8

International migration, national development and the role of governments: the case of Nigeria

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Introduction

As Africa's demographic giant, Nigeria plays a key role in African migrations, but has surprisingly been ignored in the migration and development literature. Beyond the issue of trafficking, few empirical studies on Nigerian migration are available. With a few exceptions (Nwajiuba, 2005; Osili, 2004), studies on the development implications of Nigerian international migration are particularly rare.

Besides giving a brief overview of Nigerian international migration, this chapter aims to analyse the views and policies of Nigeria-based stakeholders with regard to migration and development linkages. This has been achieved through the study of available documentation (articles, reports, policy documents, undocumented notes) and interviews with twenty-two people representing eighteen institutions, ranging from Nigerian ministries and agencies, NGOs, European and African foreign embassies to several multilateral organisations such as the IOM, ILO and ECOWAS. The interviews were conducted from 26 to 30 June 2006 in Abuja.

Due to the limited number of interviews, and the general lack of data and empirical studies, this chapter does not pretend to be comprehensive. Rather, it tries to throw light on the major migration trends and to identify the major policy issues and dilemmas from the perspective of the Nigerian interviewees. Unless reference is made to written sources, information in this chapter is based on the interviews. Because of limitations of space, the chapter will focus almost exclusively on international migration.

Nigerian international migration

During the colonial era, parallel to rural-to-urban migration, and migration to and from other African countries, Nigerians migrated to the United Kingdom (UK), principally to pursue higher education. A significant proportion of them have stayed. After independence in 1960 this largely highly-skilled migration to the UK continued, although an increasing proportion of Nigerians also migrated to the United States (US) for study, business and work.

The 1973 oil crisis, with skyrocketing oil prices, caused a 350 per cent increase in oil revenues. The associated economic boom in oil-producing countries made Nigeria into a major migration destination within Africa. The rising incomes of the urban middle class and rapid industrialisation attracted a substantial number of West African labour migrants. However, the post-1981 decrease in oil prices heralded a long period of economic downturn along with sustained political repression and violence. In 1983 and 1985 Nigeria expelled large numbers of West African migrants, including about one million Ghanaians (Arthur 1991: 74).

In fact, Nigeria has witnessed a 'reverse migration transition, transforming itself from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Black et al., 2004: 11). Nigerians have increasingly emigrated to countries such as Ghana, Cameroon, and particularly the wealthy economies of Gabon, Botswana and South Africa (Adepoju, 2000). Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has developed as a major destination for migrants from various African countries, among which are numerous Nigerians. The skilled in particular have found the booming economy of South Africa to be a convenient alternative to Europe, the US and the Gulf States (Adepoju, 2000).

Although this migration of students, professionals and entrepreneurs to Anglo-Saxon countries has continued, there was also a diversification of extra-continental migration during the 1980s. An increasing number of Nigerians migrated to countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium as well as to the Gulf states. In the 1990s, Spain, Italy and Ireland emerged as new major destinations of labour migrants from West Africa and Nigeria (Black et al., 2004: 9). There has also been an increasing tendency of Nigerian migrants towards permanent settlement in these countries. Increasing restrictions and controls on immigration in Europe have not led to a decrease in Nigerian emigration. Rather, migrants are more often irregular and the itineraries tend to be longer and more perilous.

There is circumstantial evidence that these more recent migrants to continental European countries are, on average, less skilled, and that they more often work in the service (formal and, particularly in southern Europe, informal), trade and agricultural sectors of the economy. The UK and, in particular, the US (through student and professional migration as well as the Green Card lottery) continue to attract the more highly skilled workers (Hernandez-Coss et al., 2007). The need to expand the UK National Health Service has for instance created new opportunities for professional health workers who, at home, were poorly paid and unmotivated. Universities in the UK have also embarked upon a recruitment drive to attract Nigerian students. The Gulf states, too, have attracted primarily the relatively highly skilled – at least until recently. Education has remained an important cause of Nigerian emigration, and labour migration from Nigeria has also become increasingly feminine (Adepoju, 2000: 386).

A significant number of Nigerians apply for refugee status in European countries. In 2004, Nigerians were the fifth largest group of asylum seekers in Europe (Carling, 2006). Because of its size and its current *relative* stability, Nigerians have less chance of obtaining asylum status than citizens from ECOWAS countries directly affected by civil war.

The issue of trafficking of female Nigerian sex workers to Italy and other European countries has received substantial attention (Carling, 2006). Most recruiting of future prostitutes takes place in the southern Edo state. The most important destination is Italy, where it is said that as many as 10 000 Nigerian prostitutes live. Secondary destinations are the Netherlands, Spain and a range of other countries

(Carling, 2006). When Nigerians began migrating to Italy in the 1980s as a response to its high demand for low-skilled labour in agriculture and services, these women were only one of many groups that migrated. The first prostitutes tended to work independently, but in the early 1990s, immigration restrictions made prospective emigrants increasingly dependent on large loans in order to pay their journey, which provided an opportunity for traffickers (Carling, 2006).

A potential prostitute's initial contact with traffickers is often made through a relative, friend, or other familiar person, who puts her in contact with a 'madam' who organises and finances the journey. The costs may range from US$40 000 to US$100 000. The migrants and the madam conclude a 'pact', religiously sealed by a traditional priest, which obliges debt repayment in exchange for a safe passage to Europe. In Europe, the women are under the control of another madam, a counterpart of the madam in Nigeria. Most women realise that they are going to work as prostitutes, but do not necessarily know about the arduous conditions under which (street) prostitutes have to work, nor the size of their debt (Carling, 2006).

However, this work does offer some 'career' prospects. After repaying their migration debt in one to three years, women are essentially free, and it is fairly common for them to become a supervisor of other prostitutes and, eventually, a madam themselves. Carling (2006) stresses that this prospect of upward mobility is a incentive to comply with the pact, and that the strong element of reciprocity between traffickers and trafficked women makes it difficult to reduce this form of trafficking. According to a recent study, traffickers, especially in Kano state, successfully exploited the annual pilgrimage to Mecca to traffic children, men and women for different exploitative purposes, for example prostitution, begging and all forms of domestic work (Ehindero et al., 2006).

However, in light of the attention currently being given to trafficking, it is important to stress that, for Nigerian migration, trafficking seems the exception rather than the rule. The large majority of Nigerians migrate voluntarily, and even in the case of trafficking it is clear that the line between voluntary and forced migration is blurred.

It is also important to make a distinction between trafficking and smuggling. While many previously migrated on their own initiative, increasing restrictions have made more and more migrants dependent on the services of smugglers in crossing borders. Whereas until the 1990s migrants to Europe predominantly used air links, visa requirements and increasing immigration controls at air- and seaports, seem to have led to an increasing reliance on trans-Saharan, overland routes to the Maghreb countries, and in particular to Morocco, from where Nigerians and other sub-Saharan Africans attempt to cross the Mediterranean to southern Europe. Another now-popular route is via the Atlantic Ocean and the Canary Islands (de Haas, 2006b).

Scattered evidence on the origin of Nigerian immigrants in Europe and the US strongly suggests that the majority originate from the relatively developed and densely populated southern provinces. The Ibo from the southeast and the Yoruba from the southwest, and, to a lesser extent the Edo and the Ogoni ethnic groups, seem to constitute the majority of Nigerian migrants in the UK (Hernandez-Coss, et al. 2007). The majority of Nigerians trafficked to Europe seem to originate from Edo state, and Benin City in particular. Edo and, to a lesser extent, the Delta states are known as the main origin areas of sex workers. The Hausa and other northern groups seem relatively more oriented towards migration to the Gulf states. The predominantly Muslim character of the north as well as the position of the northern

city of Kano as a major air hub in the *hadj* (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), might partially explain this connection.

Reliable data on Nigerian migration is lacking. Nigerian authorities do not register or estimate emigration, which presumably reflects a low interest in the issue. Also, receiving country statistics are incomplete, as many countries do not include naturalised and second-generation Nigerians in immigrant statistics, and because of the substantial presence of irregular migrants. Nigeria's 2005 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) estimated that more than 2 million Nigerians (mostly highly educated) have emigrated to Europe and the United States (NNPC, 2004), but the empirical basis for this claim remains unclear. According to some embassies, at least 1 million Nigerians are living in the US and the UK, and another 500 000 in Germany and Canada. Hernandez-Coss et al. (2007) even claim that 5 million Nigerians are currently living abroad. However, these estimates lack empirical underpinning.

A compilation of existing migration statistics shows that more than 300 000 first generation Nigerian migrants were legally living abroad at the beginning of the twenty-first century (see table 1). Although the real number is certainly higher if we include second and third generations as well as irregular migrants, claims that 'millions' of Nigerians would live abroad appear to be unrealistic.

Black et al. (2004: 19) refer to sources suggesting that nearly 15 000 Nigerians enter Europe and North America annually. The UK census in 2001 reported almost 87 000 Nigerians living in the UK, with about 80 per cent of them in greater London (Hernandez-Coss et al. 2007). Between 200 000 and 300 000 first and second generation Nigerians live in the US. According to the 2000 census, 90 000 of the 109 000 Nigerian-born immigrants in the US aged 25 or over were tertiary educated (Adams, 2003). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) database on immigrants and expatriates, Nigerian emigrants living in OECD countries[1] represent 8.4 per cent of all Nigerians (including emigrants) with tertiary levels of education.

Table 1 Estimates of numbers of Nigerians living outside Africa

Country	Nigerians abroad		Arrival of asylum seekers (2004)
US	160 000	2004; country of birth	N/A
UK	88 380	2001; country of birth	1209
Germany	16 183	2002; nationality	N/A
Canada	10 425	2001; country of birth	589
Ireland	9 225	2002; country or birth	N/A
Netherlands	4 564	2003; country of birth	N/A
Italy	3 575	1989; nationality	N/A
Austria	2 913	2001; country of birth	1828
Greece	2 021	2001; nationality	N/A
Australia	1 783	2001; country of birth	N/A
Belgium	1 636	2004; nationality	N/A
France	1 425	1999; nationality	1572
Total	*302 130*		

Source: OECD 2006 and http://www.migrationinformation.org

4

Nigeria has also remained a migration destination. Despite past expulsions and the economic decline after 1980, substantial communities of west-African migrants remain in Nigeria, though immigration has continued at more modest levels. Between 1984 and 1991, the numbers of migrants from Ghana in particular, and also from Mali declined, whereas the numbers of Togolese and Beninoise seem to show an increasing trend (Arthur, 1991; 1991 National census). Although official figures underestimate the true numbers of migrants, census data suggest that migrants from Benin, Ghana, Mali, Togo and Niger form the largest groups, altogether comprising 305 000 registered migrants in Nigeria in 1991. Until the 2006 census results are released, it is difficult to assess the actual numbers of foreigners. According to recent UN estimates, over 971 000 immigrants live in Nigeria (International Migration Report UN, 2006). Nigeria hosts a relatively small number of refugees. Nigerian authorities and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that that there are 19 000 refugees and asylum seekers; most refugees are from Liberia (about 7000), Sierra Leone (1700) and Chad (3200).

Nigerian migration policies in regional and global contexts

Migration relations with European states: control and re-admission

Nigeria has largely pursued a laissez faire policy concerning the emigration of its citizens. It has actively intervened only in the case of anti-trafficking policies. However, since European countries started to put pressure on Nigeria to collaborate regarding the re-admission of irregular migrants, the Nigerian state seems to have embarked upon more active emigration policies through negotiating immigrant quota in exchange for collaboration with re-admission. Nigeria's own immigration policies are rather restrictive, except concerning ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) citizens who have at least nominally the right to settle, work and do business. Most non-ECOWAS foreigners have to obtain a visa to enter Nigeria.

The focus of the migration policies of European states and their embassies and consulates in Nigeria is on immigration control, and restrictive visa polices are seen as the main instrument for such control. European states see visas as a major bargaining chip use in negotiations, and one that they do not want to give up. A major problem in this process is the widespread forgery of documents supporting visa applications, such as false bank statements and reference letters. This makes Nigerians particularly suspect in the eyes of immigration officials. Nigerians are also thought to be regularly involved in various forms of crime, such as the global trade in cocaine, financial fraud, money laundering and internet scams. Nigerian interviewees tended to complain that their migration is put in a negative light through the persistent association with trafficking, crime and fraud, even though the vast majority of Nigerian migrants are law-abiding.

In recent years, migration has clearly risen on the agenda in bilateral relations between Nigeria and European states, which specifically seek Nigeria's collaboration in the *readmission* of irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers of Nigerian citizenship. Nigeria is known as one of the most 'cooperative' African states on this issue. Several European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Ireland and Switzerland, have signed re-admission agreements with Nigeria. Some countries are hesitant to concede to Nigerian demands for certain quotas of legal migrants in exchange for cooperation on re-admission. Although European embassies tend to describe Nigeria as relatively

5

cooperative in border control and readmission policies, they argue that the main obstacles in migration control are the limited resources and organisational and infrastructural capacity on the Nigerian side. Also the sheer size of the country, with 147 overland border crossing points, makes it notoriously difficult to control migration.

Although expulsions from several European countries to Nigeria do take place, and planeloads of irregular migrants are sent back, the numbers returned are fairly small, and the interviewees did not tend to see them as a very effective way of limiting irregular migration. Several interviewees claimed that these repatriations are largely 'symbolic', to give the impression that policy makers are 'doing something'.

Although readmission agreements with European countries state that irregular migrants should be returned on a voluntary basis, some Nigerian interviewees saw these as having the character of deportations, in which irregular migrants were treated 'as criminals'. Irregular migrants apprehended in Europe are imprisoned in detention centres before being deported, and aircrafts are full of police and security people2.

ECOWAS: infringing on nominal freedom of movement

Nigeria is a founding member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)[3] and hosts its headquarters in Abuja. The purpose of the ECOWAS is to have common trade, elimination of tariffs, and freedom of movement of people in the West African region. Freedom of movement is enshrined in the ECOWAS protocol of 29 May 1979 on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment. This protocol allows ECOWAS persons (1) to enter any ECOWAS state without a visa; (2) to reside in any ECOWAS country for up to 90 days; and (3) after 90 days, to apply for a permanent residence permit allowing them to start businesses, seek employment, and invest. An ECOWAS passport was established in 2000. National passports are gradually being phased out.

The implementation of the protocol on free movement nevertheless leaves much to be desired. A major obstacle is the frequent corruption of police, *gendarmerie* and border officials in all ECOWAS countries, which hinders free movement in practice. In Nigeria and throughout roads in the ECOWAS zone, several interviewees mentioned the presence of many unofficial road-blocks where police, *gendarmerie* and border officials take bribes as a form of unofficial toll. It was also reported that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for ECOWAS citizens to obtain residence permits, due to widespread corruption, bureaucracy and a general lack of awareness among migrants of their rights.

Migration issues have also become more important in EU-ECOWAS relations, presumably because of the increasingly visible presence of sub-Saharan migrants in North Africa and Europe, and the deaths and human suffering of West Africans attempting to enter the EU by making illegal sea crossings to Europe. It is seen as a problem by Nigerian and other ECOWAS stakeholders that most negotiations between ECOWAS and EU countries on issues such as migration (i.e. readmission) agreements are done on a bilateral, country-to-country level. ECOWAS would prefer to have block-to-block ECOWAS-EU negotiations.

Focus on trafficking

So far, the focus of Nigerian migration policies has been on the prevention of trafficking of women and children to Western Europe and other African states. This

partly reflects domestic concerns, and in particular those of the wife of the vice-president, but also the priorities of international donors. Nigeria has been under intense pressure particularly from the US to 'combat' trafficking. Trafficking is also seen as harmful for Nigeria's image abroad.

The Nigerian Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) was one of the first Nigerian organisations to work on trafficking issues. Since its inception in 1999, six hundred women and children have used WOTCLEF's Abuja shelter. WOTCLEF activities focus on awareness-raising, through establishing volunteer clubs in each state, and by visiting schools, markets, and hair salons, as well as talking to local leaders, in order to raise awareness of trafficking. A WOTCLEF-sponsored TV programme on trafficking played for a number of years.

A national law prohibiting human trafficking was adopted in July 2003. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) was created to implement this law. Its primary functions include investigation, the prosecution of traffickers, the rehabilitation of trafficked women, and the 'enlightenment' (awareness raising) of the general public and of institutions such as immigration, police, and justice departments. NAPTIP has a staff of approximately 250, located in six or seven offices around the country. Strategies to identify traffickers include working with paid informants in schools, motor parks, and hair salons in states where trafficking is prevalent. NAPTIP works with government agencies, WOTCLEF, UNICEF and IOM. There is a donor group on Child Trafficking headed by UNICEF.

Between February 2004 and April 2006, NAPTIP was involved in the return of 520 trafficked women. This included those apprehended en route to North Africa, and those deported from Europe in the context of re-admission agreements Nigeria has signed with several European countries, such as Italy and Spain. This number includes only the women and girls who admit to have been trafficked. The true number of returned trafficked women is believed to be much higher. It is estimated that of returned irregular migrants, only a small fraction (perhaps 5 out of 200) admit to have been trafficked, because of the negative stigma attached to female sex workers, and their presumed fear of being traced and punished by their traffickers.

Trafficked persons enter an 'oath of secrecy' with their madam in Europe. The belief in these oaths is said to be very strong and deters trafficked women from seeking police support or from admitting that they have been trafficked. Deportees include both traffickers (madams) and trafficked women. When the Italian authorities do 'sweeps', the traffickers are included among the returned irregular migrants. Upon arrival in Nigeria, NAPTIP used to hold all these women in one room, which decreased the chances of trafficked women being willing to denounce the traffickers. NAPTIP therefore now interviews expelled girls and women upon re-entry in Nigeria, so that it becomes apparent who are the traffickers.

There is little evidence that Nigeria's new anti-trafficking policies have led to a measurable decrease in trafficking, although most interviewees stated that Nigerians are 'more aware' of the dangers of trafficking. Some interviewees criticised the public awareness campaigns for having the character of general anti-migration manifestations which try to convince the youth that they should not migrate. As one interviewee said:

> They simply say 'East, west, home is best'. But this is the wrong message.
> You won't stop people from going. You should instead inform people

how to migrate legally so as to create a balanced opinion. Migration is not really a bad thing.

Several interviewees criticised the failure of European receiving countries, such as Italy, to identify the traffickers and to not deport them with the trafficked women. Currently, no such differentiation is made, and all irregular migrants are categorised as 'illegals'.

The focus on improving Nigeria's rather negative image abroad through anti-trafficking campaigns was the subject of criticism by several interviewees, because this coincides with an emphasis on repression and a lack of attention to the trafficked women themselves. As one interviewee said:

> The Nigerian government wants to make a good show, laundering its international image, rather than protecting the rights of individuals. For instance, the preamble of the anti-trafficking law only mentions the bad image migrants are creating for Nigeria. It does not address the rights of the individuals.

Because trafficked women are not well protected in either Europe or Nigeria, they are generally not inclined to denounce traffickers, although is seen as essential to addressing the issue effectively. One interviewee suggested that irregular migrants should be given temporary or permanent residency status if they identify a trafficker, instead of being deported straight away.

Emergent links between migration and development policies?

Contested migration-development links

In the first four decades after independence, international migration was hardly an issue in Nigerian politics, and until recently no connection whatsoever was made between international migration and national development strategies. In comparison, the much more large-scale rural-to-urban internal migration has attracted far greater attention from Nigerian policy makers and development agencies, mostly with the aim of stemming rural-to-urban migration through development, rather than using this migration as a development force.

This policy-making was based on the assumption that migration impacts negatively on development processes. For example, in the few instances in which Nigeria's PRSP – in Nigeria better known as NEEDS (Nation Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, see NNPC, 2004) – mentions (internal) migration, it is generally seen as a force disrupting social cohesion and societal values in village societies, and causing urban crises. Migration is strongly associated with trafficking, forced child labour and prostitution. In addition, Nigeria's PRSP perceives internal migration as a force which potentially contributes to urban unemployment[4], crime, conflict, failure in the maintenance of democracy, as well as urban pollution and waste management problems (NNPC, 2004: 12, 43, xix). Migration of the educated workforce to urban areas is also seen as increasing the ageing and deepening the poverty of rural populations (NNPC 2004: 32). The perceived solution to these problems is to stem rural-urban migration through rural development schemes (NNPC 2004: 70).

In as far as Nigerian policy makers have dealt with *international* migration, its positive contribution to development has so far been envisaged mainly in strong connection with *return* migration (Federal Government of Nigeria 2004: 38). Emigrants have been seen as a drain on the country's resources rather than as a potentially positive force for national development, even when living abroad. In most policy circles, migration, whether internal or international, is still seen primarily as a development failure rather than as a constituent part of broader social and economic transformation processes.

In this context, it is relevant to assess what has been the actual contribution of internal and international migration to social and economic development. Because of the effects of remittances and possibly of newly-acquired skills, dominant policy discourses – such as voiced in the Nigerian PRSP – have put international migration into a more positive light than internal migration. However, there seems reason to question this assumption. Internal migration has been much more massive than international migration, and its contribution has possibly been more positive and redistributive.

International migration of the elite, although numerically not impressive, is widely associated with large-scale capital flight, in which significant amounts of the country's oil windfall are transferred to foreign bank accounts and invested abroad. However, the recent, often irregular, migration of people from more modest socio-economic backgrounds to southern Europe and elsewhere may have been more beneficial for national economic development.

There is also some evidence that international remittances might exacerbate regional inequality. Over the past years, there has been a remarkable increase in remittances. A recent study on the UK-Nigeria 'remittance corridor' concluded that Nigeria received about US$2.26 billion in registered remittances in 2004, while in kind remittances (such as cars and electronic goods) were estimated at a level of US$0.51 billion. Based on the assumption that fifty per cent of the remittances to Nigeria are unrecorded[5], Hernandez-Coss et al. (2007) conclude that the real level of remittances must be around US$5 billion.

Most UK remittances are destined for cities in the main origin areas of Nigerian migrants, that is in the relatively developed southwest and southeast regions (Hernandez-Coss et al., 2007). Thus international remittances seem to exacerbate rather than level the income differentials between Nigerian states, and between urban and rural areas. *Internal* migration has probably contributed more to income redistribution from urban to rural areas, which might seem surprising in the light of the bad press it tends to receive in comparison with international migration. Back in the 1970s, on the basis of a survey conducted in rural Nigeria, Adepoju (1974) had already concluded that internal remittances enabled rural households to improve their livelihoods significantly, construct houses, and enable children's education. However, there is virtually no empirical evidence to assess the development impacts of internal and international migration more precisely.

A nascent interest in migration and development policies

In contrast with earlier 'non-policies' or migration prevention discourses, in recent years there seems to be a certain (re)-appreciation of the potentially positive contribution to national development of international migration and resulting remittances. There is also growing recognition that migrants are not to blame for the loss of resources, but rather the rather dismal economic, institutional and security

conditions prevailing in Nigeria. As one interviewee said: 'Instead of pushing migrants not to migrate or to come back, the state should create the circumstances to lure them back.'

The formal re-introduction of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 and increasing freedom of speech was generally recognised as an important step forward in restoring trust in the Nigerian state among Nigerian migrants. Yet at the same time the high insecurity, violence and crime levels as well as the omnipresent corruption and the lack of economic reform were seen as massive obstacles. According to many interviewees, the low levels of security and the institutionalised corruption are among the main concerns of migrants who return either temporarily or permanently. In addition, many migrants are said to be attacked and robbed when they visit Nigeria, because of their alleged wealth. The NNVS agency (see below) is currently trying to address this problem by providing police protection for returning migrants, which demonstrates how worrying the security situation is.

Political change towards democratisation after 1999 also seems to have coincided with a shift to more positive attitudes regarding international migration and development. For instance, Nigeria's PRSP makes a clear connection between democratisation and economic growth on the one hand, and the role of emigrants and donors in national economic development on the other (NNPC 2004: 13). The PRSP aims to

> continue to actively strengthen links with Nigerians and other Africans in the diaspora to deepen technical and business ties with the rest of the world, and improve export market penetration, especially in textiles, food, and cultural artefacts. (NNPC 2004: 83)

Strikingly, the PRSP also refers to attracting investments from *non-Nigerian* African migrants (NNPC 2004: 116). It is also interesting to observe the contrast with internal migration, whose contribution to national development is still seen as negative.

The launch of the 'presidential dialogue with Nigerians abroad' in 2002 marked this shift in policies. The presidential dialogue aims at incorporating the Nigerian diaspora into national development policies. This also coincides with a stated willingness on the part of the government to establish and reinforce links with Nigerian migrants, as well as with the numerous associations they have established abroad.

A study on the contribution of UK-based diasporas to development and poverty reduction conducted by Van Hear et al. (2004) highlights the diversity of Nigerians living in the UK and their organisations. It also showed that UK-based Nigerian diaspora organisations draw on a variety of constituencies, such as national or state-level interest groups, business associations, and associations of particular ethnic groups, whereas others are based on gender, religion, or political and cultural activities. Van Hear et al. (2004) also reported that, beyond such particular interest groups, Nigerians (and Ghanaians) in the UK figure prominently in pan-African diaspora development organisations, for instance the London-based NGO the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD).

Van Hear et al. (2004) state that the Nigeria diaspora provides a substantial contribution, especially by way of remittances, to the homeland, and that, in addition to these transfers, members of Nigerian diasporas contribute to poverty reduction and development in Nigeria, through temporary or permanent return programmes for the

10

highly-skilled and through numerous efforts to mobilise Nigerians for the social and political development of Nigeria (Van Hear 2004: 10–11).

It is not so much the engagement of diaspora groups that is new, but rather the interest of the Nigerian government in their potential contribution to national development. While the government has focused its hope on individual emigrants to invest, their associations are primarily ascribed a role in running and sustaining development projects. As part of the presidential dialogue with Nigerians abroad, the president had meetings with Nigerians living abroad in Atlanta and London.

The government has also established a Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization (NIDO), with an office based in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NIDO has set up a network of branches in Nigerian embassies abroad as well as destination country-specific websites. The official aims of NIDO are fourfold: firstly, to encourage the participation of Nigerians in the diaspora in the affairs of their home country; secondly to provide to Nigerian international migrant organisations a forum for the exchange of views and experience; third, to enhance the image of Nigeria through networking; and, lastly, to build a database of Nigerians with professional skills, and make this database available for the benefit of government, the private sector and Nigeria's partners. The President has also appointed a Special Assistant to the President on Nigerians in the diaspora. Nigerians abroad are officially encouraged to organise themselves and to link up with NIDO branches.

The Nigeria National Volunteer Services (NNVS) is another government agency which was established to reinforce bonds with the Nigerian diaspora. NNVS attempts to mobilise Nigerian professionals living abroad for capacity building, through encouraging temporary visits, technical missions and sabbaticals to Nigerian institutions, or through giving summer courses. These contacts are partly established through linking up with Nigerian professional associations abroad. Unfortunately, it is unclear how NIDO and NNVS function in practice, as no independent evaluations are available.

Remittances and remittance policies

Until recently, Nigerian policy makers and banks paid scant attention to the issue of remittances. According to interviewees, the Nigerian government and banks gave the impression of being mainly interested in large money transfers and major investments by Nigerians living abroad. Small-scale person-to-person remittances appeared to be of little interest to them. Although the Nigerian Central Bank is part of the technical committee responsible for drafting a coherent migration policy, it is unclear to what extent the globally increased interest of donors in remittances is going to change the attitudes of the Nigerian government and banks.

At the 2004 G8 summit, countries agreed to engage in remittance partnerships. Nigeria is one of the countries with which the UK government wished to engage in such a partnership. Up till now, however, this has been obstructed by a general lack of information on remittances and migrants abroad, and also because very little interest has been shown by the Nigerian Central Bank in engaging in discussion.

A recent UK Department for International Development DFID study on the UK-Nigeria remittance corridor identified the weakened Nigerian banking structure as a major obstacle for facilitating remittances. Due to decades of economic crisis, the number of Nigerian banks that have branches abroad has decreased. For small remittance amounts, their fixed fees are higher than sending money through Western Union, the main money transfer agency in Nigeria, which is also quicker. In addition,

money transfer agencies offer the option to pay out in US$ instead of Nigerian Nairas, to avoid the official, low exchange rate. Informal systems of value transfer are common, particularly in Italy, where there are a high number of irregular Nigerian migrants who have difficulty accessing formal remittance channels (Hernandez-Coss et al., 2007).

The main recommendation of the DFID report is to encourage the use of formal remittance systems, through four main methods. First, by increasing competition in the remittance market and facilitating the entry of more competitors, including the postal service and telecommunications providers, which can offer remittance products through mobile phone techniques. Secondly by making regulations affecting remittances more transparent and predictable; thirdly by encouraging banks to go beyond the role of being money-transfer agents and to become more proactive, by designing remittance products for the diaspora, and offering other products, such as mortgages. The last method is by building confidence in and capacity of formal financial institutions. The report also observed that, because banks are the only institutions authorised to pay remittances in Nigeria, the extensive national network of post offices is currently underutilised regarding the distribution of remittances.

It was also suggested in the DFID report that, in order to increase the development impact of remittances in Nigeria, the government could consider matching the collective remittances from diaspora associations (Hernandez-Coss et al. 2007). This proposal is apparently inspired by the Mexican *Tres por Uno* programmes.

Elements for a coherent policy on migration and development

Policy coherence between migration and development policies is yet to be achieved. As is visible in Nigeria's PRSP, development policies are still based on the assumption that migration is associated with a *lack* of development and furthermore undermines development in its own right. This is somehow inconsistent with stated aims of creating a positive link between migration and development policies.

The Nigerian president has appointed a Special Assistant to the President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs. Her office has established a technical committee of government ministries and agencies[6], which in 2006 was discussing a coherent policy on migration and development. Civil society role-players do not seem to be actively involved. The process is facilitated by IOM Nigeria. By July 2006, the committee had met six times and intended to submit the draft policy paper to the Federal Council by November 2006, and in any case before the 2007 elections.

According to the Office of the Special Assistant to the President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs, the main components of the migration policy are likely to be focused on mapping Nigerian migration and on identifying the most needed expatriates, how not to lose skilled labour, how to bring back the diaspora, and how to prevent irregular migration. It has also been mentioned that, as part of these new policies, migrants may be granted voting rights in the next elections[7].

Several interviewees expressed a fair level of scepticism about these initiatives. According to one Nigerian interviewee, the government's policies still essentially boil down to anti-emigration policies:

> The message is still 'do not migrate'. When the president talks to Nigerians living abroad he says 'come back to Nigeria and struggle it out

in Nigeria'. This is unrealistic if you take into account the enormous numbers of graduates without decent employment. They don't recognise the unattractive environment that Nigeria is. The government is not trying to regulate it through managing migration and protecting migrants. It is still seeing migrants as deviants. At the same time, ministers send their children to study and work abroad – but they don't call it migration.

This sceptical view seems to be based partly on doubts about the intentions of the government regarding the creation of a migration and development policy. One interviewee feared that, just as it has been the case with trafficking, the issue of migration and development is being imposed by the international donor community and that it is predominantly 'a fashion'.

The Nigerian interviewees tended to criticise EU migration policies for being focused solely on security issues and migration prevention. The feeling is often that these policies fail because governments cannot control migration since it is a result of, or is supported by, globalisation and new technologies. Probably more than other West Africans, Nigerians feel stigmatised and collectively treated as potential irregular migrants, criminals and traffickers. Even Nigerians with good jobs in Nigeria have difficulties securing a European visa.

The international image of Nigerian migration is dominated by issues around trafficking, although the large majority of Nigerian emigrants are often highly skilled and do not cause problems (Carling 2006). For low-skilled workers, it was suggested that European states should give 'temporary stay' permits that enable individuals to work and acquire skills and income, and then support them in returning to their countries of origin.

Conclusions

Although several hundreds of thousands of Nigerians live outside Africa, as a proportion of its total population of an estimated 130 million, this fraction is small compared to other African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Egypt or Morocco. There is no data confirming that there is a 'massive outflow' of Nigerians. Likewise, remittances seem to be relatively low as a percentage of Nigerian GDP, certainly compared to oil revenues. In the same vein, claims on the supposedly harmful effects of the Nigerian 'brain drain' lack a sound empirical underpinning.

However, a general lack of quantitative and qualitative research precludes making any definite statements. Too many facts about the nature and magnitude of Nigerian migrations and their relations to broader development processes are simply unknown. It seems to be important to put the development potential of migration into an empirical perspective – and to develop policies based on knowledge and not on trends and fashions within the international development community or in academic discourses. So far, policy is too much guided by unsubstantiated *assumptions* on migration–development linkages. Therefore, more empirical research on Nigerian migration as well its development implications is urgently needed in order to develop more informed policies on the issue.

On the basis of this exploratory study, we will try to formulate some hypotheses concerning policies put in place by Nigeria and European states that might maximise the positive development impact of migration while minimising its negative effects. Some targeted policy actions were mentioned by the interviewees which are seen as enhancing the development contribution of migration. These included

granting voting rights to migrants and encouraging migrants to register at Nigerian embassies abroad – in order to reinforce links with Nigerian migrants and their organisations. With regard to remittances, there seems to be substantial scope for the Nigerian state, and banks, to decrease the costs of remitting money and to encourage the use of formal remittance systems through increasing competition and transparency, as well as offering remittance products through mobile phone techniques, encouraging banks to design remittance products for the diaspora, and building general confidence in and capacity of formal financial institutions.

However, it seems to be important to go beyond such targeted actions and to address more *general* issues related to improving the status and rights of migrants, restoring the trust of migrants in the Nigerian state, and, crucially, create a generally attractive socio-economic and political environment for migrants to invest in and return to. Without such general improvements, it is unlikely that targeted migration and development policies will have a significant impact.

First, the lack of rights of many (irregular) Nigerian emigrants make them vulnerable and easy to exploit. This obviously diminishes their own socio-economic mobility as well as their capacity to contribute to origin-country development. Most Nigerian interviewees stressed that a migration and development policy should therefore start by recognising and respecting the basic human rights of migrants. This seems to be a responsibility of both sending and receiving countries. Without such rights, migrants become extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The generally repressive ('combating') approaches towards trafficking and irregular migration have limited effects or are even counterproductive because they deprive migrants even further of such rights.

The interviewees said that European employers profit from cheap immigrant labour, and the often irregular status of migrants makes it easier to exploit them. Instead of targeting these employers, states punish and stigmatise migrants, while denying their rights. Instead of criminalising and stigmatising migrants, it was said that European states should recognise the need for immigrant labour through giving access to legal channels of temporary or more long-term migration. Access to visas should also be made easier. Most Nigerian interviewees felt deeply uncomfortable with the fact that the focus on trafficking, crime and document forgery obscures the reality that the vast majority of Nigerian migrants are not criminals. In this context, interviewees suggested that the Nigerian government should engage in discussions with destination country governments to create more legitimate opportunities for migration.

Most Nigerian interviewees, in particular those in non-governmental positions also criticised the anti-trafficking policies of European states because they do not differentiate between traffickers and trafficked persons; instead all are collectively labelled as 'illegals' and subsequently expelled. They stressed that serious anti-trafficking policies should address trafficked men and women as victims and protect their rights. A blanket repressive approach works counterproductively by actually reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between traffickers and trafficked persons.

In the same vein, it was felt that the Nigerian state should liberalise its immigration policies and that Nigeria and other ECOWAS states should genuinely implement the ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of persons, the right of residence and establishment. Regional integration, both in economic and migratory terms, is seen as a powerful tool for national development.

Second, there seems to be a general feeling of distrust among migrants of the Nigerian state, which makes it difficult for the government to 'reach out' to diaspora groups. This seems to be the result of years of repression and neglect, and is unlikely to be changed overnight. This is evident in the NIDO initiative, which obviously lacks a firm connection with the already very active development associations of Nigerians abroad. Current initiatives of the Nigerian state (such as NIDO) seem to be rather top-down and this is perhaps an obstacle for their successful implementation. A more fruitful approach might be to link up with and build on the wealth of *existing* initiatives of Nigerian (and other West African) diaspora organisations

Not only European states, but also the Nigerian state was seen as failing to defend adequately the rights of Nigerian emigrants abroad, as well as immigrants in Nigeria. Emigrants have often been seen as deviants or even as traitors, and the Nigerian state has done little to protect their rights abroad, or those of forced and voluntary returnees. The Nigerians embassies are not (yet) seen as supporting irregular or even legal migrants. One interviewee described going to the embassy as 'the very last option' in case of trouble. It was felt that the Nigerian state would be successful in encouraging emigrants to register at Nigerian embassies abroad only if it assumes a more active role in assisting and defending migrant rights. Granting migrants voting rights is also seen a factor that would contribute to restoring trust.

Third, the general lack of insecurity, the high prevalence of crime, high levels of corruption, and a generally unfavourable investment environment prevent Nigerian migrants from investing, circulating and returning. There was general agreement among the Nigerian interviewees that in order to enhance the development contribution of migrants, it is necessary to create a generally conducive environment for development and investment. Nigeria is still seen as too risky, and, apart from in the oil industry, few investments are being made which allow for a significant skills transfer. In the eyes of many interviewees, there are not enough assurances that entrepreneurs can invest, and make a profit on their investments.

It was similarly argued that the 'brain drain' cannot be prevented as long as general conditions in Nigeria do not improve substantially. In Nigeria, basic rights are not upheld and there is not a feeling that the government protects its citizens. Besides improving investment conditions, personal security needs to be addressed before the brain drain can be turned into a brain gain through increased remittances, transfer of knowledge and competencies, and even a reversal of capital flight. This exemplifies the need to pursue *general* economic and political reform in order to restore trust among migrants.

15

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ENDNOTES

1 For a list of these (industrialised) countries, see http://www.oecd.org

2 Because deportees are officially not allowed to be handcuffed, the number of (military) police in an aircraft may well exceed the number of returnees

3 Current ECOWAS members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

4 This notion is based on the assumption that labour demand is constant, and ignores the fact that migrants themselves are also consumers of services and products, and hence may increase the size of the urban economy.

5 The empirical basis of this assumption is not clear.

6 The committee consists of the ministries of Finance, Education, Justice, Science and Technology, Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth Matters, Women Affairs, Health, and Foreign Affairs. It also includes the following agencies: the Central Bank of Nigeria, the National Commission for Refugees, NAPTIP, the National Population Commission, Nigerian Labour Congress, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), the National Planning Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission (2007).

7 Nigeria apparently does not have restrictions on dual citizenship.