

**Migration, trafficking and internally displaced persons: Considerations for Social Work
practice in Nigeria**

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Abstract

The insurgency in Nigeria, notably Boko-Haram and farmers-herdsmen clashes have no doubt displaced millions of Nigerians and further forcing refugee status on thousands. On the other hand, trafficking and irregular migration of Nigerians across national borders to European, Maghreb and other nations of the world, have cost Nigeria its reputation globally. Handling these challenges has not been easy for Nigeria due to the increasing figures of perpetrators and victims. Care and social protection of IDPs as well as refugees are being marred by lots of controversies. With all of these pointers, the professional composite of those charged with handling these challenges should now be at the very fore. Conspicuously absent in this regard are social workers who are all over the world known for crisis management and psychosocial care. It is in this light that this paper seeks to understand the sociopolitical and economic formations of Nigeria, vis-à-vis the influence they exert on migration, flight and refugees, while x-raying the supposed place and roles of social workers in such context. The study relied on literature based research methodology and personal experiences.

Key words

Social Work, trafficking, internally displaced persons, migration, Nigeria

Background

Currently, the circumstances under which people migrate have taken the front burner of global engagements (Nelson, Price & Zubrzycki, 2017; Plambech, 2014a). Some of these circumstances are accepted to be right and some are accepted to be wrong, especially those that contravene principles of human rights and country specific migration laws. Thus, the issue in global migration discourses tends to be those inhumane circumstances under which people migrate, as well as the problems that arise in host countries for even those who have migrated conditionally or legally. Such problems include: xenophobic attacks, discrimination, stigmatization, among other forms of prejudice that dehumanize migrants (Tinarwo, 2015; Berman & Paradies, 2010; Slonim-Nevo & Lavie-Ajayi, 2017).

The leading cause of migration, displacement and flight is the search for benefits and survival by persons who believe that what they search for cannot be guaranteed in their places of origin (Aye, 2016; Haas, 2006; Plambech, 2014b). The capability approach of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen have tried to explain the place of individual perception and belief on why people choose to migrate (Mitra, 2006; Fukuda-Parr & Kumar, 2003). However, forceful displacement and irregular migration form the crux of this paper. Reasons and remedies to this, is what this paper seeks to discuss, while underscoring implications for Social Work practice in Nigeria.

1.1 Nigeria's sociopolitical, economic and migration experiences

Nigeria is one of the most populated countries in the world with a 2016 projected population of 230 million people (National Population Commission, 2016). It occupies a landmass of over 923,768km². According to Oyeniyi (2010), Nigeria is viewed as a multinational state as it is inhabited by over 500 ethnic groups of which the three largest are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and these ethnic groups speak over 500 different languages and are identified with wide variety of cultures. The official language is English. Nigeria is divided roughly in half between Christians who live mostly in the southern part of the country and Muslims who live mostly in the north.

The country is sharply divided along a Muslim dominated North and Christian dominated South which typifies its two-protectoral amalgamation in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard (Peel, 2010). Nigeria is largely a diverse ethnic concentrated country, with tribes numbering over 300. Major tribes are the Hausa/Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the South-West, Igbo in the South-East and Izon in the South-South (National Population Commission, 2010). It is as a result of this uncommon diversity that Nigerians hitherto feel they have been forced together to be a nation of nations by the colonialist, with the outcome turning out in recent times to be aggrieved groups calling for restructuring at best, and secession at worst (Achebe, 2012; Meredith, 2011; Onuoha, 2016; Achebe, 1998).

Although the country is blessed with abundant resources, its harnessing and management have not achieved much economic growth for its citizens as majority of them still live below poverty level given poor economic indices that mean no better for

middle and low class Nigerians (Opeyemi, 2012; Achebe, 1998). Driving poor economic situation of Nigeria is the malaise of corruption. Recently, Transparency International (2018) ranks the country at 148 of 180 countries in its corruption perception index. In addition, statistics from different agencies and studies speak poorly of Nigeria in terms of poverty, mortality rates, ethnic/religious and sporadic killings, terrorism, human development index, embezzlement of funds and abuse of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), among others (WHO, 2016; UN, 2018; Lekwa & Anyaogu, 2016; Boyo, 2017; Onuoha, 2016; Amnesty International, 2018). More recently, cases of abduction of school children and other persons by terrorists and kidnappers are beginning to heighten the scare of living in the country (Ross, 2018; United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2017). These highlighted crisis situations often provide justification for trafficking and illegal migration and also makes the protection of the displaced somewhat difficult.

To ascertain the extent to which migration, trafficking and internal displacement have become a burning issue for the government of Nigeria, available statistics suffice. In Nigeria, the number of Internally Displaced Persons has doubled more than in the span of three (3) years, from 868,000 people identified by the Nigerian Government in the North Eastern Regions at the end of 2014 to 1.7 Million people by June 2016 (Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). On IDPs, 2,598,000 persons between 2016/2017 were displaced rising from insurgency and herdsme-farmers' clashes. Again, within 2016/2017, it is recorded that 80,000 persons are also internally displaced courtesy of natural disasters. This is in addition to the country recording not less than 168 deaths in January 2018 alone, arising from clashes between farmers and herdsmen (Amnesty International, 2018). Nigeria is said to have the highest number of IDPs just better than war-torn Syria and Iraq (Odu, 2017). Yet, it is reported that only 10% of IDPs stay in the 150 IDP camps scattered across the country (IDMC [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre], 2017). More so, 218,000 Nigerians have been granted refugee status in neighbouring countries where they live in camps and fringes of host communities. On the other hand, Nigeria had a record of 10,000 refugees from Anglophone Cameroun as at January 2018 owing to the Southern Cameroun crisis (Sahara Reporters, 2018; NCFRMI [National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons], 2017).

These point to the fact that while Nigeria is a country of origin, it is equally a country of destination for refugees of other countries. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2017) pointed out that more than 1000 people have been killed in communal clashes since last December 2016. The violence has been almost on a daily basis in some places like Benue State and in a few other places, it is almost on a weekly basis.

Displacement is caused by a connection of interrelated factors which include: violence, insurgency, communal clashes, natural disasters which include flood and storms etc. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram Insurgency has caused over 2 Million People to be internally displaced, making Nigeria the home of African's largest Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Escalating communal clashes in different parts of Nigeria has also resulted in many people fleeing their homes and property. Clashes between farmers and herdsmen over grazing lands in states such as Enugu (Nibo in Uzouwani Local Government Area), Benue, Taraba, Zamfara and parts of Kaduna have left a bloody trail with its attendant destruction of houses, property, farmlands and whole communities.

According to Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round 11 Report of August 2016, the total of 2,093,030 IDPs (370,389 households) were identified in Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Benue, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Zamfara States and Abuja FCT. The breakdowns according to the States are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Total IDP population by current location (State)

State	Households	Individuals	Avg HH Size	
ADAMAWA	36,189	163,559	4.52	7.81%
BAUCHI	10,136	61,717	6.09	2.95%
BENUE	5,497	30,584	5.56	1.46%
BORNO	253,951	1,446,829	5.7	69.13%
FCT	3,160	20,924	6.62	1.00%
GOMBE	5,111	28,972	5.67	1.38%
KADUNA	3,842	28,927	7.53	1.38%
KANO	1,841	9,910	5.38	0.47%
NASARAWA	3,664	24,795	6.77	1.18%
PLATEAU	8,692	45,746	5.26	2.19%
TARABA	8,230	47,195	5.73	2.25%
YOBE	20,901	135,442	6.48	6.47%
ZAMFARA	9,175	48,430	5.28	2.31%
Grand Total	370,389	2,093,030	5.65	100%

Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix,
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/50878>

Given the figures above in addition to the socioeconomic difficulties obtainable in Nigeria, it would not be surprising to accept the veracity of Nigeria's high migration figures. Nigeria's National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI, 2017) reported that the figures for women who arrived Italy alone on the ground of sex work related migration rose from 433 persons in 2013 to 11,009 persons in 2016 alongside legion of unaccompanied children. On the other hand, the Nigeria Immigration Service [NIS] reported that between January to May, 2017, not fewer than 10,000 Nigerians lost their lives while trying to migrate to Europe through deserts and the Mediterranean Sea (Adepegba, Nwogu, Adeoye, & Alagbe, 2017). In similar vein, the International Organisation on Migration [IOM] also stated that illegal migrants of Nigerian origin rose from 800 persons in 2012 to over 22,500 persons in 2016 (IOM, 2016). However, while figures of migrants of Nigerian origin are on the increase, the figures of voluntary and forced Nigerian deportees are equally on the increase. The International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2017) puts the figure at above 100,000 for 2017 alone, stating that Nigerians are deported regularly from European, Maghreb and other African nations.

It is very important to state that some factors fueling incidences of migration and flight for Nigerians, apart from violence and economic hardships, are not farfetched from material based culture, voodoo practices, uncoordinated fostering practices, poor education and poor social protection, which are both direct and indirect consequences of poor recognition, lack and engagement of qualified social service professionals like social workers (Onyeji, 2018; Haas, 2006; Plambech, 2014b; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2009; Ikuteyijo, 2012; Gilroy, 2012; Okoye, 2013).

1.2 Social Work profession in Nigeria

It is not out of place to assert that the current realities of Social Work in Nigeria is a product of what the colonialist introduced, sustained and handed over to the country at independence in 1960. The traditional Nigeria social work was developmental and

involved the people promptly in dealing with their own needs while the western social work is remedial. In Nigeria, those who started the profession of social work were not trained professionals and the colonial government did nothing as regards professionalizing social work practice before independence. This is because, colonial Nigeria focused on three cardinals of Social Work, Religion and Medical Care. Areas where Social Work was evident in colonial Nigeria include remand homes, approved schools and the introduction of almoners in Nigerian medical settings beginning from 1952 (Idyorough, 2008; Ityavyar, 1985).

The implication was that the nationalist government inherited formal social work without professional social workers to carry the profession along. The development of social work in Nigeria according to Ekpe and Mamah (1997) has been very slow due to the above reasons. The remedial model of social work is still being practised in Nigeria while the practitioners of social work are mostly non professionals. After 1960, it was as though the colonial masters left Nigeria with Social Work, which could be traceable to the fact that non-social workers were directly responsible for social work jobs, in addition to the culturally induced thoughts about Social Work being a nebulous act that can be performed by anyone (Idyorough, 2013).

Social work services aimed primarily at the provision of services to the social casualties of the society, the beggars and destitutes, the delinquent youths, disorganized families, the unemployed and women. Programmes and projects implementing these policies on both federal and state levels centred around the construction, expansion and administration of rehabilitation centres, workshops for the disabled, destitutes and physically handicapped persons, youths centres, corrective institutions, emergency relief agencies, children's homes, motherless babies homes, women training centres and rural employment promotion schemes. All these were being handled by non-professional social workers.

Evidencing the failures of Social Work in not just Nigeria alone but other third world countries was the 1968 meeting of third world nations' social welfare ministers conveyed by the United Nations (United Nations, 1971). The resultant effect of this

meeting was the coming of Dr. A. H. Shawky to Nigeria in 1970. Shawky studied the social space of Nigeria and reemphasized the need for social workers to be trained, engaged and professionalized for the purpose of the country's social development (Okafor, 2004).

In what looks like heeding to the report of Dr. Shawky, Nigeria enacted Decree No. 12, also known as the Social Development Decree. It went further to create a separate and totally independent Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture, responsible for the coordination of social development activities and the training of social workers in Nigeria. The climax came at 1975/1976 when institutions of learning started advanced programmes in Social Work at diploma and baccalaureate levels. Today, not less than 15 tertiary institutions in Nigeria offer Social Work as a course either at diploma, bachelor's, master's and PhD levels or all of them (Okoye, 2018; Okoye, 2013).

Therefore, it is a known fact that Nigeria has plethora of social workers as evident in the hundreds of registered membership in its three major associations - Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW), Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) and Association of Medical Social Workers in Nigeria (AMSWON). More so, to scale up an effective teaching and training curriculum for Social Work students at all levels, the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) together with Social Work academics have just recently successfully produced a benchmark quality control system that will regulate social work courses in all Nigerian universities. Any department of Social Work in any Nigerian university that falls below the requirements of this benchmark will not be accredited. In same vein, the 1974 Social Development Decree which amounted to Nigeria's Social Development Policy last revised in 2004, was revised again in 2017. The document likewise emphasized social workers as very vital to the social development of Nigeria. Given the strides as communicated above, the questions become – why the seeming infantile existence of Social Work in Nigeria? Why the manning of supposedly Social Work positions in Nigeria by lawyers, sociologists, public administrators, accountants etc.?

The journey of professionalizing Social Work in Nigeria began in 2002 through a bill sponsored at Nigeria's bi-cameral legislature. In 2016, the lower chamber of Nigeria's Federal Legislature approved the bill, and precisely on March 31, 2017, the upper chamber gave same approval and transferred to the President for his assent in order to make the bill a law (Onyekwere, 2017). Social workers in Nigeria became very excited that a 15-year-old battle of professionalizing Social Work was coming to an end. The tide changed for the worst when on February 6, 2018, President Muhammadu Buhari denied assent to the bill on the grounds of clarity and a particular clause in the bill that reads – "... prohibits all persons who are not members of the institute from practicing ..." (Ogbonna, 2018).

The assent denial in addition to a similar bill called the Chartered Institute of Social Work Practitioners Bill which is not supported by any of the established Social Work Associations in Nigeria, made it obvious that there is an existing conspiracy to frustrate the professionalization of Social Work in Nigeria. Underscoring this conspiracy are the thoughts of job loss on the parts of non-social workers who see themselves as social workers in fields and offices that are exclusively Social Work inclined, except they return to school and get a minimum required credential as stipulated by the Nigerian Council for Social Work. Adding to this is the fact of culture. Culturally, Nigerians hold strongly to *filial piety*, which implies that issues of resolving disputes, care and social protection are handled by family members. At an extreme, the traditional ruler or religious leader could intervene. This cultural practice could be held responsible for the classification of Social Work as nebulous by some Nigerians, including the elites.

While the arguments made against the professionalization of Social Work in Nigeria cannot be disregarded, it has become very important to social workers in Nigeria to look out for superior arguments which is currently taking shape. Legislators and high profile citizens are being rallied and schooled on the science of social work that distinguishes it from activities of social care, welfare and protection championed by cultural and religious institutions. Efforts are underway to indigenize Social Work in Nigeria, thereby ensuring that practicing the profession in the country accommodates cultural peculiarities of Nigerians. Academic fora for discussing issues of Social Work in Nigeria

are being promoted by higher institutions of learning where Social Work is taught. The media is not left out, though very little or no effort has been made to explore social media instruments in the struggle, which could be owing to lack of funds to engage them. Very importantly, the bill is receiving some modifications to accommodate political interests, given the fact that professionalization is a process that should allow for gradual introduction of stringent measures of regulation on the continuum. With these concerted efforts, social workers all over Nigeria, are still very optimistic that at worst, the legislators if properly carried along and informed could go ahead to overrule the veto of the President after due considerations, once they can garner the support of two-third majority at both the upper and lower chambers. With such action, the bill would become law even without the signature of the President (Federal Republic of Nigeria National Assembly, 2018).

1.3 Relevance and challenges of Social Work in migration and flight context

There are couple of bodies who have taken up the challenges of migration, trafficking and internal displacement in Nigeria. Some of them are instituted by the government, some are driven by the United Nations and some are non-governmental. These bodies include, Nigeria Immigration Service [NIS], Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation [WOTCLEF], National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters [NAPTIP], National Emergency Management Agency [NEMA] and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]. The common goal of all these bodies is to foster human rights for migrants, trafficked persons and IDPs while ensuring that laws of various countries are respected. They achieve this common goal through physicality, education, as well as relevant rehabilitation, protective and reintegration services (NIS, 2017; WOTCLEF, 2017; NAPTIP, 2017; NEMA, 2017; UNHCR, 2018). Of all these agencies in exception of UNHCR poised to work within areas of migration, flight and refugees, only NAPTIP stated a clear designated position for the social worker. This is captured in a statement that reads on its website – ‘... the chair of the counselling and rehabilitation department must be a seasoned social worker with over 31 years of practice experience’ (NAPTIP, 2017).

In further revealing the gross lack of partnership and involvement of social workers in

migration and displacement situations in Nigeria, the Association of Medical Social Workers in Nigeria [AMSWON] lamented in 2016 and 2017, the absence of social workers in IDPs. They exposed the experiences faced by IDPs in various camps for lack of social protection, and called on the Nigerian government to partner with them for social care and protective services (Ojoma, 2017; Kashimana, 2016). It is till perplexing that to date, the Nigerian government is yet to heed that call. Little wonder why cases of sexual abuse, embezzlement of funds, malnutrition, child labour, to mention but few, still persist in most IDPs camps in Nigeria (Umoru, 2016). Of course, the narrative is not any different within coordinates of migration, as cases abound of deported women and girls facing the gall of being re-trafficked (Haas, 2006; Plambech, 2014b).

Consequent on these failings of the Nigerian government alongside governments of neighbouring countries to prioritize the importance of involving well trained social workers in the migration and trafficking saga, the UNHCR in its bid to advance social protection and care has put in place Nigeria Regional Refugee Response Plan [NRRRP]. The plan has been in existence since 2015 and currently has the partnership of 47 bodies inclusive of governments of various countries, word bodies and International Non-Governmental Organizations (UNHCR, 2018). The NRRRP for 2018 covers 218,000 refugee population, 75,000 host population and would need a budget of US\$157m. Over the years, the NRRRP has made commendable efforts in areas of biometric identification of refugees, education, self-reliance and livelihoods, alternative clean energy for cooking, environmental protection, water and sanitation, food security, health and nutrition, rights protection, shelter and distribution of non-food items (UNHCR, 2018). The 2018 plan would be building more on these achievements, with more emphasis on sustainability which imply that refugees should move away from dependence to independence. They are equally working with governments of Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon to utilize security might to put an end to insurgency of any sort in their nations.

In addition to these efforts chronicled above, Social Work Department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka currently has students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels who are exploring research areas in migration, trafficking and internal displacement.

More students are equally encouraged to develop strengths in these areas, as efforts are underway to make their findings be of applied importance to policies, programmes and actions aimed at social care, protective measures, rehabilitation and reintegration of troubled migrants, refugees and IDPs. So far, from engaged studies and dialogue on the subject, challenges and perspectives on these areas have been categorized into micro, mezzo and macro significance. The aim is to be able to deal with these persons at all levels regardless of cultural hindrances.

The complex structural face of migration tends to make professionals like social workers to emphasize more of the structure than the person. At micro level of Social Work intervention, the emphasis is the person, with crossovers coming from structural approaches (Thompson, 2011). The aim of micro intervention is to build resilience for the individual that is involved through psychosocial engagements and behavioural modification (Teater, 2010). This level of intervention aims at aggregating strengths of the client for the purpose of challenging present and future circumstances that could lead to a relapse.

It is in lieu of the foregoing that the conspicuous absence of social workers at Nigeria's port facilities, borders and IDPs camps should be reconsidered. With social workers at these points of migration and shelter for displaced persons, they will serve as agents of educating people on acceptable standards of migration as well as exploring credible avenues of economic sustenance together with affected persons. For displaced persons, through scientific therapies, trauma would be handled, care/protection would be promoted and the economic viability of the displaced could be enhanced through emphasis of strengths of affected persons. Social workers at this level could equally help to properly identify the status of migrants and refugees through investigative and diagnostic skills. Such skills would equally be of importance in discovering strong and available systems in the ecomap of clients. This will be of so much importance to the rehabilitation, reintegration and even prosecution of the victim where necessary. This paper also recommends recruitment of social workers at Nigerian embassies in xenophobic prone countries. They could serve as quick responsive agents to cultural and racial instigated conflicts between persons. Since it is possible for xenophobia to

begin from micro components before snowballing into group acceptance.

Social workers also need to focus on group identity and the influence of group on individual identity and behaviour (Thompson, 2006; Teater, 2010). This would be very effective at IDP camps, detention facilities and shelters. Social workers could assist in organizing recreation programmes at these sites which would serve as pacifiers to their plights, as well as a means of having them discover their strengths. Utilizing group techniques, the social worker could call for forums where these persons would feel relaxed to share their experiences and tell their stories in order to encourage themselves. Very important not to be excluded in the discourse at such forums should be the visions and hopes of these persons for the future. This would provide a good ground for the social worker in plotting and executing help strategies.

Also there is need for social workers to involve in large scale awareness creation among the populace, research, data management, diplomacy and policy actions. These areas concerted work toward protecting and preserving the system. On large scale awareness, education as a form of immunity to trafficking deceits, religious deceptions, inimical cultural practices, among others, has to be promoted by social workers, through curriculum reviews and mass sensitizations. Social workers are equally expected to advocate for favorable economic policies and legislations that will improve living conditions of people generally and those in crisis ridden areas. They are to ensure acceptable economic conditions for deportees to avoid the dangers of re-trafficking. The professionals could equally challenge unfavourable cultural practices that negatively influence these issues, while utilizing resources like witch doctors in Edo State to the best interest of curbing and eradicating the menace of illegal migration. Social workers should engage in research to furnish policy makers and implementers of programmes with scientific data to assist the plans of agencies in areas of logistics and interventions. They are equally meant to ensure the sharing of relevant information on the diverse cultures of places of origin, transit and destination, which will absolutely be of practice significance for involving professionals and significant entities in areas of migration, flight and refugees.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is one of the major crimes in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2006). Adding to these are the cases refugees and IDPs. This paper has revealed the rising figures of irregular migrants, refugees and IDPs, as well as the need for a more proactive action. Thus, the paper is stating that social care and protection for these categories of persons in Nigeria and of Nigerian origin are almost nonexistent. The paper advocated an inclusion of social workers in the web of these challenges, as they would professionally be of help in taming the dangers they portend. Social workers could be of help at various levels. To this end, it becomes imperative for Nigeria to prioritize its social development via sponsoring the development of social work, and ultimately grant the occupation a professional status by law.

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