Ileyemi, 2024). A statistic like this puts the doctor-to-patient ratio in some cities like Abuja at 14.7 doctors per 10000 patients, which could lead to a potential collapse of the health sector at the going rate. This issue is an effect of brain drain in an economy. When there is the rapid urbanisation of a region or movement of a group of people from one place to another without the necessary resources to back up the areas left behind, brain drain leads to economic turmoil and potential disrepair of an economy.

Brain drain and rural-urban migration take away from the stability of a country and are a global epidemic that needs to be tackled, hence my thesis statement: Brain drain and rural migration, while still seen as inevitable outcomes of globalisation, pose serious changes to sustainable development in Nigeria. However, by implementing strategic policies focused on decentralisation, rural development, and retaining skilled talent, Nigeria can transform these challenges into opportunities for inclusive growth.

Brain drain is the emigration of highly skilled professionals or the working class out of a country in search of more favourable conditions, which leads to a direct reduction in the availability of human capital and hinders economic progress. However some parties believe that rapid urban-rural migration and brain drain contribute to national development, drawing data from Western demographics and development paradigms, urbanisation is viewed as a

key element for social and economic change (Zarate et al., 1975, p.2). The perspective lies in the ability of a nation to utilise rapid change and turn it into a window to foster inclusive growth.

There are several reasons why Brain Drain occurs, most of them stemming from turmoil and lack of favourable conditions for sustainable growth. Brain drain, nicknamed by Nigerians as *japa*, is the exodus of the higher class to other parts of the world has three types:

1. Emigration between developing countries
2. Emigration from developing to developed countries
3. Emigration between developed countries

Nigerians are mostly in the first two categories. Such movement can be a result of socio-political instability, such as the mass exodus of Nigerians to the United Kingdom, United States, and environs during the civil war, poor economic and political governance, inappropriate economic policies, declining economic growth rate, such as the rapid decline of the Nigerian economy from 2015 till present, poor infrastructure, repression of human rights, bad judiciary and political violence, with many more reasons forcing Nigerian citizens to move to other countries even till date.

Despite many theories, such as the push-pull theory and the Demographic transition theory by John Caldwell, being that rapid urbanisation has positive aspects, the effects of brain drain, especially in developing countries, are largely negative. For instance, Nigeria suffers from a severe lack of technological development and innovation due to the masses of human capital fleeing the country. The unemployment rate in the Buhari administration in Nigeria rose from 21.5% to 33.7% from December 2020 to March 2021, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022, p8.). Such lack of capable leadership forced many to leave the country to seek better opportunities, causing an already declining economy to fall

further, indicating that the effects of Brain drain are cause and effect. A negative reaction causes the movement, leading to further economic decline.

The lack of technological and economic development has forced Nigeria to be over-dependent on other countries for their resources. As of 2021, a food and oil-exporting nation has been dependent on surrounding countries and the United States for food production and refined oil, while using China as a crutch for infrastructural development has caused the nation's Gross Domestic Product(GDP) to depreciate by over a half of its 2014 worth in a decade. A severe consequence for the already high poverty rate in the country and an inherent rise in unemployment rates and cost of living.

Rural-urban migration also poses problems for the equitable distribution of wealth in a country. And most undeveloped or developing countries are the usual victims of rapid rural-urban migration. Countries such as Nigeria, with rapid migration to Abuja, Lagos, and Kano, or Kenya with Nairobi and Mombasa, or India With Mumbai and New Delhi. Such countries suffer the effects of rapid migration within a country and hinder equitable distribution of resources. Since the end of the Nigerian civil war in the 1970s, no aspect of society has aroused the passionate concern of reforms more constantly than the massive population increase, the housing conditions, and the living standard of the urban poor; these profound changes have led to the proliferation of modern-day slums (Okeke,2021,p2).

Take South Africa, for instance; when Apartheid, the epitome of oppression and racial discrimination, was disbanded, urbanisation in the country speeded up, but the cities were still economically fractured and socially segregated, reinforcing inequalities and imposed economic costs(Turok, 2014, p15). Rural-urban migration leaves a certain region undeveloped and infrastructurally poor while the receiving city or region receives the perceived "lower class" and suffers from rapid increases in costs of living, traffic congestion, unavailability of housing, and many more socioeconomic problems. Many South African

citizens leave regions such as Limpopo or Soweto to more extensive and more economically rich centers like Johannesburg or Cape Town, a typical case of the Push-Pull effect where there is a push from rural infrastructure to economic hubs for better opportunities.

The socioeconomic impacts of rapid Rural-Urban migration are many, but through demographics, it is clear that the migration does not necessarily lead to an overall development of the national economy but rather a recession as it leads to overpopulation and an inability to allocate resources to the high demand, thus exacerbating poverty and inequality in the economy. Rapid Urbanization robs rural communities of their educated, young, and talented while imposing increased economic costs on the receiving regions. It is important to note that not every migrant also, expects to become urbanised, as Liebnow observed and said that migrants "... do not regard the urban milieu as a proper environment for the development of the whole gamut of social relationships and all aspects of one's personality" (Liebnow, 1986, p5). While they may leave these cities in search of jobs and a better standard of living, they may have no interest in integrating or contributing to the general cultural, public, and political function of the region that they have migrated to, hence retarding economic development in the regions they have taken up space in.

According to Uwaleka, "Sustainable economic growth, measured by GDP growth rate, is a necessary condition for economic development and, by extension, low employment rates" (Uwaleka, 2021, p3). However one must take into account that economic growth does not necessarily constitute Economic development, and most African countries are guilty of growth with no real development over an extended period. Economic growth without development can be manifested in the following way: Goods and services of certain types are on the increase, like crude oil, coffee, and rubber, but the profits go abroad, and the economy becomes more and more dependent on foreign manufactured goods. This dependency leads to borrowing and taking loans from organisations such as the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund, which many African countries are not able to meet up with leading to freeloading of resources and hindered economic development.

It has been well established that the effects of unchecked migration and brain drain are largely negative on the economy. With the influx of many youths into urban areas from rural regions there is an eventual neglect of the affairs of the primary sector. Jobs such as farming and mining are neglected as there is a shortage of able individuals to take on these jobs, which threatens the economy with food insecurity and weakens the agricultural and mining sectors. With the population explosion that comes with Urban-rural migration, there is an inevitable environmental degradation of urban cities and urban sprawl which invites an increase in crime rates and spread of diseases. This furthers the social instability in the local and national economy.

However, even in the face of a mass exodus of human capital from one region to another, some countries have found ways to mitigate this movement and maintain population demography, though these models have faced challenges or even failed. Russia urbanised a Soviet central planning model that favoured a pro-industrial and pro-development model for urban scaling. While the economy did industrialise successfully, the soviet era population movement was tightly controlled, and costs rose to people not being able to choose economically desirable locations(Becker et al., 2014, p15). China's *Hukuo*, on the contrary, encourages rural-urban migration, an experimental approach to urbanisation; however, the registration system greatly restricts the rights of those who cannot secure a local *Hukuo* registration(McGranahan et al., 2013, p15). It is hard to create systems that mitigate uncontrolled migration while still protecting the interests of citizens, especially in countries with large economic disparities in regions.

There are still many steps and potential solutions to mitigate uncontrolled and rapid migration. For one, the government can advocate for decentralised economic planning to

stimulate and elevate rural communities and then invest in rural healthcare, education, and transportation. Investments such as Enugu state's Governor's Free Education scheme for rural communities or Rwanda's health insurance scheme (Mutuelles Santelles) cover most health costs for its citizens. Schemes like this stabilise population movement within the nation. It would be to Nigeria's benefit to implement policies that favour human capital retention. Policies such as competitive wages, competitions, accelerator hubs for startups, better pensions, and while retaining the current population, they can incentivize the diaspora to return by offering tax breaks, competitive insurance offers and funding, scholarships and grants for research, startups, and educational opportunities. These policies can be made possible by budget reallocation to the health and education sector, improving investor sentiment to create funding opportunities for Nigerians.

Sustainable urban planning will stabilise population migration. Promoting smart and green cities, while improving transport, sanitation, and housing with satellite technology will reduce pressure on major cities like Lagos and Abuja, and even draw human capital from outside the country to contribute to the economic development of the nation. Working conditions should also be made better, with better union practices to protect the interests of employees while securing those of their employers.

Social recruitment is another initiative that will encourage Rural development. Offering primary jobs such as mining, farming, environmental sanitation, and social work to the homeless and unemployed with guaranteed wages, in exchange for social housing, insurance, and other benefits. Incentives such as this will draw citizens of other countries to Nigeria to contribute to its development while increasing the GDP per capita and ensuring economic development.

Tourism provides a great means of employment and many of Nigeria's 'undeveloped' regions which are still largely inhabited by wildlife, and nature, provide a great source for

tourism and in turn employment, which will boost the Nigerian economy and attract foreign exchange strengthening the local currency too.

While brain drain and rural-urban migration pose significant challenges, they also offer opportunities for reform and transformation. Strategic planning can lead to the revitalization of rural areas, improved living standards in cities, and overall sustainable economic growth. While International migration is great and offers a chance for exposure, when there is no significant return on investment to the given region or country, it becomes a cause for concern. Human capital is the engine of any economy, and to retain it, Nigeria should focus on economic and infrastructural development, as its deficit is the main cause of Brain drain in most Nations. In the foreseeable future, Nigeria will be far from achieving sustainable development. It must begin to harness its human capital to save the economy and create opportunities for sustainable economic development to forestall the Brain drain.

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