

Oluwatoyin Gbenga, BAWALLA¹
Segilola Yewande OLADEJO²

Understanding the Exodus: A Multifaceted Assessment of Brain Drain and Migration in Contemporary Nigeria and its Implication on Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The phenomenon of brain drain and migration presents both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. This paper aims to assess the brain drain of human capital and its implication on sustainable development in Nigeria. The study is based on a multifaceted assessment of the phenomenon and its impact on the country's economic, educational, political, healthcare, and technological perspectives. The paper is anchored on interpretative meaning of “Push and Pull Factor Theory of Migration” by Everett Lee. This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding brain drain, the emigration of highly skilled individuals from one country to another, as well as policy recommendations to address the issue. The outcome of this study will enhance our better understanding and knowledge on the remote causes and solutions to brain drain in Nigeria towards achieving a vibrant and sustainable economy and also hitherto strategically position the nation's economy by discouraging Nigeria citizens from migrating to other countries. The study concludes that by combining domestic reforms with strategic diaspora engagement, Nigeria can transform brain drain into a resource for sustainability.

Keywords: *Brain Drain, Migration, Multifaceted Assessment, Sustainable Development*

¹ Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.
bawalla.oluwatoyin@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

² Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.
segilola.ogunyemi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Introduction

It is no doubt that the issue of brain drain in Nigeria is alarming and has generated a lot of controversies within the context of human capital development. The human capital development of any country is relatively significant to the nation's economy (Bawalla & Adegbite, 2019). The term brain drain simply refers to the emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from one country to another, often resulting in a loss of talent and expertise for the home country. In the context of Nigeria, brain drain has been a significant issue, with many skilled professionals, including doctors, engineers, scientists, and academics, leaving the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This phenomenon has been driven by various factors, including political instability, economic challenges, lack of job opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and better prospects for career advancement and higher salaries in other countries.

However, Migration, on the other hand, refers to the movement of people from one place to another, either within the same country or across international borders (Agunbiade & Ojewunmi, 2019). In the Nigerian context, migration takes various forms, including internal migration from rural to urban areas, rural-urban migration, and international migration. Internal migration is often driven by factors such as rural poverty, limited access to basic services, and the search for better economic opportunities in urban centers. International migration from Nigeria can be motivated by similar factors, as well as political instability, conflict, and persecution in some cases.

Both brain drain and migration have significant implications for Nigeria's development. Brain drain deprives the country of valuable human capital, exacerbating skills shortages and hindering economic growth and innovation (Afolayan & Adeleye, 2017). Moreover, the loss of skilled professionals often weakens essential sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology. On the other hand, migration, especially when it involves young and skilled individuals, can also contribute to brain gain if migrants return home with new skills, knowledge, and experiences acquired abroad. However, the extent to which brain gain offsets brain drain in Nigeria remains a subject of debate.

The Brain drain syndrome, particularly in Nigeria, remains a critical issue impacting the country's development and economy in terms of the magnitude of brain drain as Nigeria one of the countries

significantly affected as reported by the World Bank between 1990 and 2000, the (World Bank (2003) and Nigerian Medical Association, (2019) revealed Nigeria lost about 32,000 professional including doctors, engineers and academics to developed countries annually (Ogunyemi, S.Y, Bawalla O.G and Olulade, O.O, 2018). The health sector as suffered the lion share because the sector bears a substantial brunt of brain drain (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020). For instance, The Nigerian Medical Association estimates that over 2,000 doctors leave the country annually to seek better opportunities abroad. This exodus exacerbates the already strained healthcare system, leading to shortages of medical personnel and diminished healthcare access for the population. The educational sector of Nigeria equally faces challenges due to brain drain. The country loses a significant number of academics and researchers to foreign institutions. According to (UNESCO, 2013), Nigeria had over 13,000 tertiary-educated professionals working abroad in 2017, with a substantial portion being academics. Brain drain deprives Nigeria of valuable human capital, hindering economic growth and development. The loss of skilled professionals reduces productivity and innovation within key sectors, impacting the country's competitiveness on the global stage.

Arising from the foregoing, it could be deduced that several factors such as better employment opportunities, higher wages and salaries, good working conditions, access to advanced technology and infrastructural facilities may have contributed to the dearth of brain drain in Nigeria. Although, successive government in Nigeria has initiated various policies programmes to address brain drain such as offering incentives to retain skilled professionals, improving working conditions, and investing in education and healthcare infrastructure. However, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable, given the persistent nature of brain drain.

According to the International Organization for Migration, (2020) brain drain exerts multifaceted impacts on Nigeria sustainable development efforts in terms of the depletion of human capital whereby the migration of skilled professionals deprives Nigeria of its most valuable asset human capital. This diminishes the pool of expertise available for driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement, hindering long-term economic growth. This depletion also manifest in the health sector strain resulting to the shortage of healthcare practitioners exacerbated by the emigration of doctors and nurses. This brain drain undermines efforts to improve healthcare

delivery, resulting in inadequate access to quality medical services, particularly in rural areas, and impeding progress towards achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The fourth goal of sustainable development goals on quality of education invariably affects the departure of academics and researchers weakens Nigeria's higher education system, affecting teaching quality, research output, and institutional capacity (UNDP, 2019). This impedes educational advancements crucial for fostering human capital development and innovation, hindering progress towards SDG 4 (Quality Education). The loss of Investment and Innovation in relation to the skilled emigrants often contribute significantly to the economies of destination countries through their expertise, research, and entrepreneurial ventures (World Bank. (2020). Nigeria loses out on potential investments, technological advancements, and innovation that could drive sustainable development and enhance competitiveness in the global economy.

There are questions as to whether the mass exodus of highly skilled professional and experts affected the human capital development in contemporary Nigeria. Hence, the focus of this paper is to assess the brain drain and migration of human capital and its implication on the Nigeria sustainable development.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to assess the multifaceted aspects of brain drain and migration and their impact on sustainable development. This paper will enhance our better understanding and knowledge on the remote causes and solutions to brain drain in Nigeria towards achieving a vibrant and sustainable economy and also hitherto strategically position the nation's economy by discouraging Nigeria citizens from migrating to other countries.

Theoretical Exposition: The Push-Pull Theory of Migration

The push-pull theory of migration is anchored on interpretative meaning of Everett Lee. It is a conceptual framework used to understand the factors that influence people's decisions to migrate from one place to another. It suggests that migration is driven by a combination of "push" factors that encourage people to leave their place of origin and "pull" factors that attract them to a new destination.

The Push factors basically refers to the condition or circumstances in the migrants' place of origin that make them want to leave. These factors can vary widely but often include: Economic hardships which includes lack of employment opportunities, low wages, poverty, or economic instability; Political instability in terms of war, conflict, persecution, or political repression; Social factors as relative to Discrimination, lack of social services, or limited access to education and healthcare; Environmental factors such as Natural disasters, environmental degradation, or climate change effects like droughts or floods; also Demographic factors with examples of overpopulation, high population density, or demographic imbalances; and lastly the personal reasons in terms of family reunification, desire for better quality of life, or seeking adventure and new experiences.

The pull factors are the conditions or opportunities in the destination that attract migrants and encourage them to settle there. These factors can include: Economic opportunities: Higher wages, better job prospects, or the presence of industries in need of labor; Political stability: Peaceful governance, respect for human rights, and democratic institutions; Social factors: Access to social services, education, healthcare, and a diverse and inclusive society. Environmental factors: Pleasant climate, environmental sustainability, or access to natural resources; Demographic factors: Favorable age structure, low population density, or family and community ties; Personal reasons: Cultural attractions, better quality of life, or the presence of friends and relatives. However, migration decisions are often influenced by a complex interaction of push and pull factors. For example, economic opportunities in a destination may be the primary pull factor, but political instability or environmental degradation in the migrants' place of origin may serve as strong push factors. Similarly, the absence of economic opportunities or social services in the origin coupled with the presence of such opportunities in the destination can lead to migration.

In Nigeria, to understand the push-pull dynamics of migration, it is essential for policymakers to develop effective migration policies. Addressing the root causes of migration, such as economic inequality, political instability, or environmental degradation, as this can help mitigate forced migration and create conditions for sustainable development. Additionally, policies that enhance the benefits of migration for both migrants and destination countries, such as promoting labor market integration, protecting migrants' rights, and fostering social cohesion, can contribute to more positive outcomes for all involved parties.

Multifaceted Assessment of Brain Drain and Migration

Brain drain, the emigration of highly skilled individuals from one country to another, has been a significant challenge for Nigeria, impacting its sustainable development efforts in various ways. However, this multifaceted assessment provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding brain drain and migration in Nigeria, drawing on economic, educational, political, healthcare, and technological perspectives, along with policy recommendations to address the issue.

1. **Loss of Human Capital:** Nigeria faces a substantial loss of its skilled workforce due to brain drain. This loss deprives the country of the expertise needed to drive sustainable development initiatives in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and engineering.

2. **Impact on Healthcare:** The healthcare sector in Nigeria suffers significantly from brain drain. Many trained medical professionals, including doctors, nurses, and specialists, leave the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This exodus exacerbates the already strained healthcare system, leading to a shortage of skilled personnel and reduced access to quality healthcare services for the population.

3. **Educational Sector:** Brain drain also affects the education sector, as experienced teachers, professors, and researchers leave the country for better prospects elsewhere (Bawalla & Adenugba, 2021). This drain of intellectual capital hampers the quality of education in Nigeria and impedes efforts to build a knowledgeable workforce capable of driving sustainable development.

4. **Technology and Innovation:** Bawalla and Daniel (2021) argued that skilled professionals in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are particularly prone to leaving Nigeria in search of better opportunities abroad. This brain drain stifles innovation and technological advancement within the country, hindering its ability to compete globally and address sustainable development challenges effectively.

5. **Economic Impact:** (Oviawe & Iyoha, 2019) avers that brain drain contributes to economic losses for Nigeria, as significant investments made in the education and training of skilled individuals do not translate into benefits for the country's economy. The loss of talent also affects productivity and innovation, further impeding economic growth and sustainable development.

6. **Policy Implications:** In addressing brain drain World Bank (2018) requires a comprehensive policies that focus on improving working conditions, providing incentives for skilled professionals

to stay, and creating opportunities for their professional growth and development within the country. Additionally, measures to attract Nigerian professionals abroad to return home should be implemented to mitigate the effects of brain drain on sustainable development efforts.

The Meaning of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Through the pledge to Leave No One Behind, countries have committed to fast-track progress for those furthest behind first. That is why the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing ‘zeros’, including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls. Everyone is needed to reach these ambitious targets. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context. The United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to achieve decent lives for all on a healthy planet by 2030. As things stand, most of them are likely to be missed. This is partly because they fail to address human population growth. Positive, empowering population solutions are key to meeting the SDGs.

Implication of Brain Drain on Sustainable Development

The phenomenon of brain drain in Nigeria is multifaceted, it involves lots of complex interplay in terms of economic, political, and social factors. These three phenomenon are often categorised as the factors that affect brain positively and negatively in other achieve sustainable development for any nation’s economy or perhaps development. However, these three factors will be critically reviewed.

The Economic Effect of Brain Drain on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The economic effect of brain drain on sustainable development in Nigeria can be significant and multifaceted. Basically, brain drain as to do with the emigration of highly skilled and educated

individuals from one country to another, often to seek better opportunities, higher salaries, or improved living conditions. Here's how brain drain can impact Nigeria's sustainable development:

1. **Loss of Human Capital:** Nigeria invests resources in educating and training professionals in various fields such as medicine, engineering, and technology. When these skilled individuals leave the country, it results in a loss of human capital. This loss can hinder the country's ability to innovate, develop new technologies, and drive economic growth.

2. **Impact on Key Sectors:** Brain drain often affects critical sectors such as healthcare and education the most. Nigeria faces challenges in providing adequate healthcare services and education to its population. The departure of skilled doctors, nurses, teachers, and professors exacerbates these challenges, leading to decreased quality of services and limited access to essential services for the population.

3. **Decreased Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Skilled professionals play a crucial role in driving innovation and entrepreneurship. When these individuals leave, it can stifle innovation and limit the emergence of new businesses and industries in Nigeria. This, in turn, can impede economic diversification and growth, which are essential for sustainable development.

4. **Remittance Dependency:** While brain drain primarily represents a loss for the country, there can be a counterbalancing effect through remittances sent back home by expatriates. However, relying solely on remittances can create dependency and may not be sustainable in the long run. Additionally, remittances might not be directed towards investments in productive sectors that contribute to sustainable development.

5. **Skills Mismatch:** Brain drain can exacerbate skills shortages in certain sectors while creating surpluses in others. This imbalance can further hinder economic development and exacerbate inequalities within the country.

However, addressing brain drain requires comprehensive policies aimed at retaining skilled professionals, improving working conditions, providing opportunities for career advancement, and creating an enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. Investing in education, healthcare, and infrastructure is also crucial to building a sustainable economy that can attract and retain talent. Additionally, initiatives to encourage diaspora engagement and reverse brain drain can also contribute to Nigeria's sustainable development efforts.

The Social Effect of Brain Drain on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

It has been evident that emigration of highly skilled individuals from one country to another has significant social implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. However, here are some key social effects:

1. **Loss of Talent:** Brain drain deprives Nigeria of its most skilled and educated citizens, leading to a shortage of professionals in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and engineering. This loss of talent hampers the country's ability to innovate and develop sustainable solutions to social and economic challenges (Ndambuki & Ndirangu, 2017).
2. **Impact on Education:** The departure of skilled professionals often includes academics and researchers, resulting in a brain drain from educational institutions. This exodus weakens the quality of education and research in Nigeria, hindering the country's capacity to produce the next generation of skilled workers and innovators (Ikelegbe & Omeje, 2014).
3. **Social Inequality:** Brain drain exacerbates social inequality by creating a divide between those who can afford to emigrate and those who cannot. This phenomenon disproportionately affects marginalized communities and exacerbates existing social disparities, leading to social unrest and instability (Egunjobi, 2016; Adegbite & Bawalla, 2023).
4. **Dependency on Remittances:** Many Nigerian professionals who emigrate send remittances back to their families, which can alleviate poverty and improve living standards for some. However, this dependency on remittances may also discourage investment in local businesses and sustainable development projects, perpetuating a cycle of economic dependency (Chang & Lozano, 2019).
5. **Loss of Social Capital:** Brain drain weakens Nigeria's social capital by reducing the networks and connections that skilled professionals contribute to the country. These networks are essential for fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and collective problem-solving, all of which are crucial for sustainable development (World Bank, 2020).

To address the social effects of brain drain and promote sustainable development in Nigeria, policymakers must implement strategies to retain skilled professionals, improve working conditions, and invest in education and research infrastructure (Ndambuki & Ndirangu, 2017). Additionally, fostering an environment that encourages return migration and diaspora engagement

can help harness the skills and resources of Nigerian expatriates for the country's development (Egunjobi, 2016).

The Political Effect of Brain Drain on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The political effect of brain drain on sustainable development in Nigeria is multifaceted and can significantly hinder the country's progress. Brain drain, the emigration of highly skilled Nigerians, has significant political ramifications hindering sustainable development in the country. Here's a breakdown of the effects:

- 1. Weakening of Institutions:** Brain drain can weaken key institutions in Nigeria as skilled professionals, including academics, researchers, and policymakers, leave for better opportunities elsewhere. This exodus can undermine the effectiveness and capacity of government institutions, leading to challenges in implementing sustainable development policies and programs Afolabi & Samuel (2018).
- 2. Impact on Innovation and Research:** The departure of skilled professionals diminishes Nigeria's capacity for innovation and research. Sustainable development relies on continuous innovation and the development of new technologies, ideas, and solutions to address pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Brain drain impedes this process by reducing the pool of talent available for research and innovation within the country.
- 3. Political Instability:** Brain drain can exacerbate political instability in Nigeria. The loss of skilled professionals may contribute to a sense of disillusionment among the populace, leading to social unrest and political discontent. Moreover, the flight of talent can weaken governance structures and exacerbate corruption, further undermining political stability and hindering sustainable development efforts (Awogbenle, & Iwuamadi, 2010).
- 4. Dependency on Remittances:** Brain drain also results in a dependency on remittances from Nigerians living abroad, which can have political implications. While remittances can alleviate poverty for some families, they do not address the underlying structural issues driving emigration. Moreover, reliance on remittances can create a sense of complacency among policymakers, reducing the urgency to address the root causes of brain drain and invest in sustainable development initiatives at home (World Bank, 2018).

These political effects of brain drain underscore the urgent need for Nigeria to implement policies aimed at retaining skilled professionals, fostering innovation and research, strengthening institutions, and addressing the root causes driving emigration. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can mitigate the adverse impact of brain drain on sustainable development and promote long-term prosperity for its citizens.

The Consequent Effect of Brain Drain on Nigeria Sustainable Development

Nigeria faces a significant challenge in achieving sustainable development due to brain drain, the emigration of highly skilled professionals. Here's how brain drain negatively impacts Nigeria's sustainable development goals (SDGs) as outlined in the 2019 UN report [UN sustainable development goals ON United Nations sdgs.un.org]:

1. **Hinders human capital development (SDG 4):** Brain drain depletes Nigeria's pool of skilled workers in critical sectors like education and healthcare. This weakens the ability to deliver quality education and healthcare, hindering progress on SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education).
2. **Undermines economic growth (SDG 8):** The lack of skilled professionals hampers innovation and productivity, leading to slower economic growth.
3. **Strains infrastructure and resources (SDG 6, 7, 9):** With fewer skilled engineers and technicians, maintaining essential infrastructure like water, sanitation, and energy systems becomes a challenge (SDGs 6, 7). This can exacerbate environmental degradation (SDG 15) and limit progress on sustainable development overall.

Additionally, brain drain can:

4. **Reduce tax revenue:** Emigrated professionals don't contribute taxes, limiting government resources for development initiatives.
5. **Remittances:** Money sent back home by emigrants can boost the economy (Mondopoli, 2020).

Overall, the negative consequences of brain drain on Nigeria's sustainable development outweigh the potential benefits.

Suggested Policy Recommendation in Addressing Push Factors in Nigeria

Policies recommendation are essentially a suggested course of action for addressing a specific issue. It is crafted to be informative for policy makers and decision makers. However, in addressing push factors in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that tackles underlying issues contributing to migration, such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and lack of access to basic services. Here are some policy recommendations:

- 1. Economic Development Initiatives:** According to Ayenagbo (2019) to implement programs aimed at stimulating economic growth, particularly in rural areas where poverty and unemployment rates are high. This could include investment in infrastructure, agriculture, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Providing access to microfinance and vocational training can also empower individuals to start businesses and generate income locally.
- 2. Education and Skill Development:** Strengthen the education system to equip individuals with the skills needed for employment in a rapidly evolving economy. Promote vocational training programs tailored to local market demands, as well as initiatives that encourage entrepreneurship and innovation (NBS, 2018; Muraina, & Bawalla, 2019).
- 3. Improving Healthcare Services:** Enhance access to quality healthcare services, especially in rural and underserved areas, to address health-related push factors such as disease outbreaks and high mortality rates (World Health Organization, 2020). This can involve increasing funding for healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare workers, and implementing health education programs.
- 4. Enhanced Security Measures:** Combat insecurity and violence by investing in law enforcement agencies, improving intelligence gathering capabilities, and implementing community policing initiatives Human Rights Watch. (2022). Addressing root causes of conflict and promoting social cohesion can contribute to a safer environment conducive to economic and social development.
- 5. Social Protection Programs:** Introduce social protection programs targeted at vulnerable populations, including cash transfer schemes, food assistance programs, and support for internally

displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees World Bank. (2019). These programs can help mitigate the impact of poverty and provide a safety net during times of crisis.

6. Climate Change Adaptation: Address environmental degradation and climate change impacts through sustainable land management practices, reforestation initiatives, and climate-resilient agricultural techniques. Investing in renewable energy sources can also reduce dependency on fossil fuels and mitigate climate-related displacement (United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the phenomenon of brain drain and migration presents both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. Our exploration of brain drain, migration, and sustainable development reveals a complex interplay. While migration offers opportunities for economic growth through remittances and knowledge transfer, brain drain can significantly hinder a nation's progress. The loss of skilled professionals weakens crucial sectors like education and healthcare, impeding development efforts. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Investment in creating a more attractive environment for skilled Nigerians is essential. This includes improving wages, working conditions, and infrastructure. Additionally, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship can create opportunities that retain talent. However, simply stemming the tide of outward migration is not enough. We must also harness the potential of Nigerians abroad. Fostering strong ties with the diaspora through engagement programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives can leverage their expertise for national development. By combining domestic reforms with strategic diaspora engagement, Nigeria can transform brain drain into a resource for sustainable development.

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