



INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AIDED MOBILITY AND MIGRATION IN WEST AFRICA: IMPERATIVE FOR INTEGRATION

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STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

- Introduction
- Conceptual framing
- Research questions
- Method
- Drivers of migration in West Africa
- ICT aided (im)mobility
- ECOWAS Protocol and a future beyond borders
- Barriers to sub-regional integration
- New identities and reconfiguration of African Studies.

INTRODUCTION

- West Africa is located in the western most part of Africa, comprising of **16 countries** with estimated population of **403,923,246** as at September,2020 (IOM, 2020).
- Historically,West Africa, has a standing culture of migration characterized by fluid mobility of persons.
- Mobility within the sub-region is multi-layered, it takes the form of temporary, circular and permanent movements, mainly for employment and economic opportunities.
- About **47.7%** of west Africa's population is urban with a median age of **18.2** years (IOM, 2019).
- The IOM 2020 report shows estimated number of international migrants globally to be **272 million** as against **220 million** in 2010 and **173 million** in 2000. Migration is therefore part of global dynamics.
- There is dearth of migrants statistics within the sub-region due to the fluidity of such movements. The latest is the figure for 2009, which is **8.4 million** (Afdb, 2010).
- However, migration within the sub-region is seven times greater than migration flows to Europe. It is recognised as the largest migrant stock in Africa (Mo Ibrahim, 2019).
- Even though projected rates of migration are rising but migration has been a vibrant and historically rooted phenomenon in the sub-region.

FIGURE 1: MAP SHOWING THE COUNTRIES WITHIN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION



METHOD

- The data for this presentation were generated from the following sources:
- Empirical information from a commissioned work on migration and border conflicts in Africa by the presenter.
- African Development Bank working paper series.
- The international organization for migration annual reports.
- The Mo Ibrahim Foundation report.
- And journal resources including online resources and some library resources.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

- The concepts in this presentation are framed to convey the social meaning of interactions in the context of mobility and migration.
- **ICT**-Information and communication technology represents the integration of numerous technological devices deployed in communication to enhance social interactions.
- **Mobility**-represents the movement of populations and goods over time which is integral to human freedom.
- Youth is defined as young persons aged **15-35** years (ECOWAS Youth Forum, 2003).
- **Human migration** is the movement of people from one place to another. It could be temporary or permanent.
- It consists of internal and international migration which involves the crossing of borders. This presentation focuses on intra-regional migration using Benin Republic, Ghana and Nigeria as case studies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ❖ The following questions provide the road map for this discourse
 - What are the current migration drivers in west africa?
 - How does ICT aid (im)mobility?
 - Free movement of persons and the future of bordering?
 - What constitutes barriers to sub-regional integration?
 - Are new identities formed?
 - How does it reconfigure African Studies?

WHO MIGRATES?

- Around 60% of Africa's population is currently less than 25 years old, and more than 1/3 is aged between 15-34 yrs .This trend will span 2035 while the rest of the world suffers aging population (Mbaye and Gueye, 2018).
- West Africa, has always been a region for mobility and migration. People migrate mainly for wage labour and trade and return to origin context to invest hence migration has been temporary and circular. Few migrations are permanent.
According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, contemporary migrants in the region are young, educated and comprise of both men and women.
- The types of mobility range from seasonal labour migration in search of better opportunities, to forced displacement due to climate change and conflicts.
- For this new class of migrants, migration is agentic and not collective.This presentation focuses on this class of migrants.
- Benin, Ghana and Nigeria are the case studies for this presentation. Benin for proximity and Ghana and Nigeria for the size of their economies and colonial and post colonial relationships.

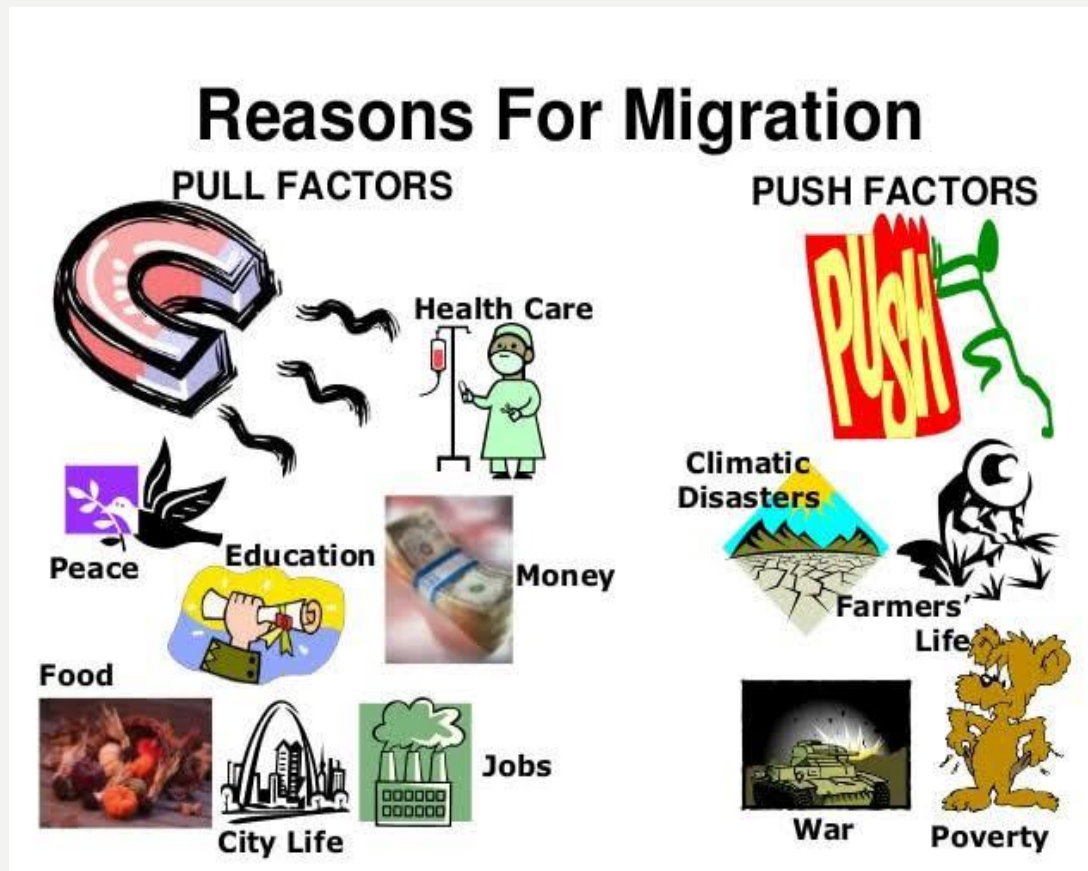
FIGURE 2: MIGRATION INVOLVES ALL



MIGRATION DRIVERS IN WEST AFRICA

- Contemporary African migrants are mostly young, educated and roughly count as many women as men (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019). Migration is fluid, multi-layered and agentive.
- Precarious economic prospects, youth population bulge and consequent high pressure on the labour markets of small and struggling economies are some elements that have contributed to West African cross-border mobility and migration.
- Also conflicts exacerbated by insurgencies have also contributed to the mobility in the sub-region. Examples include the Boko haram and Islamic state of West Africa province (ISWAP).
- Unable to rely on agriculture for their livelihood and the growing unemployment an increasing number of youth in West Africa leave their communities, to relocate to other cities in the sub-region in search of better opportunities.
- Not infrequently, these movements have followed unofficial routes. Mobility in the sub-region has also been enhanced by regional integration under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has contributed to freedom of movement and residence within the Community and the dawn of ICT as young people utilize the various online communities to seek greener pasture.

FIGURE 3: MIGRATION DRIVERS IN WEST AFRICA



PRECARIOUS ECONOMIC PROSPECTS: NIGERIA, BENIN AND GHANA-1

At present, migration in the sub-region represents both a challenge and an opportunity as many economies tank and youth seek better wellbeing in other spaces. All three countries are places of immigration.

- Mobility from the afore mentioned countries takes the form of both regular and irregular migration movements.
- The decline of Nigeria's economy in the past five years and the ease of transportation coupled with ICT has further exacerbated migratory movements between these countries.

Daily youth from Nigeria, Benin and Ghana explore new opportunities within the sub-region especially as migration to Europe becomes more difficult and dangerous.

- The borders are fluid and porous and could be crossed at will. Traders, students and itinerant workers seek better well being from Nigeria to Benin and Ghana and vice versa.
- Ghana's economy is buoyant according to IMF which has put its growth rate to be **8.8% by 2019** which puts Ghana as the worlds fastest growing economy however, IMF projects a decline by 2020. The global health crisis of Covid-19 can also be attributed to the predicted decline in Ghana's economic growth rate which is far higher than her neighbours like Nigeria. This to a large extent can explain why the current wave of migration is tilting towards Ghana as migrants seek to access good economic prospects which Ghana is offering. Ghanaians are however becoming hostile to migrants with the feeling that their economic opportunities will be taken over by migrants from neighbouring countries.
- It is easier to cross the borders unofficially than officially as experienced by this writer.

At Seme, (#Nmale, 45 yrs), government official, "this border post is to show sovereignty but our people were trading with each other before the demarcation. I don't disturb anyone who wants to cross except you're a criminal or trouble maker". Those with genuine business cross and return and we assist them to cross.

FIGURE 4: FLUID MOVEMENT OF PERSONS AT SEME BORDER

SOURCE: DAILY POST ONLINE –RETRIEVED 20/9/2020)



FIGURE 5: TRADERS WAITING TO CROSS THE AFLAO BORDER IN GHANA



WEST AFRICA YOUTH POPULATION BULGE

- Africa's population is young with half being under **25 years**. In West Africa, about **60%** of the population is under **25 years** and expected to grow through **2035**.
- Ideally, this should be a positive for wealth creation because it could be deployed to work and generate wealth.
- Unfortunately, the governments have neither expanded the formal sectors nor empowered the informal sectors to create jobs.
- Unequal access to education and lack of vocational education create a series of inequalities that exacerbate unemployment in spite of the youth bulge.
- This is because many young people and society equate a job with a skilled position that provides a steady income and status.
- Many young people in the informal sector or agriculture see themselves as unemployed.
- Paradoxically this category of people are exposed to ICT which provides them access to social capital. This enhances their desire to migrate in search of better opportunities.
- *At Seme, a respondent (#Nmale,25yrs),said "I am going to Accra to hustle in the tech.hub. I was in Yaba for 5yrs, I can repair all android phones and one day will develop an App. My friend told me that Ghana is better for hustle. Many of my friends are in Accra and Kumasi.*

FIGURE 6: YOUNG AFRICAN MIGRANTS (courtesy: IOM Niger).



UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

- As governments in the sub-region make a show of sustaining the colonial legacy of militarized borders, West Africans have devised ingenious ways of living in a borderless world.
- The labour market in West Africa is fraught with challenges as most of the actors are informal and majority of the available jobs are self-employment with a high level of underemployment (Mbaye and Gueye, 2018). Between 2000 and 2010 some states in West Africa enjoyed some measure of economic growth but poverty did not decline thus, exacerbating unemployment.
- Acute unemployment and precarity affect the largest and most vulnerable population segment such as the youth, women and the rural population. The greater majority of this population are found in the informal sector-poor remuneration and insecurity of tenure.
- The governments were unable to create jobs to match the increasing population thereby, causing the youth to seek better opportunities else where.
- On the surface the unemployment rate seems low judging by ILO's report, for Benin its 2.0% and Ghana, 4.33% . But for Nigeria, its 27.1% which is quite high. The fact is that those counted as employed do not cherish their employability especially if in agriculture. They often seek for means to improve their wellbeing as evidenced by a large population of Beninese and Ghanaians who migrate to Nigeria to seek better employment opportunities in the informal sector.
- For Nigerians, the rising youth unemployment and underemployment have caused many young people to migrate either to Ghana and Benin to either work or trade encouraged by their friends in those contexts.
- Two respondents (#Nmale 25 yrs and #Nfemale 23 yrs) informed that one stands a better chance of making a living above poverty line in any of the two countries than residing in the country without any hope.

FIGURE 7: UNEMPLOYMENT IN AFRICA



LABOUR PRESSURE AND MIGRATION

- Labour Supply and demand are imbalanced in Africa's market with high levels of unemployment and underemployment, and few high-quality formal jobs.
- Labour market distortions reduce productivity and hinder the overall growth of labour.
- Africa's labour market is a paradox: the work-force is abundant, but labour costs are high because skills are skewed and distorted.
- The economic potentials that came with the growth of different cities within the sub-region served to attract a host of labour migrants from different parts within the sub-region but often unskilled or semi-skilled. These factors continue to push young people into migratory movements as labour seeks out better opportunities.
- The labour pressure for instance, impels young people into decisions such as migrating for a short period or settling for longer periods.
- Migrating youth are often caught in the web of deciding to accept being underemployed and unemployed or moving to new contexts as evidenced from two respondents:
 - *#Bmale, 28 yrs: I am a chef from Benin. I work in Lagos and earn good money more than what I will earn in Benin. I return home yearly to invest and plan for my future.*
 - *#Gh.female, 25yrs, I am a hair dresser, I come to Nigeria to hustle every six months. I stay with friends and my customers come for Ghana weaving and braids. I have other friends who are seamstresses who also work in Lagos.*
- The fact is that among young people such movements are seen as normal and a strategy to improve available skills set- in a word brain gain.

MIGRATION AND GENDER

- Migration studies have been gender blind and tend to view female migration through masculine prism. Women were often viewed as associational migrants.
- Common perception is that migrants are predominantly male, but global estimates by sex confirm that since 1960 numbers of female cross-boarder migrants reached almost the same number as male migrants.
- Women disproportionately lead informal small enterprises within the sub-region than they do in formal and large informal ones.
- Individuals may migrate out of desire for a better life or to escape poverty, or social and family pressure .
- Gender roles, relations and inequalities affect who migrates and why, how the decision is made, therefore migration cannot be gender blind.
- Migration within the West Africa sub-region provides new opportunities that improve women's lives and change oppressive gender relations even displacement as a result of conflict has also led to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities to women's benefit as they take advantage of economic opportunities in their place of destination.
- The intersectionality theory according to Tanja Bastia states that the new trend of migration is that women are no longer associational migrants but rather they are also primary migrants who now negotiate their economic power and aspire for upward social mobility on the basis of class and economic power (Bastia, 2015).
- Migration within the sub-region provides a vital source of income for migrant women and their families and earn them greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status in the society.
- It is the case that most women who migrate find work in unskilled occupations, for instance as domestic or care workers, or in the manufacturing and to a large extent in agriculture. These opportunities have also empowered them economically.
- Others go into petty trading, hair dressing and other minor trade that allow them empower themselves and negotiate their freedom.
- These opportunities allow women to move at will without being hindered by migration policies thereby helping them to earn their wage and have economic power.

FIGURE 8: YOUNG AFRICANS ARE LEAVING IT IS UP TO US TO PERSUADE THEM



ICT AIDED (IM)MOBILITY-1

- ICT has aided migration within the West African sub-region as many migrants have utilized the opportunities of the social media to maximize possible economic prospects outside their country of origin.
- The availability of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Google-hangout, We-chat, Badoo and many more has aided intra-regional migration within the West African corridor. Users of these social media platforms are able to connect with each other both as individuals and in groups and share advantages that each country presents and migrants are able to choose where to migrate to and which routes to use.
- Migrants and potential migrants within the three countries cited have been exposed to better economic opportunity with the aid of social media and this has led many to migrate with the sole aim of having a better life at the country of destination as compared to their country of origin.
- Intra-regional migration is good for the African continent because it will help retain skills set within the sub-region since the introduction of visa restrictions to Europe and reduce brain drain and waste (Attoh, 2019).
- The opportunities presented by ICT development within the sub-region is helping to change the pattern of migration as many young people feel the need to explore other areas and this to a large extent is helping in improving the economic growth of the entire sub-region especially in the development of tech. hubs.
- Every year over 23,000 graduates leave Africa for opportunities overseas mainly in Europe. The emigration of technically skilled people has left a little above 20,000 scientists and engineers in Africa serving a population of over 1.3 billion citizens. This trend can become more beneficial for the sub-region if migration is within to reduce brain drain and enhance brain gain (European Commission, 2018).

FIGURE 9: A FACEBOOK ADVERT BY A TRANSPORTER

TRAVEL TO GHANA, NIGERIA IN COMFORT & STYLE !



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Olive Building beside
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ICT AIDED (IM)MOBILITY-2

- A study conducted by Europol in 2018 showed the growth of social media in irregular migration in Africa.
- Human smugglers and trafficking syndicates put out untruthful information on the internet to lure potential migrants.
- Another study by Ukachi and Attoh (2020) showed 70% of the respondents sourcing information about trafficking situation from online communities.
- Organizations such as IOM uses its MigApp to provide veritable information. The Red Cross and Red Crescent societies use Trace the Face to connect with migrants.
- In West Africa, potential migrants use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp to connect with friends and source information.
- Those who succeed in destination contexts make skits and post on Utube to attract their peers. For West Africa, ICT also helps migrants with easy routes and likely spaces for greater opportunities.

FIGURE 10: HOW ICT AIDS INTERCONNECTIVITY



ECOWAS PROTOCOL AND A FUTURE BEYOND BORDERS

The consistent efforts by ECOWAS at facilitating the free movement of persons and goods and regional integration help to sustain migration flows within the sub-region.

- The West African sub-region has historically been a walked-across land as migration of people within and across borders has traditionally been an integral part of the social organisation of societies within the sub-region.

The 90 days movement treaty of ECOWAS which states that “citizens of the community shall have the right of entry, residence and establishment and member states undertake to recognise these rights of community citizens in their territories in accordance with the provisions of the protocols” has facilitated trade within the region.

- Most times migrants within the sub-region go for adventure and can always discover new economic opportunities and most times are likely to stay in their new destination for exploration.

The movement is often continuous as citizens move back and forth within the region to aid their economic potentials.

- The free movement offered by ECOWAS has mainly been utilized by the younger population because they are more mobile and in tune with latest ICT which provide them with accurate economic potentials within the three countries cited in this work.

ECOWAS should advocate a fluid and less militarized border corridor as evidenced by the EU border corridors. This is the future for the sub-region.

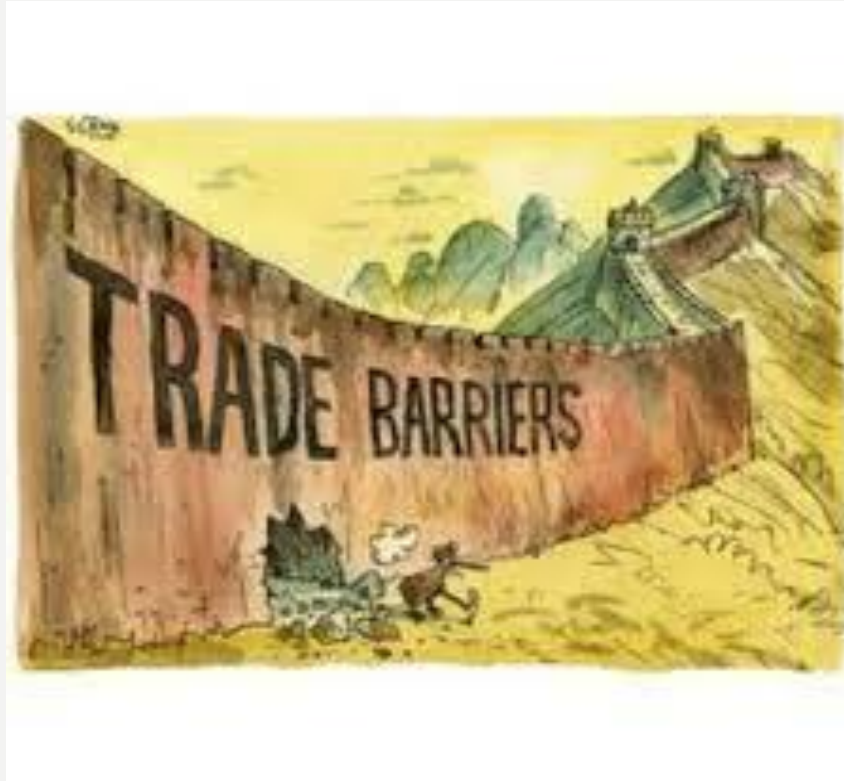
FIGURE 11: REGIONAL INTEGRATION



BARRIERS TO SUB-REGIONAL INTEGRATION

- There still exist some major barriers to the full exploration and development of the economic potentials of the West African sub-region using migration as an economic tool.
- National laws: This is a major barrier to the ideals of ECOWAS treaty that guarantee movement of persons and goods within the sub-region for a specified period of time.
- For instance, the current chairman of ECOWAS advocates tighter border controls to fight insurgency.
- National laws of all the countries have made this treaty impracticable as some countries implement laws that ensure that foreigners register to trade while Nigeria, closes her land borders.
- A good example is the Nigeria-Ghana relations where Nigerian traders are required to register their businesses with over one million Cedis and employ specified number of Ghanaians before they can own shops.
- This presents a big problem to integration and development.

FIGURE 12: BARRIERS TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION



NEW IDENTITIES AND RECONFIGURATION OF AFRICAN STUDIES

- The intra-regional migration within the sub-region helps to strengthen the bonds that exist within the countries as new identities are formed as a result of intra marriages and economic integration.
- Migrants within the sub-region often engage in circular migration which gives them the opportunity of making economic gains from their country of destination and sending money back to their country of origin for economic establishment and they visit home from time to time.
- The free movement within these three countries has become a viable platform for cultural unification and oneness as people embrace new cultures, learn new cuisine, music, fashion adapt to a new way of life as a result of migration.
- The transnational perspective on migration and development states that there is increased possibilities for migrants and their families to live transnationally and to adopt transnational identities, foster links with their societies of origin through remittances which enables migrants and their families to foster double loyalties.
- The opportunity of intra-regional migration will help reduce the physical border barriers created by countries as it sets to coalesce the sub-region into a single economic entity where people have freedom to identify with other cultures thereby allowing inter-cultural marriages, trade and social interaction.
- Sub-regional migration will help to reconfigure the West African identity to a region that shares common values and goals solely aimed at regional development and peaceful co-existence for its citizens.
- It will also help researchers to interrogate how gender intersects with migration in the sub-region.
- These are new vistas for research in African studies.

FIGURE 13: NEW IDENTITIES FORMED



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