

## The 'Japa' Syndrome and its Effect on National Economy: The Way Forward

Daniel Ugwo

Japa, is a coinage from the Western part of Nigeria where Yoruba language is spoken. Its literal connotation denotes 'to skillfully depart in haste'. It has become a trending word for an uncontrolled migration by desperate or frustrated Nigerians searching for a conducive environment, greener than their primary source of livelihood. Most especially those that wish to breathe fresh air. At present, there may not be justifiable empirical fact to ascertain the total number of Nigerians living outside the shore of the country. However, various data from different sources show that certainly, millions of Nigerians are living abroad, especially in the western world. According to Abike Dabiri-Erewa, head of Nigerians in Diaspora commission, there were in 2017 about 15 million Nigerians in various parts of the world. Two years later, she reported an increased number of over 20 million Nigerians. (Vanguard, March 2017; December 2019)<sup>1 2</sup>. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Desa) most recent estimate of Nigerians in Diaspora was 1.7-million as of June 2020. (Polity, February 2021).<sup>3</sup>

Several reasons have been determined to be responsible for this culture of 'Japa' of recent. One of the reasons is the lack of job opportunity in the country for both graduates and non-graduates.

### UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Today, one may conclude that Nigerians, living home and abroad, including the few ones yet unborn are not free of debt incurred on our behalf. During the last eight years of the former President, Muhammadu Buhari's administration which concluded in 2023, an average salary earner, who decided to live a little less than a moderate life however 'not-comfortable-life'; earning up to 50,000 Naira, would have incurred debt of 25,400 Naira at the end of every month using the following indices: (Fair meal - 1,800 = 54,000 monthly; Medicals - 180 = 5,400 monthly; House rent = 1000 monthly; Transportation - 200 = 6,000 monthly; Minor home materials such as soap, toiletries etc - 300 = 9,000 monthly. A total resulting to 75,400 leaving deficits of -25,400 after deducting salary of the month. This calculation does not include any emergency cost while such individual is unmarried and bear no responsibility towards his or her family. However, a monthly debt of ₦55,400 awaits a private primary school teacher earning ₦20,000 monthly. It will be heartbreaking to juxtapose the difference using the current choking situation of the country after the removal of fuel subsidy. What this means is that, many, in our country, despite working, are not earning enough to live an ordinary life let alone a fair life.

According to data from Statista, based on its information from World Bank. Since 2013, unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from its stable position of 3.7% to as high as 5.21% in 2019. However, 2020 recorded a surge to 6%. Although there was reduction in 2021 to 5.94% and 5.76% in 2022; this means that "the unemployment rate in Nigeria decreased by 0.2 percentage points (-3.37 percent) in 2022 in comparison to the previous year. Nevertheless, the last two years recorded a significant higher unemployment rate than the preceding years. This does not include economically inactive persons, such as children, retirees, or the long-term unemployed," (Statista).<sup>4</sup>

The youth unemployment rate has gained an increase since - from its 13.14% in 2016 to a high rate of 19.61% in 2021. This is just the percentage of the unemployed in the age group of 15 to 24 years as compared to the total labour force. The implication is that, there is no accurate index to determine the actual rate of unemployment in Nigeria and this implies that, the total number of unemployed persons ever reported is definitely lower than the actual unemployed population in the country.

There is nothing morally wrong with emigration as it is the process of leaving one's country of origin to live temporarily or permanently in another. What is more worrisome is the rate at which citizens have decided to emigrate, placed side-by-side with total number that have departed and those still in the process to depart with rush per specific time.

## **EDUCATION**

Lack of quality education is another factor that contributes towards the emigration of Nigerians to another country. Though Nigeria practice cheap education system, it can no longer be said to be cheap by an average Nigerians who is unable to match two meals daily with cost of education due to the retrogressive nature of standard of living in the country. It is true that Nigerian government for a long time have relaxed in its responsibilities to invest in maintaining standard level of education as it were it the 1960s to the 1980s. Poor funding, diversion, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds, insufficient workforce and other factors, in the education sectors has contributed to reason why Nigerians emigrate abroad to seek quality, conducive and convenient education. While this is always very expensive, it is affordable to the rich, especially children of the political class. The poor only seek scholarship opportunity. In this current time, lecturers in public higher institutions no longer teach the student to understand their purpose

in school against past ethics and standard, they are, most of the times, told to surf the web for what lecturers are paid to teach.

This action can be traced to the fact that lecturers are not well remunerated and most have decided to seek additional teaching role in other institutions which is desperately having negative effect on standard of education in the country since dedication is share among several institutions instead of their primary place of assignment.

### **POOR MEDICAL CARE**

Medical tourism abroad by leaders of the country is a clear mirror of the dilapidated medical condition of the country's medical facilities. Other Nigerians also depart the country in search of better healthcare and treatment option due to inadequate medical facilities, equipment, and trained healthcare professionals. The available ones may not be able to attend to some critical health conditions or illnesses as and when due; an implication which contributes to the decline in human health and quality of life, leaving many with no choice but to seek care abroad.

Poor medical conditions also contribute to the overall economic and social instability of a country. If a large portion of the population is struggling with health issues and unable to work or contribute to society, it can lead to a decrease in productivity and economic growth. This can create a cycle of poverty and hardship, which may drive individuals to emigrate in search of better opportunities and living conditions as is the case in Nigeria. Expert who are qualified to provide medical relief and care to patient are among the list of emigrants rushing out of the country with speed, leaving incompetent ones to attend to patients, including cases beyond their expertise. "UK immigration report in 2022 put the number of Nigerian healthcare professionals granted working visas in the UK in 2021 at 13,609. Also, between December 2021 and May 2022, a total of 727 Nigerian-trained medical doctors relocated to the UK. While the UK is one of the top destinations, Nigerian-trained healthcare professionals emigrate to Canada, the US, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and other developed countries." (Adebisi Adenipekun, 2023).

Another data source from General Medical Council of the United Kingdom revealed that in 2022, 1,107 Nigerian-trained doctors have been licensed to practice. Presently, Nigeria has the third highest number of foreign doctors working in the UK after India and Pakistan. (Tolu-Kolawole, 2022).<sup>7 6</sup>. The high levels of economic inequity in the country play an important role in this situation. The rich will often seek solace in their ability to travel abroad for healthcare services

or get healthcare in well-equipped private hospitals. This leave over 45% of Nigerians living below the poverty line to overwhelm the understaffed and badly equipped government hospitals.

### **EFFECT ON NATIONAL ECONOMY**

It is important to note that, it is not only the low-income earners that are departing the country in this recent dispensation; professionals, wealthy individuals and entrepreneurs are also departing. This didn't leave investors and foreigners unnoticed.

Emigration has both positive and negative effects on a national economy. On one hand, it will lead to brain drain of Nigerians and Nigeria, since highly skilled and educated individuals depart the country taking their talents with them. This will result to loss of human capital and a decrease in innovation and productivity. Many Nigerians will be made to offer more value while earning less in comparison but will have no choice since the least, abroad is better than the most at home. However, great number of citizens who are trafficked through the deserts and seas meet their grave in their journey while their impact result in deficit to the Nation's economy since they are not alive to contribute. The situation is almost the same for those who got to their destination but are in jail for illegal immigration or other offences.

On the other hand, emigration of Nigerians if well structured, can also provide economic benefits such as remittances, which are the funds that migrants send back to their home countries. Remittances can provide a significant source of income for families and communities, and can contribute to economic development by increasing consumer's spending and investment. According to Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Nigerians in Diaspora contributed so much to the Nigerian economy, an estimation of over 25 billion dollars in 2018. (Vanguard, December 2019)

Emigration can increase workers supply in certain occupations and industries in the destination country, thereby causing increase in population, lowering wages and increasing unemployment for native workers. Nevertheless, it can also expand the demand for workers and thereby inventing new jobs by increasing innovation, entrepreneurship, consumption and production. The general effect of emigration on wages and employment depends on the level of expertise and substitutability of natives and emigrants in the labor market. Emigration can affect the public finances of the destination country by changing the tax revenues and public expenditures associated with emigrants. The fiscal impact of emigration depends on factors such as the

income level, tax contribution, welfare eligibility, health status, education level, and family size of emigrants. Generally speaking, high-skilled emigrants tend to have positive fiscal impact compared with low-skilled emigrants who tend to have negative fiscal.

Emigration can alter the age structure, gender balance, and population size of the origin country, with implications for labor supply, social security, health care, education, and family structures. Emigration can also affect the cultural and political diversity of the origin country. It can affect the social cohesion, diversity, culture, identity, and values of the destination country. Emigration can also affect the crime rate, public health, education system, and political participation of the destination country. The social impact of emigration depends on factors such as the integration level, assimilation rate, discrimination level, and cultural distance of emigrant

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

To maximize the positive effects of emigration on the national economy, Nigerian government should implement policies that encourage skilled individuals to remain and return to the country while also promoting the benefits of remittances. This can include investing in education and training programs to develop skilled workforce, creating job opportunities in high-demand fields, and offering incentives for businesses and investing in research and development. This is because; despite the brain drain that will at first affect the nation's economy due to exported talents; the emigrant Nigerians in different countries would acquire tangible knowledge and expertise over time. If these acquired expertise are channeled back home through an enabling and attractive environment. Backed with good policies, the growth and economy of Nigeria, Africa and other country affected by war and unstable political and government policies, as a whole will blossom in no time without boundaries.

In addition, Nigeria's government should work to improve the conditions that lead individuals to emigrate. This includes: political instability, lack of economic and job opportunities, increased insurgency, religious intolerance, corruption, lack of trusted and cheap medical facilities, educational dilapidation and social inequality. By addressing these underlying issues, governments can reduce the need for emigration and promote sustainable economic growth.

In conclusion, emigration has both positive and negative effects on a national economy. To maximize the benefits of emigration while minimizing its negative impacts, governments must implement policies that encourage skilled individuals to stay and return to the country while

also promoting the benefits of remittances. Additionally, addressing the underlying issues that lead to emigration can help promote sustainable economic growth.

## References

1. Dabiri, E. (2017). 15 million Nigerians in Diaspora. Vanguard, March 30, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/03/15-million-nigerians-diaspora-dabiri-erewa/>
2. Dabiri, E. (2019). 20 million Nigerians in Diaspora deserve voting right. Vanguard, December 21, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/12/20m-nigerians-in-diaspora-deserve-voting-right-dabiri-erewa/>
3. Africa Check (2021). How many Nigerians abroad? And how much cash do they send home? Polity, February 10, <https://www.polity.org.za/print-version/how-many-nigerians-abroad-and-how-much-cash-do-they-send-home-2021-02-10>
4. O'Neill, A.(2024). Nigeria: Unemployment rate from 2004 to 2023. Statista, September 27, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/382366/unemployment-rate-in-nigeria/>
5. Adenipekun, A. (2023). The brain drain of healthcare professionals in Nigeria: The buck stops with government. Bsg, January 4, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/blog/brain-drain-healthcare-professionals-nigeria-buck-stops-government>
6. Shehu, M. (2002). 6,068 Nigerian doctors relocated to UK since 2015. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chronicle, August 31, <https://21stcenturychronicle.com/6068-nigerian-doctors-relocated-to-uk-since-2015-report/#:~:text=So%20far%20in%202022%2C%20the,UK%20after%20India%20and%20Pakistan.>
7. Tolu Kolawole, D. (2022). 6,068 Nigerian doctors move to UK under Buhari. Punchng, August 31, [https://punchng.com/6068-nigerian-doctors-move-to-uk-under-buhari/#google\\_vignette](https://punchng.com/6068-nigerian-doctors-move-to-uk-under-buhari/#google_vignette)

## About Author



Daniel Ugwo is a Nigerian. He holds a B.Sc. (Hons) Degree in Computer Science at the Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria. He is a technology enthusiast. He has attended some participatory certification courses at several institutions such as: Element of Artificial intelligence and Building Artificial Intelligence at the UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI MINNA LEARN (FINLAND); Introduction to Race, Ethnicity, Gender, And Social Class in Brazil at UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA BAHIA(Brazil); Cloud Security, Cyber Security, IoT and Ethical Hacking at CISCO among other instructions. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in related field. Apart from his academic qualification, he is a News reporter and Article writer. This unique blend of skills allows Daniel to craft insightful articles that not only inform but also inspire critical thinking in diverse national and global life.

Through writing, Daniel seeks to bridge the gap between complex technological concepts and accessible information for a broader audience. The goal is to empower individuals with knowledge while highlighting the ethical responsibilities that come with technological advancements. By engaging with readers on these critical issues, Daniel aims to contribute to a more informed and equitable world.

In addition to technical pursuits, Daniel is a dedicated leader and peace advocate, committed to fostering understanding and collaboration among diverse communities. Danie Ugwo combines technical expertise with a passion for social justice, striving to make a meaningful impact through writing and advocacy in the ever-evolving landscape of technology.