
Internal Migration and Urbanization in Nigeria: Implications for Socio-Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

This study is an opinion paper that focuses on internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria: implications on socio-economic development. The purpose is to interrogate the interactions between internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria, pinpointing the implications of the nexus on Nigeria's socio-economic development. The study was explained using a combination of the theory of self-generated urbanization by Hawley (1981) and the push-pull theory by Lee (1966). The material for this study was generated through secondary sources such as journals, books, book-chapters, and available internet sources. The data were critically analyzed using content analysis. The outcome of the interrogation showed a strong nexus between internal migration and urbanization, as rural-urban migration remains a major factor in urbanization in Nigeria even though there are other factors. Again, the socio-economic development gap between rural and urban areas has incubated internal migration and affected urbanization in Nigeria. With regard to socio-economic development, internal migration, and its resultant urbanization have both good and bad sides. The good side is that internal migration (a key factor in urbanization) holds a lot of benefits for migrants, their dependants at home, and their host communities abroad by increasing educational access, quality of life, and overall living standard. The bad side, on the other hand, is that rapid urbanization, largely orchestrated by rural-urban migration, has continually mounted pressure on the urban environment and infrastructural facilities and is associated with such social problems as urban unemployment, environmental degradation, and urban health challenges. It is, therefore, recommended that government policies on internal migration and urbanization should be balanced-striving to manage the negative effects of the interaction between internal migration and urbanization and, at the same time, harnessing its gains.

1. Introduction

Urbanization, which is most frequently measured by the proportion of the total population of an area that resides in places geographically defined as urban areas as determined by the census, is a global issue (Adedeji, 2023) that has come of age in Nigeria, that is, its process began in the pre-colonial period, continued in the colonial era and has persisted in the post-colonial period (Adesote & Osiyale, 2023). Some scholars are of the view that its cause could not be isolated from internal migration especially rural-urban migration (Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adedeji, 2023). It is on record that the rate of Nigerian population growth has created a high demand for opportunities and resources with multiplier effects on migration patterns to the point that the population proportion living in places designated as urban has sky-rocketed (Kayode, 2001; Adedeji, 2023; Poufonet *al.*, 2024). Specifically, the population of Nigeria has

grown from 44.92 million in 1960 to over 213.40 million in 2021 (Poufonet *et al.*, 2024). More so, with a population of over 200 million, the country faces rapid urban growth as more people move from rural areas to urban areas in search of greener pastures (Kayode, 2001; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adedeji, 2023). This is called rural-urban migration and denotes the migration of people from rural to urban places within the same country. It is a major form of internal migration, that is, the movement of people within the country (Ugwuej e& Ikonne, 2015); others are rural-rural migration, urban-urban, and urban-rural migration (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015).

Internal migration, from Kuhn's (2015) perspective, is beneficial for development and social change even though the pathways of influence are complex. In the same direction, Deshingkar and Grimm (2005) point out that internal migration is important almost everywhere, and in some countries, it is far greater than international migration. More so, the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) (2024) argues that internal migration tends to be amplified by the fundamental shift towards urbanization, which in many ways is more important for developing countries than international migration to the point that internal migration is likely exceeding 700 million people. To demonstrate the significant level of internal migration in Nigeria, data from the 2019 World Population Review estimated that about 49% of Nigeria's population lived in urban areas compared to 16% at independence in 1960 (Poufon *et al.*, 2024). It appears people migrate to urban areas because of their calculations that urbanization improves the skills and knowledge of internal migrants through such improved facilities as research institutes, educational institutions, companies, financial institutions, and crime control agencies located in the urban areas, but the question of whether people who move from rural areas are better off in urban areas as raised by Turok and McGranahan (2013) still begs for answer due to inadequate evidence. This does not, however, counter the fact that there are push and pull factors of migration.

Some of the push factors from the literature include: lack of jobs/employment, low wages, poor financial conditions, social insecurity, and social discrimination (Khan *et al.*, 2023), while some of the pull factors include better employment opportunities, improved living standard, personal development, presence of relatives and attractive environment (Khan *et al.*, 2023). These push and pull factors could also be classified into economic, political, and social push and pull factors, respectively. Those economic factors pushing people to migrate, such as lack of jobs/employment, are economic push factors of migration, while the economic factors pulling migrants, such as hope for better employment, more income, and higher standard of living (Zoelle, 2011; Ikonne, 2024), are called economic pull factors of migration (Urbanski, 2022). The political factors associated with pushing (e.g., political crises, war and terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and unfair legal system) and pulling (the right to exercise franchise and freedom from persecution) migrants to other areas, states, regions, and countries, are called political push and pull factors of migration respectively (Urbanski, 2022). Furthermore, those social factors that contribute to pushing (e.g., decayed healthcare system and poor educational system) and pulling (e.g., religious tolerance, better educational opportunities, and better healthcare) migrants to other areas, states, regions, or countries are called social push and pull factors of migration respectively (Urbanski, 2022).

Besides, scholars like Farjana and Ahmed (2019) believe that internal migration, specifically, is a livelihood strategy orchestrated by social, economic, demographic, and geographical factors that affect households' decision to embark on internal migration. For these authors, the social factors associated with internal migration include village politics and lack of social opportunities such as education, health care, and recreational facilities; the economic factors include poverty, loan burden, and changing hereditarily profession; the demographic factor includes gender, age, and marital status; and geographic factors are natural disasters such as flood, drought, and cyclone. In fact, Vargas-Lundius *et al.* (2014) believe that the drivers of internal and international migration are essentially the same, as both are based on a strategy in search of improved well-being.

All these tend to be the reasons more people now reside in cities than in rural areas; for example, Vargas-Lundius *et al.* (2014) note that 54 percent of world population reside in urban areas in 2014; UNCTAD (2023) notes that a growing proportion of the population all over the world lives in cities and the share of urban population was projected to have risen to 56.9 percent in 2022. In Nigeria, the share of the urban population remains at around 54.28 percent (O'Neill, 2024). It is, therefore, against these backdrops that this study interrogated the interactions between internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria, bringing out their implications on socio-economic development.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Internal migration

Internal migration is the movement of individuals between usual residences within national states (Rees, 2001). In fact, it refers to the movement within a country, and it involves in-migration and out-migration (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015; Ikonne, 2024). In-migration describes movement into villages, towns, local government areas, and states within a country, while out-migration refers to movement out of the designated areas, such as villages, towns, local government areas, and states, within the country (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015; Ikonne, 2024). The patterns of internal migration include: rural-urban migration, rural-rural migration, urban-rural migration, and urban-urban migration (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005; Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015). Rural-urban migration entails movement from an agricultural settlement to an industrial sector; rural-rural migration entails movement between agricultural settlements; urban-rural is also known as return migration, and it denotes movement from an industrial sector to an agricultural settlement; while urban-urban migration means movement between industrial sectors (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015)

2.2 International migration

It is necessary to clarify the concept of international migration for a proper understanding of the concept of internal migration since both of them are the two major types of migration (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015; Ikonne, 2024). International migration is the movement of people across a national boundary; and it involves immigration and emigration (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015; Ikonne, 2024; Ikonne *et al.*, 2017). Immigration describes the movement of people into the country; while emigration denotes the movement of people out of a country (Ugwueje & Ikonne, 2015; Ikonne, 2024)

2.3 Urbanization

Urbanization denotes the concentration of human populations into discrete areas (US Environmental Protection Agency [US EPA], 2024). US EPA (2024) further explains that such concentration results in the transformation for residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation uses. The common ways of quantifying urbanization from the US EPA are tabulated thus:

Table 1: Common Ways of Quantifying Urbanization

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Description</i>
% Total urban area	Area in all urban land users
% High intensity urban	Area above some higher development threshold
% Low density urban	Area above some lower development threshold
% Residential	Area residential related uses
% Transportation	Area in transportation related
% Total impervious area	Area of impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots and roofs, also called impervious surface cover
% Effective impervious area	Impervious area directly connected to streams via pipes, also called % drainage connection
Road density	Road length per area
Road crossing density	Number of Road-stream crossings per area
Population density	Number of per area
Household density	Number of houses per area
Urban intensity indices	Multimetric indices combining a suite of development-related measures into one index value [e.g., the USGS national urban intensity index (NUII), based on housing density, % developed land in urban and road density]

Source: Culled from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2024). *Urbanization- Overview*. <https://www.epa.gov/caddis/urbanization-overview>

In fact, urbanization is narrowly defined as the urban proportion of the total population (Fox *et al.*, 2015). It, therefore, denotes the proportion of people residing in the places geographically designated as urban as determined by the census of a country.

2.4 Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development simply means social and economic progress in the society. In other words, it describes the positive changes or progress in the social and economic spheres of the society, such as in education, health-care, employment opportunities, crime control, road networks, and telecommunications. Chojnicki (2010) argues that socio-economic development embraces changes occurring in the social sphere, mostly of an economic nature. Some scholars argue that the assessment of socio-economic development cannot concentrate on only social and economic indices because, based on modern parameters, the level of economy digitalization and development of smart technologies play an important role in socio-economic development (Wang *et al.*, 2021; Nuralina *et al.*, 2023). Besides, Nuralina *et al.* (2023) assert that in order to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) and adapt to climate change, it is imperative to consider the environmental component of socio-economic development. This implies that some scholars believe in four components of socio-economic development (social, economic, digital, and environmental components) instead of just two components (social and economic) (He *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Nuralina *et al.*, 2023)

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a combination of the theory of self-generated urbanization by Hawley (1981) and the push-pull theory by Lee (1966). This is because both theories implicated migration (internal and international) as a major factor in urbanization. In fact, a combination of these theories provides an understanding of why people might choose to move to another area (push factors), what attracts them to their chosen area of destination (pull factors), and the intervening factors they are likely to face as they move to their chosen places of destination (Mlambo & Mpanza, 2019).

The central idea of the self-generated urbanization theory by Hawley (1981) is that urbanization takes place when two conditions are met: the generation of products that can support people in non-agricultural activities and the achievement of a level of social development that allows large communities to work independently (Hawley, 1981). This kind of change that led to urbanization is believed to have occurred simultaneously during the Neolithic period when the first cities appeared in the Middle East. This implies that rural-urban migration propelled this kind of urbanization as people started migrating to cities in search of industrial employment. It, therefore, may not be wrong to say that industrialization was the social force responsible for the movement from rural to urban areas (Childe, 1950; Effiong *et al.*, 2021)

Likewise, the central idea of the Push-Pull Theory of migration by Lee (1966) is that migration is more likely to occur when the positive factors of destination outweigh the positive factors of origin. In other words, the theory stipulates that the factors to be considered when migrating are the factors associated with the place of origin (push factors) and those connected to the place of destination (pull factors) and intervening obstacles (Lee (1966; Mlambo & Mpanza, 2019). According to Mlambo and Mpanza (2019:284), “a push factor is something that makes a person leave his/her area of origin and move to another area, the destination”. Examples include but are not limited to lack of economic opportunities, discrimination, violation of human rights, religious persecution, political autocracy, high rates of crime, and high population levels (Mlambo & Mpanza, 2019). A pull factor, on the other hand, is what attracts an individual to a particular area. Examples include but are not limited to good health facilities, political freedom, religious freedom, freedom from political persecution, etc. (Barman & Lumpplan, 2015; Mlambo & Mpanza, 2019). An intervening obstacle or factor may be a cultural or environmental feature that may hinder the migrant’s journey, for example, the distance between the areas of origin and destination, lack of adequate transportation, immigration policies and/or laws, ethnocentrism, rivers, borders and mountains (Mlambo & Mpanza, 2019). In fact, this theory seemed to have tapped wisdom from Ravenstein (1885), who believed that economic factors and motivations could be the basis for understanding and predicting migration.

4. Methodology

This article is a position paper anchored on already existing data on internal migration and urbanization. The data for the study was therefore generated through secondary sources such as journals, books, book-chapters, and internet sources available for this article on internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria: implications for socio-economic

development. The data were critically analyzed using content analysis to enable the researcher to draw conclusions and make meaningful contributions to the way forward.

5. The Interactions between Internal Migration and Urbanization in Nigeria

The interaction between the two phenomena (internal migration and urbanization) cannot be overemphasized, given the numerous implications of its outcomes. Tacoli, McGranahan, and Satterthwaite (2014), for example, note that internal migration, and net migration to urban areas in particular, drives the urbanization of a country's population. The authors further explain that rapid overall population growth often overlaps with rapid urbanization, creating especially fast urban population growth. Supporting this view, scholars like Aliyu and Amadu (2017) state that the towns and cities of Nigeria have phenomenally grown, with the pace of urbanization indicating extraordinarily high rates of 5%-10% per annum. This means that internal migration is a key supplier of the urban population. Relatedly, Awumbila (2014) asserts that migration is a significant contributor to urbanization as people move in search of social and economic opportunities or as a result of environmental deterioration. The author further narrates as thus:

Migration is, thus, an important component of urban population growth and urbanization process in Africa. However the capacity of urban towns to plan for and accommodate the increasing number of migrants by providing employment and access to land and basic amenities is limited... Rural-urban migration in particular, is typically seen as creating pressure on urban infrastructure, environment and employment. There is an underlying assumption that the phenomenon is linked to rising levels of urban poverty (Awumbila, 2014:3)

More so, Wilson Center (2011) reports that migration is the demographic process that links rural to urban areas, generating or spurring the growth of cities. This same report also indicates that growing cities are often seen as agents of environmental degradation as urbanization can place stress on land through sprawl; and coincident industrial development may threaten air and water quality (Wilson Center, 2011). Besides, the same report has it that in the eyes of many observers, rapid urbanization is also linked to the problem of unemployment and social adaptation of the migrants in their new urban setting (Wilson Center, 2011). Likewise, observation shows that Africa despite being described as one of the least urbanized continents across the globe, there are numerous projections that the continent will become increasingly fast growing, with estimations that current population will double by 2050 and resettle in African urban areas (Rugunanan, 2022).

This growth, from Rugunanan's (2022) point of view, will continue with increasing migration trends accelerating the urbanization process, but the opportunities and challenges connected to this growth will depend on high levels of control and management. Reports also show that there is increased movement from rural to urban areas and this has statistically moved from 15% in the 1960s to 43% in 2018, with major pull factors involving searching for better educational and financial opportunities for income diversification due to climate change, and social-cultural practices that are discriminatory to women (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2017; Rugunanan, 2022). In a more specific term, Fox et al. (2015) asserted that the growth of Nigeria's urban population in both absolute and relative terms has been accompanied by the expansion of existing built-up areas and the emergence of new and identifiably urban settlements. This same report narrated that:

While rural-urban migration also contributes to urban growth, the significance of urban natural increase and reclassification due to rural densification have been widely underappreciated while the role of rural-urban migration has likely been overstated in Nigeria, and indeed sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) more generally. While rural-urban migration is probably not the only contributor to overall urban population growth in Nigeria, it nevertheless continues to play important role in urbanization... (Fox *et al.*, 2015:6).

On the driving forces of the nexus between migration and urbanization, Ikwuyatum (2016) points out such factors as education, health, employment opportunities, transportation and communication, trade and commerce, social conflict, and violence as facilitating the linkage between migration and urbanization. The author argues that the socio-economic development gap between urban and rural areas is an issue in migration and urbanization; for example,

over half of the secondary schools and over eighty percent of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are located in urban centers (Ikuyatum 2016). The author also notes that there are inadequate secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities in most rural areas, causing a large population of rural dwellers to migrate to the nearest urban center to access health services. Besides, there is a shortage of job opportunities in rural areas, and this increases the flow of migrants from rural-urban areas (Ikuyatum, 2016). In fact, this pattern holds through in the areas of social conflict and violence, and trade in relation to migration and urbanization from the author's point of view, causing the author to call for development policies that anchor on equitable development between rural and urban centres.

In the same direction, Aydemir *et al.* (2022) argue that more people live in rural areas and work in agriculture and self-employment, while wage employment is more common in urban areas. Explaining further, these authors opine that structural transformations such as a sectoral shift from agriculture to industry and services that occur in developing countries induce migration patterns that differ from those in developed countries (Aydemir *et al.*, 2022).

6. Implications of Internal Migration and Urbanization on Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

The implications of internal migration and urbanization on socio-economic development cannot be underestimated. For example, Aliyu and Amadu (2017) argue that urbanization is a major public health challenge in the 21st century, given that urban populations are rapidly increasing while basic infrastructures are insufficient, and social and economic inequalities in urban areas have resulted in significant health inequalities. The authors further explain that urbanization is integrally connected to three pillars of sustainable development, socio-economic development, and environmental protection. Besides, as urbanization proceeds, the pace and scale of urban population growth will generate public health challenges (Aliyu & Amadu, 2017). Relatedly, Awumbila *et al.* (2014) report that rapid urbanization and the resulting pressure on employment and social amenities have led to large negative policy positions of African governments and metropolitan authorities on rural-urban migration and urbanization. In the same direction, Anaekwe (2021), who conducted a study on the impact of rural-urban migration on urban development in Abuja Municipal Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, points out that poverty, unemployment, economic disparity, basic social amenities and insecurity are the main causes of migration plus the fact that rural-urban migration has a negative effect on existing infrastructures in Abuja Municipal Area Council, which includes health-care facilities, waste disposal systems, roads and power supply.

Conversely, some scholars argue that internal labour migration can contribute to development, but recognition of the barriers to and within migration is needed to frame subsequent policy discussions and rural development planning (Dodd *et al.*, 2016). Another scholar partly supports this view as thus:

Two generations of internal migrants exist in Nigeria – first generation and their dependents and second generation migrants. These layers of internal migrants are not specific to Nigerians, but also apply to non-Nigerian migrants from neighbouring West African countries. For the different generations of internal migrants, regional differences in education, socioeconomic and political developments play important role in how internal migration impacts upon access to education, increase in life expectancy and living standards (Oyeniya, 2013:5),

Oyeniya (2022), against the popular view that internal migration (a factor in urbanization) is an economic and developmental problem, clearly states that it increases access to education, prolongs lives, and contributes to improved living standards, not only for the internal migrants and their dependants cum loved ones in regions of origin, but also for their host communities in destination areas. In other words, the scholar insists that the focus should be on how to harness the benefits of internal migration as a contributor to socio-economic development, empowerment, and poverty alleviation instead of seeing it as a militating force against economic and environmental domains. Moreover, the record has it that internal migration contributes greatly to the reduction of poverty, that the rural poor see migrating to urban areas as a way of freeing themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty, and that through migration strategy, they can actually get a better opportunity to separate themselves from poverty and enhance their socio-economic status (Saddique, 2003; Islam *et al.*, 2008).

It is also on record that the gains of migration do not just stop at the economic sphere but extend to social and cultural domains (Kilkey & palenga-Moellenbeck, 2016; Trask, 2022). The argument is that as migrants are exposed to new environments and cultures, they transmit new to their area of origin new ideas and practices, including reconceptualizations about gender relations, the role of individuals in civil society, and the value of education and skills development (Kilkey & palenga-Moellenbeck, 2016; Trask, 2022). One of the scholars notes that:

Urbanization can provide a mechanism to integrate youth into the social fabrics and provide economic, civil, and personal opportunities. It is most often in cities that they can access a good education and the skills that will provide them with solid employment (Trask, 2022:62).

Trask (2022), however, notes that rapid urbanization is associated with a wide variety of opportunities and challenges. To the author, the gains of urbanization anchor on the fact that it allows for centralization of services with increased access to employment, education, and leisure activities. Its challenges, on the other hand, especially in lower income countries, include decreasing access to fresh water supplies, growing sewage and sanitation issues, lack of access to green spaces, and a decrease in public health (Trask, 2022).

7. Conclusion

The study interrogated internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria with regard to its implication for socio-economic development. The alarming rate of movement from rural to urban areas and its resultant rapid urbanization prompted this study with the aim of establishing between the duo (internal migration and urbanization) and pointing out the effects of the interaction on the country's socio-economic development. This interrogation has shown that there is a strong connection between internal migration and urbanization in Nigeria as internal migration, especially rural-urban migration, has been implicated as a major social force behind urban growth in Nigeria, and this, evidently, is an outcome of the negligence of the rural sector. This, however, has both negative and positive effects on the country's socio-economic development. The researcher, therefore, concludes that irrespective of the fact, this nexus could be gainful and harmful to Nigeria's socio-economic development; the rapid rate of urbanization may remain unabated in the future if Nigeria as a country does not develop strategies for harnessing and controlling the benefits and dangers of the interaction respectively.

7.1 Limitations of the study

Insufficient funds and a relatively short period of time mapped out for the study necessitated the preference for an opinion paper instead of more robust qualitative research, which could have required sufficient funds and a relatively longer period of time to accomplish. This affected the balancing of the interpretation of the findings of the authors cited in this work and the researcher's conclusion. This limitation could not be overcome because the area of the study (Nigeria) is too large and could have required more funds and time to do a well-planned and thorough qualitative study using a combined instrument of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-depth Interviews to get the undiluted views of participants and respondents on Internal Migration and Urbanization in Nigeria: Implication for Socio-Economic Development, instead of making it a mere position paper.

Insufficient funds and lack of power supply delayed the work and made the study even last longer than the expected time to conclude the work. This was largely because the researcher depended solely on the generator for charging phones and laptops, which were the necessary tools for the research work. This limitation could not be overcome because there was no electricity supply in the researcher's location all through the time of this study, and there were insufficient resources for purchasing fuel for the researcher's generator at the time of the research.

7.2 Suggestions for future research

Given that no study is perfect in the pursuit of knowledge, the following further researches are suggested as follows:

1. A pure qualitative research on rural under-development and urbanization in Nigeria: implications for death rates is desirable to investigate the extent to which rural under-development has affected urbanization in Nigeria and the implications this has on death rates.
2. A research on 'an inquiry into internal migration and urbanization: a multivariate analysis' is also desirable to document the effects of the various forms of internal migration such as rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-urban and urban-rural migration, on urbanization and their policy implications

7.3 Recommendations

Based on the outcome of this interrogation, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government should target such internal migration and urbanization policies that aim at repairing the damages and, at the same time, harnessing the gains of the interaction between internal migration and urbanization since the duo (internal migration and urbanization) produces good and bad fruits
2. The government should pay urgent attention to rural development, especially its social and economic development, to reduce the rate of rural-urban drift in Nigeria.
3. Special attention should be given to rural social and economic development, such as locating modern educational institutions in rural areas and creating employment opportunities to reduce youths' attraction to cities.

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