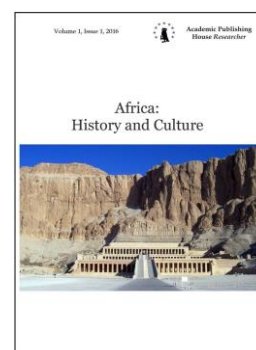


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Economic Reintegration: A Look at African Returnees

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Abstract

Young people from Africa, like many developing places in the world, often leave their countries in search of better opportunities. Once they are involuntary or forced to return home, the problem of economic reintegration seems to reemerge. The purpose of our paper is to evaluate the economic reintegration of African deportees into their respective countries of origin. In this paper, we seek to enhance knowledge about the progress of the economic reintegration of forced-returnees and also add to the paucity of research on evaluations of reintegration.

Keywords: african, deportees, economic reintegration, migration, returnees.

1. Introduction

Many developing countries are confronted with a “youth bulge”. This occurs when the composition of young people forms the highest proportion of the population. This creates some form of a demographic dividend. A demographic dividend refers to the increase in economic growth that tends to follow increases in the ratio of the working-age population – essentially the labour force – to dependents (Ssewamala, 2015). Also, the demographic dividend is projected to create a golden opportunity for economic growth and development. Amongst the young populations in the world, the African youth population has been increasing faster than the others (Population Reference Bureau, 2009). Additionally, African youth presents a promising possibility in the labour market participation (Agbor et al., 2012; Omoju et al., 2014). Nonetheless, this subject bursts the question – how has this opportunity been capitalized in Africa?

Evidence from recent developments has affirmed the increase of young irregular migrants from Africa to other parts of the developed world for greener pastures and refuge from wars (Kveder et al., 2013; Thomas, 2016). Unfortunately, irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are often trapped in Libya where their dreams and aspirations of making it to the “promised land” are perforated. So what accounts for this mystery? The youth population bulge in Africa is not harnessed; several of those who leave their shores are stuck in transit and most returnees from transit zones risk facing obstacles when they return to their home countries (Brachet, 2016; Mensah, 2016). In this view, it is actually unrealistic for anyone to assume that the “risk-takers” forcibly repatriated will peacefully settle somewhere they do not want (De Haas, 2005). If so, what is the way forward? Or what is/are the way(s) to synergize policy initiatives and the needs of the young irregular migrants to avoid illegal re-emigration?

Notably, Libya has been a key transit point for people willing to embark on a perilous sea journey to Europe (Hamood, 2006). During the heightening of the 2011 political turmoil in Libya,

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thousands of irregular migrants from Niger, Sudan, Chad, Mali, Senegal, Egypt and Ghana were deported (Grange et al., 2015; Naik, 2012). Approximately, 18,455 irregular Ghanaian migrants were reportedly deported from Libya in 2011 (Kleist et al., 2013). Arowolo (2000) argues that a potential migrant was once an integrated member of his society and that the decision to migrate and return should not rob him/her as a formerly integrated member who needs to be reintegrated. Also, the study hypothesizes that the increased rate of forced returnees from Libya is likely to put pressure on any processes and resources aimed at reintegrating migrants. Thus, most deportees would possibly end up not receiving adequate economic assistance needed for successful reintegration. This is hypothesized because most publications on reintegration have failed to evaluate the economic processes to ascertain the extent of its sustainability and the supporting bodies behind the reintegration processes (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Dako-Gyeke et al., 2017; Kleist et al., 2013).

2. Methods

This research primarily uses both descriptive and explanatory approach to collect and analyze data. We attempted to assess all the indicators within the economic aspect of reintegration by the stakeholders in Africa. Moreover, two components have been delineated to underscore how sub-Saharan African countries can facilitate a successful reintegration programme. Online searches using keywords such as “migration”, “refugees”, “reintegration”, “forced-returnees”, “Libyan deportees” etc. were conducted. A systematic review was done to analyze each of the processes of economic reintegration.

3. Discussion

Reintegration: Concept and Framework

Also, owing to the problems associated with the need for a successful reintegration and limited literature on the evaluation of economic reintegration, this paper adopts the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Reintegration Framework to answer the question; to what extent has Africa been successful in the economic reintegration process of undocumented deportees from Libya since the 2011? This framework was initially developed from an earlier study by Ruben et al. (2009). This framework has been at the core of “designing and delivering reintegration assistance” (Fonseca et al., 2015: 5).

For the purposes of the study, expressions such as irregular, undocumented and illegal migrants are used synonymously with deported or forced-return migrants from Libya. The study operationalizes that deportation of migrants by governments of transit countries, the government of origin and organizations because of political instability as forced-return and that it does not distinguish between the two scenarios. Though the IOM concept has limited detail account, for a clear understanding, this paper articulates a detailed account of the concept with secondary sources.

According to IOM (2015) reintegration is “the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or process, for example, of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence (p.13).” In relation to the definition by IOM, the European University Institute (2008) in lieu spells out the definition of reintegration more simply as the “process through which a return migrant participates in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country of origin (p. 134).” Considering these definitions, particular parameters are necessary for the reintegration of migrants, whether voluntary or forced.

Notably, some researchers subscribe to the fact that reintegration is an important component for the successful return of migrants. Nevertheless, the procedure and administration of a successful reintegration has simply not been easy and remains widely contentious also. Central to reintegration is the fact that all nations, organizations and groups share a primary goal of reintegrating their returnees sustainably to minimize re-emigration and irregular migration (Dzinesa, 2007; Fonseca et al., 2015; Özerdem, 2006). As a fundamental process of socialization, the aim is to also preserve the rights of migrants to ensure their safety and well-being as well as their contribution to local and national development (IOM, 2015: 15). Through these processes, deportees are re-established, motivated and empowered to bring change and be able to participate in other areas of their social structure. Given this account, it is important that attention is given to these processes for successful reintegration of migrants to avoid possible illegal re-emigration.

Economic Dimension of Reintegration

Ruben et al. (2009) expound that for successful reintegration to take place; three elements are to be considered. These include: (1) the prospect to become self-sufficient or independent, (2) the accessibility of social network in one's community of origin and (3) the consideration of one's psychosocial health. Generally, reintegration is thought to be sustainable when all facets of the economic self-sufficiency of returnees, their social stability with and acceptance into their communities as well as their psychosocial welfare are considered together at all levels without isolation. These processes are considered to allow returnees especially those stranded because of deportation to cope with migration drivers.

In the words of the Graviano et al. (2017):

"[T]he complex, multidimensional process of reintegration requires a holistic and a need-based approach: one that takes into consideration the various factors impacting an individual's reintegration, including economic, social, and psychosocial factors across individual, community, and structural dimensions" (p.1).

Though the above exposition demonstrates three main dimensions necessary for reintegration of forced-return migrants, this paper focuses only on the economic reintegration of deportees. This is necessary because economic reintegration has not received enough attention with respect to African returnees. Correspondingly, economic reintegration is stipulated to consist of the transportation (and travel expenses), income-generating assistance, work materials and educational support (Fonseca et al., 2015). Nevertheless, unplanned and sudden deportation of migrants from countries of transit or destination often has financial implications for the deportees and their family. The difference between the prepared and the reverse as Cassarino (2013) explains is that migrants who wish to return voluntarily make preparations for their homecoming through resource mobilization and activating social networks. This claim is supported by the IOM's projects that returnees are likely to be more sustainable in their communities if the resolution to come home is premeditated, voluntary and complemented by suitable reintegration support (IOM, 2015). As indicated in a study by Kveder et al. (2013) involuntary returnees who were forcibly repatriated back to Senegal had difficulties reintegrating into the labour market and consequently wanted to re-emigrate.

The first stage of economic reintegration regarding undocumented returnees has to do with their transportation. It is necessary for migrants to receive support right from the transit countries to the countries of origin and to their various homes. The transportation stage could possibly include "movement coordination, transit assistance, escort assistance, unaccompanied bags, documents and formalities" (Reyntjens et al., 2010: 8). In Kleist and Bob-Miller's report (2013, p. 2), mass deportation took place from countries in the global south including Libya and Morocco where irregular migrants were arrested, dumped elsewhere and left to their own faith without direct deportation to their respective countries or with any kind of support to rescue their helpless situation. Deportees in this situation became extremely stranded and vulnerable to the volatility of the conflict. They further discuss that some undocumented migrants died while trying to run from the country of expulsion. We argue that the situation indicates how the relationship between war and forced return represent a high-risk migration-management tool that always needs first-hand attention when the processes of economic reintegration are taken into consideration. Taking a critical assessment of the Assisted Voluntary Return system in Europe, emphasis on financial assistance - particularly travel expenses for returnees is fundamental. Travel assistance varies depending on the country of the return. Though it is known that some forced returnees navigate their way through to come home, in the case of deportees stuck and stranded in countries of transit, governments in collaboration with the humanitarian body such as the IOM are the agencies that come to their aid by facilitating their movement back home through coordinated activities with the officials in the transit zones. This is the first relief stage for deportees wherein the burden of moving to their respective homes is also sorted out.

Furthermore, most deportees particularly from countries of transit who could not reach "the promised land" unlike voluntary returnees, end up losing all impetus to find good conditions for themselves after their return. Dako-Gyekye et al. (2017) recognize that most returnees come back home virtually with empty hands; placing them in a difficult position to start a new life on their own. Similarly, Peña et al. (2017) argue that in most instances deportees suffer hardship and angst-ridden problems mainly because of financial instability. Even if the enthusiasm to start any

business-oriented activity is rekindled, the urge to propel this desire is obliterated by financial constraint. Attention should be drawn that not all repatriated migrants are unskilled. Before the Libyan conflict, some migrants had already stayed in the country for a considerable period of time. For that matter, their involvement in certain jobs has earned them valuable skills and innovations which can be harnessed to benefit the deportees' families, communities and the countries of origin at large. This is part of the reason why the need for an income-generating assistance is prudent. This mode of assistance could be in the form of giving money to individual returnees for start-up or group with joint economic activities. In the sub-Saharan region of Africa (SSA), poverty reduction strategies have not seen many manifestations at the grassroots level of their economies. Calls for the reintegration of deportees through financial and income generating assistance has become an additional burden for governments. A study on migration and development by Laczko (2005) maintains that reintegration assistance schemes are missing in most parts of the emergent nations where they are needed the most. This is expressed in the lack of reintegration policies and programs in these countries for returnees especially the deported individuals who could not make fortune overseas. We, therefore, argue that the pragmatic actions by the African governments in playing a leading role can facilitate a better economic reintegration process for sustainable return.

Another element notable for the augmentation of the economic assistance of forced-returnees is the provision of working materials (Kuyper, 2008). This is mostly the second phase of the financial assistance. It is believed that some returnees and in similar cases deportees, return back to their remote, marginal and poor communities where their lives began with foreknowledge in subsistence agriculture methods (Jallow et al., 2004). Importance, as scholars argue, should be attached to the provision of work materials such as agricultural supplies (livestock, seeds, tools) necessary for the development of agriculture and reintegration into their communities. They continue to argue that emphasis must be placed on the fact that in an urban location, different skills, and working tools may be required where vocational and commercial tools are prudent. According to Aghazarm et al. (2012, p. 19) "states have the prime responsibility to protect their nationals, even when abroad", and therefore, once they have been forcibly returned, it is the obligation of the state to show strong interest in a move towards a good economic reintegration process to avoid possible re-emigration. Apparently, this situation has seen a reverse action between governments and organizations in sub-Saharan Africa. Humanitarian bodies and organizations including the IOM, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) etc. are some of the agencies playing key roles with indifferent posture from most governments (Bob-Milliar, 2012; IOM, 2013). In addition to providing deportees and returnees with working materials, there should be educational initiatives to build their capacity.

Educational initiatives complement economic support for a successful assisted return of deportees (Graviano et al., 2017; Jallow et al., 2004). Certainly, while some deportees are labour-skilled, others may be less skilled or unskilled. Therefore, it is important to absorb all these concerns in the quest to reintegrate them. Likewise, the need for educational assistance is vital for job training, information on the labour market, and deportees' knowledge and skill enhancement. As Schuster et al. (2013) note in Afghanistan, the IOM was engaged to offer little financial assistance to improve skills needed to set up businesses. Rather, it provided for deportees the opportunity to "enroll in qualification training courses to learn computer skills or English, or undertake vocational training programmes that will teach them a specific technical skill in just 6 months". The knowledge acquired will certainly enhance the reintegration process. Nevertheless, the lack of funds has usually been the main hindering factor that stalls this process of reintegration in SSA. While organizations and agencies are willing to help, the large numbers along with no formal support from governments mean that successful reintegration will continue to be a herculean task for all stakeholders especially in Africa.

Component of Reintegration

As economic reintegration remains a vital issue in global development, important considerations must be attached to the components that determine the fruition of overall re-inclusion program. According to the Fonseca et al. (2015), essential factors like sustainability and measurability are required for successful readmission and development of returnees into their

communities. In this regard, they admit that sustainable return should encapsulate: (1) all the dimensions of reintegration and the ability of the returnee to handle factors that push them to migrate, and (2) any subsequent legal re-emigration that occurs based on acquired skills from the reintegration after deportation. Furthermore, measurability allows for monitoring right from the on-set and evaluations of different stages of every project. This is because evaluation is not a one-time incident, but assessments of differing scope and dimensions undertaken at various points in time to cater for the developing needs for evaluative knowledge and learning with the aim to achieve an outcome. Cherti et al. (2013) argue that long-term monitoring and evaluations of reintegrated beneficiaries will reveal the contribution of the support to a sustainable return. Additionally, long-term evaluations provide analysis of the different stages of the processes of reintegration and this could help identify possible gaps of the entire programme (Fonseca et al., 2015) and appropriate responses for subsequent projects. Based on these measures, the international community and migration scholars can ascertain the migration trend, the role of economic reintegration and how to address gaps that arise.

4. Conclusion

We evaluated the economic reintegration as a vital issue for African deportees' from Libya into their societies. Since deportees were already active members of their societies, the need for their reintegration into their various communities should be treated with alacrity. Economic reintegration has several stages beginning from the transportation of stranded migrants to and within their country of origin, provision of income-generating assistance, working tools and educational support. If the processes are to yield valuable fruition, essentially sustainable and measurable factors are not only sufficient but necessarily indicative. In the case of the African deported migrants from Libya, organizations and humanitarian bodies are the agencies that play a leading role in such reintegration programs. Governments often show a posture of mediocrity with disinterest to formulate cogent reintegration policy for their returnees. In addition, forced repatriation of migrants has great knock-on effects for development. Based on this notion, we consider the issue of deportation as a complex system which must be understood in a holistic outlook. We, therefore, suggest future studies to assess the other dimensions of reintegration in the context of social and psycho-social processes for which we acknowledge as a limitation of the study.

5. Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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