

# DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF RETURN MIGRATION IN NIGERIA: MYTH OR REALITY?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to examine the nexus between return migration and development in Nigeria. The paper reveals that the bulk of return migrants in the country are the repatriated, while the rate of return of professional migrants is low. It was observed that the ability of migrants to contribute to homeland development is influenced by their destination; those from Europe and North America are more likely to act as agents of change than their counterparts within Africa. A major obstacle to the return of professionals is the unfavorable living and investment conditions in the country. The paper concludes that for efforts to stimulate return of innovative migrants to succeed, genuine attempts must be made, to provide an enabling environment to make return a worthwhile endeavor for migrants.

**Keywords:** Voluntary return, migrant smuggling, hybrid return, repatriated.

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration describes the movement of people from one place to another, involving a change of usual residence. The phenomenon has a deep history dating back to the beginning of the human race, and has been subjected to considerable scientific attention by scholars interested

in interpreting the consequences of population movements and distribution on societies (Campbell and Barone 2012; Hatton et al. 1998; Lucas 2005; McNeil, 1984; Oyekanmi 2004). Earlier patterns of migration involved the historical movements of mainly permanent settlers trying to escape conflict zones, oppression or starvation in the wake of crises, famine and drought. In some cases, it had involved forcible transfer of humans from one place or part of the world to another as was the case in the inhumane trans-Atlantic slave trade, during which period, able-bodied men and women were forcibly transferred as slaves from Africa to Europe, North America and the Caribbean in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This kind of migratory movement was involuntary, and the people had no idea where they were headed and what their fate would be on their journey, and the intent to return was totally out of their hands. The consequences of such massive removal of human population on the African continent was aptly captured by the Guyanese historian, Walter Rodney, in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney 1976).

Scholarly interest in return migration first appeared in print in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Ravenstein 1885). Return migration attracts less attention than other studies of migration that concentrate on emigration and immigration, and their consequences in origin and destination countries such as depopulation and the resulting deprivation of origin communities much of their human resources, on the one hand; and overpopulation in places of destination on the other hand. These concerns tend to limit the scope of migration to the movements of people out of their territories, and the act of entering into new lands (Abreu 2010; Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; Udo 1975). Return migration was studied less and not accorded much attention (De Haas 2008; Iversen, 2005; Lucas 2005). Interest in studying this phenomenon in Africa intensified in the

1970s following the economic downturn and consequent growing migration (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010).

The history of migration indicates that a number of migrants usually return to their countries of origin after sojourn abroad; and many make frequent visits before the final return (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; Owasanoye 2012). Though the scale of return is not yet clear, some studies (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; World Bank 2011) suggest that it may well be around half of the migration flow from Africa. Nevertheless, it was not the scale of return migration that prompted the impetus to focus on return migration, but attempts by some number countries to tackle social and economic crises that began in the 1970s (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010). Many countries, especially in the developing regions, convinced that migration contributed to a brain drain of skilled and experienced citizens abroad, began to consider return migration as a potential route to economic revival. Efforts were also made by some more developed countries (e.g. Japan, Israel and Spain) to induce foreign nationals (with the promise of cash gifts) to return to their countries, as a means of reducing the effects of population pressure on available resources and open job opportunities for host countries' citizens (Farrant et al. 2006; Findlay 2002; Finn 2012). In the developing countries, the idea was to tap into the experiences and skills of their citizens returning from overseas to aid development efforts back home. This idea was based on the assumption that returnees constitute a vital agent of change and development, having acquired more experience in their various places of sojourn (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010).

In Nigeria, the desire to reverse the consequences of the brain drain and tap into the skills and knowledge based of citizens who migrated abroad for better opportunities inspired the establishment of the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization (NIDO) and the Nigerian National

Volunteer Service (NNVS) in 2000. This paper is an attempt to examine the relationship between return migration and development in Nigeria. The assumption that return migration is intrinsically related to development took for granted that the phenomenon takes various forms, and that returnees originate from different destinations. The paper explores the various forms of return migration and will attempt to determine their relative significance for homeland development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Return migration is conceived of as the return of migrants to their country of origin, sometimes as fulfillment of original intentions, while at other times, it occurs as a consequence of revised intentions (King 2000). Literature on return migration in Nigeria is scanty, indicating that the subject has not received sufficient systematic investigation. This situation, coupled with lack of effective registration system and management of migratory movements in Nigeria, will make a robust presentation of the actual state of return migration in country somewhat challenging. However, the little that could be gleaned from few existing records on return migration in Nigeria indicates that some Nigerians who traveled abroad return (whether voluntary, involuntary, or voluntary by compulsion). Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) suggest that the scale of return migration in Nigeria may well be around half of the migration flows: the movements of people between countries of origin and destination over a defined period, usually twelve months. They argue that among migration groups which intended to settle in a new country, a significant number returns (Adepoju and van der Wiel 2010). Their calculation is nevertheless based on impressionistic evidence, rather than empirical information. But they supported their claim by citing Laczko (2005) and stressing that of all Europeans who migrated to the USA between 1908 and 1957, between one-quarter and one-third returned home. This

trend might have changed over the years because, Findlay (2002) reveals that the rate of return in the UK was relatively low in the 1990s. The author notes that between 1995 and 1998, only one highly skilled migrant in some Commonwealth countries departed, for every four professional and managerial migrants who arrived.

Furthermore, Adepoju and van der Wiel (2010) looked at return migration among migrant students abroad and concluded that their rate of return is low. According to the authors, in the USA, only a fraction of overseas' science and engineering graduates leave after their studies; with stay rates being highest among graduates from developing countries. They noted that inter-country variation in stay rates is wide. For instance, in one study in the USA, only 15 percent of Koreans in the sample stayed; while 91 percent of Chinese and 87 percent of Indians stayed (Adepoju and van der Wiel, 2010; Finn, 2012).

In Nigeria, a large part of data on return migration comes from the media, and individual returnees who volunteer information because there is no effective management of migration data in the country (Adepoju and van der Wiel 2010). Reference is sometimes made to returnees like Yvonne Emordi-Njideke, a thirty-seven year-old Nigerian who returned to the country after her studies abroad, as an indication that some Nigerian nationals abroad are returning home (Weekly Trust, July 4, 2009). According to the report, Yvonne Emordi-Njideke had her childhood in Ghana and her secondary school in Switzerland, before moving to the United States. After spending about twenty years in the United States, with a background in Silicon Valley, she decided to return to Nigeria and joined the Strategy Department, Nigerian Stock Exchange (Adepoju and van der Wiel, 2010). Similarly, the media is replete with news of Nigerians deported and those awaiting deportation from different parts of the world. For instance, between September 21, 2012 and early September 2013, the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) reported

that over 1,023 Nigerians were deported from different parts of the world (Muanya, 2013). Similarly, Adepoju and van der Wiel (2010) note that between September and October 2000, during a violent clash between Libyans and West African migrants in Tripoli and Ezzouia, over six thousand Nigerians and Ghanaians were repatriated. Then, between November 2004 and March 2005, Morocco chartered five planes to deport African refugees to Nigeria; an action that nearly strained the relationship between the two countries. Furthermore, in October 2009, over 140 Nigerians were repatriated from Libya (Adepoju and van der Wiel, 2010). By the same token, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that since the end of February 2011, 790,000 migrant workers have crossed the Libyan border into other countries to escape the ongoing violence in that country. IOM reveals that a significant number of these returning migrant workers were Nigerians (IOM, 2012).

On the other hand, the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) program reveals that since the inception of AVR in 2001, over two thousand Nigerian irregular, stranded and labor migrants have been repatriated (IOM 2012). Between 2003 and 2004, IOM in Nigeria, working with their UK and Switzerland offices, coordinated the return of about 134 AVR beneficiaries from the UK, and another 103 from Switzerland, to Nigeria (IOM 2008). Furthermore, in 2011, IOM-Nigeria provided voluntary return assistance to over six hundred migrants returning from countries of destination or transit including the UK, Austria, Switzerland, Norway, Morocco and Yemen. Records indicate that the IOM's AVR activities have assisted over 1.4 million migrants to return safely to more than 160 countries of origin since the first of the programs in 1979. Reports reveal that post conflict returns have been large, with recent records showing return to Bosnia and Herzegovina: over 187,000 persons; Kosovo province: some 200,000 persons; and East Timor: nearly 200,000 persons (IOM 2012).

The literature suggests that a significant number of returnees to Nigeria involved involuntary (or voluntary by compulsion) returns (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; IOM 2012, 2010); and whether these kinds of returnees can serve as agents for the development of their homeland is debatable. In the opinion of Global Migration Group (GMG), true voluntary return is most relevant for development, and that depends on whether the returnees have the kinds of skills relevant for national development (GMG 2011).

Many immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, do not return. Owasanoye (2012) and Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) attribute this to many challenges facing the country, maintaining that most irregular Nigerian migrants abroad and in transit countries, chose not to come back even when they are faced with uncertainties and difficulties. Naturally, it is expected that migrants from poor countries to Europe and North America might want to stay after experiencing the taste and comfort of Western societies relative to their home country. For many of them, it might be considered better to face misery with hope abroad than to return home to face misery without hope. From all indications, organized efforts are needed to stimulate return migration of skilled and professional Nigerian nationals abroad to contribute to the development of the country. Attempts to stimulate the return of a significant number of experienced migrants will involve measures that go beyond verbal appeals to patriotism and ersatz summits. Such attempts must encompass real measures to provide attractive conditions for returnees. In other words, and as Oucho (2008) rightly observed, for a return to be desirable, there has to be something tangible for skilled migrants to return to. This point is buttressed by return migration experiences in China, Singapore, Turkey, India and Israel, which tended to follow significant economic gains as well as improved political stability and consequent opportunities (IOM 2012).

Furthermore, the problem of getting accurate migration data is not limited to return migration; data on emigration is equally contentious. Very often, researchers had to rely on information from destination countries for data on Nigerians living abroad (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010); and this option is said to be precarious because of irregular migration and the multifarious nature of migrants' destinations. For instance, De Haas (2008, cited in Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010:116), suggests that the number of Nigerian emigrants in 2005 was 836,832 people. The distribution according to the authors revealed that 14.1 percent stayed in the West African region; 26.9 percent stayed in Central Africa; 3.5 percent stayed in North Africa; 1.7 percent stayed in the Gulf; 24.6 percent stayed in Europe; 19.9 percent stayed in North America; and 9.3 percent stayed in other regions. Given the spate of irregular migration and migrant smuggling, these data are not likely to be accurate. To illustrate the degree of dissonance on emigration data, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) once revealed that at least, 200,000 Africans entered Europe irregularly in 2005 (UNODC 2006). This assertion was however countered by De Haas who cautioned that the figure might have been inflated, and opined that the number should not be more than 50,000 (De Haas 2008). Thus, as the IOM observed, data on Nigerian migrants abroad can only amount to guesstimates (IOM 2008).

### **NATURE OF RETURN MIGRATION**

The nature of return is conceptualized around questions concerning the conditions under which migrants return, and the considerations that inform their decision to return. Nonetheless, it appears there is no consensus and synthesis on the nature of return migration in the literature.

Gurka Celik (2011) identified four patterns of return migration thus: repatriation, circular migration, reverse migration and re-migration. These patterns are briefly discussed below.



*Repatriation*: return by repatriation describes the voluntary or involuntary return of migrants to their places of origin; and in many cases, repatriation takes more of an involuntary return. When repatriation is voluntary, it may represent the wisest option to the challenge of survival in destination country, such as when migrants report themselves to a host country's authority or AVR agency for repatriation. This often happens when migrants are faced with serious existential challenges that push them to think of home as more humane (Maja-Pearce 2009).

*Circular migration* involves a situation where migrants repeatedly travel between origin and destination countries. Circular migrants are short-term migrants who travel periodically between destination and origin places, and they include seasonal migrants who combine activities in several places according to the availability of seasonal work opportunities and seasonal labor demands. *Reverse migration* has to do with a situation where migrants travel exactly opposite to their route after unsuccessful attempts to settle in the new destination. *Remigration* represents the coming home of migrants with the hope of settling back in their places of origin after years of sojourn abroad. Celik illustrated the last point in his *Turkey Pulls, The Netherlands Pushes* by showing how an increasing number of Turks in Netherlands returned to Turkey, taking with them the education and skills they acquired abroad (Celik 2011). The push was instigated by economic challenges and social tension that surfaced in Netherlands at a time when Turkey's economic and political conditions were improving, making home coming appealing for many Turks abroad.

Other scholars identified five categories of return as follows: *the return of failure* (those who return following a traumatic shock upon arrival, and inability to adjust to the new environment); *the return of conservatism* (migrants who maintain links with the origins and eventually return after their sojourn); *the return of motivation* (return migrants with new and

treasured values, ideas and expertise which they intend to apply on return); *the return of retirement* (migrants who have terminated their working careers and returned to their countries as a matter of course; with a strong attachment and lack of total severance with cultural roots); *return of innovation* (migrants who purposefully traveled abroad to acquire skills with the intention of returning home to contribute to homeland development) (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010:378; Cerase 1974). In their observation, Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) lament that return of innovation is no longer common in Nigeria. It has been pointed out that the late 1950s and early 1960s represented the golden age of return of innovation (Alubo 2006; Udo 1984). Thus, later migrants looked at home coming with contempt because of the mismanagement of the country's affairs and the resulting crises since the late 1960s (Alubo 2006; Ouchou 2008). The voluntary or involuntary nature of return, as well as whether the condition of return is permanent or temporary are other questions to consider (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; IOM 2012; Owasanoye 2011).

Studies on the interconnection between specific types of return and development are inconclusive; thus the forms of return migration require increased analysis, synthesis and exploration to understand their relative implications and significance for national development. In the following section, an attempt is made to consider some theories of migration that may contribute to our understanding and explanation of return migration.

## **THEORETICAL ISSUES**

Return migration, as an epiphenomenon of migration, has not attracted established theoretical systematization and interpretations in the same degree as the phenomenon of migration. What will be done, for the present purpose is to visit existing theories of migration

and invoke the aspects that may be malleable for the explication of the phenomenon, and then do a critique for possible synthesis.

Until the birth of the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) in the 1980s (Stark and Bloom 1985), the field of migration theory was dominated by two major schools: the neoclassical school and the historical-structural theoretical accounts. Each of these schools embodies a variety of theoretical strands. The neoclassical school represents mainly scholars who advanced the view that the migration process is based on the rational calculus of the individual; emphasizing rationality, “methodological individualism,” with little or no regard for structural constraints (Abreu 2010; Lee 1966; Wood 1982). On the other hand, the historical-structural approach to migration represents a body of theoretical pronouncements which emphasizes structural demand for migrants’ labor in advanced capitalist societies, as well as the interpretation of the migration-inducing effects of the penetration of capitalism in peripheral socio-political formations (Castles and Kosack 1973; Massey 1988; Nikolinakos 1975; Petras 1981; Priore 1979; Sassen 1991). Lack of satisfaction with both the neoclassical school and the historical-structural school by some migration scholars gave birth to NELM. The NELM posits that migration, particularly international migration, is part of the household’s economic strategies. The approach emerged in the 1980s from the work of Stark and Bloom whose theory sought to occupy a middle ground between the structural emphasis of the historical-structural perspective and the agency orientation of the neoclassical school (Stark and Bloom 1985).

However, the NELM has been criticized as lacking in theoretical robustness. One author who has vehemently attacked the theory for its theoretical inadequacy is Alexandre Abreu (2010). Abreu argues that NELM is nothing more than an avatar of the neoclassical approach, with only marginal changes. While admitting that NELM provides some tools to migration

scholars unsatisfied with the neoclassical approach, Abreu rejects it as theoretically unsatisfactory. In his opinion, the main theoretical alternative to the neoclassical perspective, the historical-structural approach, presents a more powerful instrument for grasping the reality of past and present migration flow systems. Yet, according to Abreu, the historical-structural approach also deserves a new and improved synthesis (Abreu 2010).

If these various theoretical prescriptions are incapable of providing satisfactory interpretation of migration in general, as Abreu (2010) contends, how can they lend themselves to accurate explanation of return migration; especially as return migration did not seem to receive any consideration during the production of these theories? The reason for this theoretical lapse on return migration was elucidated by Hatton et al. (1998) who noted that the absence of theories on return migration could be understood from the perspective of the nature of the social forces propelling migratory movements in the early period of migration studies. Such forces not only determined the patterns of migration, they also shaped its definition and presented it largely as a one-way movement. Thus, the idea of return migration was not envisaged because the general assumption then was that those who left never returned (Hatton et al. 1998).

To overcome the present theoretical impasse on return migration, an alternative might be to deploy an aspect of the neoclassical perspectives, particularly the tradition initiated by the German geographer, Ernst Georg Ravenstein (1889), and pursued by Everette Lee (1966); especially in the latter's formulation of the "pull-push" concept. In that connection, it could be assumed that return migration is propelled by push factors (frustrations) in destination or host countries.

Similarly, attempts have been made by some scholars to link Africans homecoming to African optimism or *Afro-optimism*: the notion that many Africans abroad are beginning to be

optimistic about their homeland as a result of the political advances recorded by some African states as authoritarian and dictatorial regimes begin to give way to democratization in some parts of Africa (Onwudiwe 2003). However, records suggest that many of those who return are involuntary and their return home is not necessarily inspired by optimism (IOM 2008, 2012).

Furthermore, Campbell and Barone (2012) adopted a personality perspective to theorize on human migration. According to them, human migration can be understood by a consideration of personality characteristics. They postulated that a certain personality type, which they termed the *mobiocentric* personality type: (one who values action and motion; is always on the move; and would always want to be on the move), is prone to migration. This suggests that some individuals are more likely to migrate than the others because of their personality characteristics (Campbell and Barone 2012:47). As noted earlier, evidence indicates that many return migrants in Nigeria did so involuntarily and out of frustration, and their return may have little or nothing to do with the tendency to always be on the move (IOM 2008). Given the available information, and its inability to provide empirical evidence of the psychological evaluation of returned migrants, Campbell and Barone's (2012) personality perspective appears to be of limited utility as a source of adequate explanation and conclusive analysis of the phenomenon of return migration in Nigeria.

The lack of robust and theoretical synthesis that can adequately interpret the phenomenon of return migration in Nigeria suggests that more studies are required in the field of migration. As it stands, the neoclassical school serves us better for the purpose of providing explanation to the phenomenon. The emphasis of the school that the migration process is governed by the rational calculus of migrants on the one hand, and the "push" factors in destination countries, on the other hand, cannot be ignored; the reservations of Abreu (2010) notwithstanding.

## **RETURN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

References have been made to the development impact of return migration on a nation, with some authors pointing to China, Korea, India, Israel, Singapore and Somaliland, as examples (Adepoju 2010; Farrant et al. 2006; Lucas 2005). It is believed that some returnees can act as agents of change in the origin country; a phenomenon described as “brain gain” (Lucas, 2005). Nonetheless, evidence indicates that not all forms of return migration are instrumental to the developmental aspirations of home country. Even among scholars who posit that return migration is catalytic to origin countries development, there is hardly any agreement on the ideal form of return migration and its precise developmental implications. For instance, while Cerase (1974) opines that the category of return migration with the potential to stimulate progress and national development in origin country is the return of innovation, Owasanoye (2012) asserts that the development-igniting form of return migration is to be understood within the context of circular migration.

Owasanoye argues that circular migrants are potential engines of growth and development because their periodic circulation between origin and host countries tends to transfer learned ideas and skills to the benefit of homeland (Owasanoye 2012). On the other hand, the GMG contends that the aspect of return migration capable of provoking development is *voluntary return* (GMG, 2011). GMG distinguished between voluntary return and involuntary return by stating that involuntary return is associated with rejection, frustration and deportation. Consequently, migrants in such situations are not in a position to act as agents of progress and innovations in the country of origin (GMG, 2011). The majority of return migrants in Nigeria are not of these categories (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; IOM 2012); and the conducts of

some returnees in the country do not evince traits with serious developmental consequences. In other words, it will be difficult to describe some Nigerian returnees as agents of progress if their conducts as public officials are subjected to critical analysis. Whether it is the character of the Nigerian state and the pervasiveness of corruption in the country that drowned their genuine intentions (if any) and undermined their efforts is unclear; but judging from the conducts of some of them, it is obvious that the motive for their engagement in public affairs is primarily pecuniary.

These returnees that best exemplify problematic impact in Nigeria include Professor Maurice Iwu, former Chairman of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and Dr. Andy Uba, former Special Assistant to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, between 2003 and 2007. The appointments of these individuals were marred with serious controversies. The 2007 elections conducted by Maurice Iwu, for instance, had been described as the worst election in the history of the country (Odebode, 2012). Contrary to expectations that he was going to apply his foreign experiences to ensure objectivity and contribute to the deepening of democracy through better functioning public institutions, Iwu was reported to have collaborated with the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to massively rig the 2007 elections in favor of the ruling party. The irregularities that characterized the 2007 election were evident in the manner in which some state governors, who had earlier been declared winners by Iwu's INEC, for instance, in Anambra, Edo, Ondo and Osun, were removed by election tribunals for obvious electoral malpractices (Odebode, 2012). To date, Nigeria is still struggling to deal with the disruptions Iwu's actions inflicted on election arrangements across the states. Andy Uba, on the other hand, was one of the arrowheads of the Third Term bid by former President Obasanjo; and had been fingered to have been in charge of the slush fund meant to see the passage of the

bid; this was in addition to his alleged role in the abduction of a former sitting Governor of Anambra State in 2003, Dr. Chris Ngige, and the subsequent siege in Anambra State by hoodlums led by Chris Uba, the younger brother of Dr. Andy Uba (Ninalowo, 2007).

Other noticeable circular migrants in many instances include those exploiting migration as a strategy to escape poverty in origin country by going to work in a high-income country and spend in low-income, but low-cost origin. In the course of their working life, they circulate between destination and origin. Many however return on retirement; at best, they could be reckoned with for their remittances to home country which benefit primarily their families (Adepoju 2010). Adepoju observed that remittances reduce poverty by providing families in the countries of origin with additional income. He noted further, that the surplus from the remittance ends in consumption as well as investments in education and health (Adepoju 2010). The practice of sending remittances to homelands by many African migrants abroad for the educational and health needs of their family members has been acknowledged by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Nevertheless, in recognition of the development challenges facing many African countries, the body cautions that it is pointless for African households to receive remittances to pay for school and health care costs when there are not enough teachers and nurses (ECA 2006). The point here is that unrelenting migration guts the human capital and knowledge base in the education and health care sectors and may also serve to encourage further migration due to perceptions that economic and career success, as well as upward mobility and wellbeing are to be found abroad.

As things stand, the idea of tying development to return migration raises many questions. Aside from the fact that many countries of the world did not have to wait for their nationals abroad to return before they commenced their journey to development, there is a lack of



consensus among scholars on the strand of return migration associated with development (Cerase 1974; GMG 2011; Owasanoye 2011). Furthermore, it has been argued that the impact of return migration on home country's development is influenced to a large extent by migrants' destination country and the kind of skills they have acquired. Those from Europe and North America are different in economic and social terms, and are more likely to have a greater impact on homeland development than those returning from sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, as indicated earlier, there is a higher return rate in regional migration than intercontinental migration (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; IOM 2012). Similarly, there is a significant difference between the contributions made by skilled returnees and unskilled returnees, as well as between legal and undocumented returnees. The return rates of unskilled and undocumented migrants have been shown to exceed those of skilled and legal migrants (IOM 2012).

In an attempt to measure the impact of return migration in Nigeria, efforts have been made to point to certain individuals who studied abroad and returned to take political appointments. However, an analysis of the activities of some of them and their mode of engagement with the country, as alluded earlier, would reveal that the driving motive was far from a patriotic zeal to lift their country from lameness. Many consider the country as a field for easy harvest where they can ride on gravy train and swell the number of aristocrats. In fact, some of them, for example, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, current Nigeria's Minister of Finance, did not actually return; they established their families abroad, while Nigeria serves as their place of work, which could be abandoned at the sight of any discomfort (Adepoju and Van der Wiel, 2010; Odebode, 2012). This category of migrants is what Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010:394) tried to describe with the concept of "hybrid return." There is equally concern about the tendency of this class of returnees to settle in the cities, contributing to overcrowding (Lucas

2005; Massey 1988). On the other hand, many skilled Nigerian professionals abroad do not like to return to the country; among those who return, a sizeable number re-migrate to where they come from, or move to new destinations such as Ghana and South Africa because of the difficult operating environment in Nigeria (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; Owasanoye 2011). The implication of the foregoing is that Nigeria has continued to be rated as one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world by major global bodies. For instance, in 2011, a report by the UN ranked the country the 156th country out of about 179 countries on the Human Development Index (UN 2011); while the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) revealed that the majority of Nigerians are poor, with about 84.5 percent of the population living on less than two dollars per day (Ekpo 2013; World Bank 2012).

### **CHALLENGES TO SUCCESSFUL RETURN**

In recent history, most migrants who travelled abroad entertain the hope to return to their home country after a period of sojourn, but only few actually return voluntarily with the zeal to contribute to homeland development (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010; De Haas 2010; Hagen-Zanker 2008; IOM 2012; Owasanoye 2011). The question is why do many migrants find it difficult to return voluntarily without compulsion? Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) and IOM (2012) reveal that some migrants encounter certain problems which undermine their ability to live a settled life in their host countries, and consequently affect their tendency to return. According to these sources, the first set of problems migrants (especially irregular migrants) face revolves around host countries' immigration policies and the issue of irregular migration. Irregular migrants (also referred to as undocumented migrants) are immigrants without valid documents, who are unregistered and tend to hide from authorities to avoid being identified (Adepoju and Van der Wiel, 2010). Many of them may have entered the destination countries

legally, but overstayed their visas; consequently, their status reversed to irregular migrants. Others involve those who entered the host country clandestinely, through the enterprise of migrants smuggling: a form of ‘trade’ in migration movements in which smugglers who specialize in transporting migrants surreptitiously, through complex and dangerous routes, convey their clients to destination countries without valid documents (Lucas 2005; Maja-Pearce 2009). Those who make it to Europe (because records indicate that many do not survive, while some in frustration, settle in Maghreb countries) become undocumented migrants, and are incapable of operating freely in their new environment (Maja-Pearce 2009). Thus, many languish for years hoping to regularize their irregular status without which they cannot visit home for fear they will not be able to make it back to their destination countries.

The problem is not limited to Europe, as many migrants are reported to be staying in the United States clandestinely and unable to return. However, unlike Europe where most undocumented migrants arrive through routes across the Maghreb, many undocumented migrants in the USA from Africa entered by pretending to be students, visitors, tourists and business travelers. But as Robert Lucas notes, “the days when the US welcomed the huddled masses are long gone” (Lucas 2005:6). Therefore, like many other developed countries, the US has stepped up efforts to curb undocumented migration. Internal immigration controls are becoming tight and undocumented migrants are deported regularly. Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) report that about 250,000 Mexicans were deported as undocumented immigrants in 2008; while about 435 Nigerians were expelled in that same year as undocumented immigrants. These circumstances make life for many irregular migrants in the US somewhat unsettled.

Another challenge to homecoming for many skilled migrants is the condition of origin country. Celik (2011), Owasanoye (2011) and Fix et al (2009) demonstrate that the rate of return

of skilled migrants is positively related to the socioeconomic and political conditions in country of origin. Celik, in particular, argues that the factors influencing return to one's country are the "pulls": things which make home country more appealing (Celik 2011). He notes, for instance, that the return of a large number of Turks in the Netherlands back to Turkey in the last decade is due to the improvement in Turkey. He maintained that the boost in Turkish economy and the prospect of Turkish membership in the EU and its recent economic growth make return migration for many Turks around the world attractive. A similar observation has been made about immigrants from eastern European countries in the UK. According to this report, of the 1.4 million eastern Europeans who had come to the UK between 2004 and 2009, almost half had returned by the end of 2008 as the conditions in their home countries improved (Fix et al, 2009).

Furthermore, Celik (2011) adopted the concept of "myth of return" to demonstrate that not all migrants who talk about their desire to return actually do. Drawing from the experiences of Turks in the Netherlands, the author identified five phases in the development or process of return: (i) the idea to return; (ii) the intention of leaving for country of origin; (iii) the decision to migrate back; (iv) the action of migrating back; and (v) the degree of satisfaction with return migration. Celik argues that thoughts about returning home remain alive among many migrants in their destination countries, but that there is often a big difference between what one desires and what one actually accomplishes. Thus, the desire to leave might appear strong, but the number of people who seriously consider leaving seems to be very low, and many do not return ultimately. In other words, many migrants talk and behave as though they favor return, but the reality of daily life means this step is hardly ever taken.

In Nigeria, there is no sign yet to indicate that the country has started receiving return migration with development implications. Even in the midst of calculated efforts by the

government to encourage skilled migrants to return; as encapsulated in the mandates of NIDO and NNVS, the return rate of professionals and skilled migrants has been dismal. According to reports, the reason for lack of return of many skilled Nigerians in the diaspora is the deplorable condition of living in the country (Adepoju and Van der Wiel, 2010). The agonizing condition back home makes many international migrants to look at homecoming with horror. In particular, Adepoju and Van der Wiel (2010) note that the problems of weak institutions, inept leadership, massive corruption, unprecedented security challenge and fragile political situation make homecoming among many settled, skilled migrants difficult to contemplate.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper centered on return migration in Nigeria and its implications for national development. The paper revealed that return migration to developing countries began to attract systematic attention in the 1970s following global economic crisis at the time. As a result, many developing countries looking for how to overcome their economic challenges attempted to exploit the agency of return migration, and that calculation led some countries to introduce measures to encourage the return of their nationals abroad. In Nigeria, such consideration inspired the creation of NIDO and NNVS in 2000 (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010).

Although there is paucity of data on return migration in Nigeria, the little that could be gleaned from existing limited literature suggests that not all forms of return migration have the potential to steer development in the origin country; and the ability of returnees to contribute to homeland development initiatives is circumscribed by migrants' destination country and skills acquired. Those from Europe and North America are more likely to serve as agents of development than their counterparts from Africa; but unfortunately, the preponderance of return

migrants are within the African continent (Adepoju 2010; Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010). Furthermore, records indicate that the size of repatriated returnees and tired migrants is by far greater than the number of skilled and professional returnees (Adepoju Van der Wiel 2010; IOM 2012, 2008). It was also observed that many skilled and professional migrants shun the government's appeals to return because of the unpalatable situation in the country (Adepoju and Van der Wiel 2010). On the whole, it could be said that return migration is yet to make significant impact in Nigeria's yearning for development, and the idea that the country will overcome its development challenges as a function of return migration will remain a myth, unless concrete steps are taken to tackle the immanent crisis of governance plaguing the nation to restore the hope of Nigerians abroad on their homeland (Ake 1996; Ninalowo 2007).

Candid efforts are required to address the problem of poor political institutions and improve the country's socioeconomic conditions to enable skilled migrants desirous of returning home to come and contribute to national development. Efforts to encourage return migration must go beyond synthetic summits and verbal appeals to patriotism, and face the issue of governance properly to make the socioeconomic and political environments attractive for home coming. That will also have the effect of reducing the tendency of many young people to leave the country by irregular means thereby ending up as undocumented migrants many whom are repatriated.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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