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INTERNAL MIGRATION AND SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION: LABOUR SHIFTS BETWEEN NIGERIA'S RURAL AND URBAN SPHERES

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically investigated the dynamics and implications of labour shifts between Nigeria's rural and urban spheres, driven predominantly by internal migration and spatial transformation. Anchored in empirical literature, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary demographic trends, the research explores key factors that propel labour movements, such as economic disparity, environmental degradation, poor rural infrastructure, urban employment opportunities, population pressures, and socio-political instability. According to existing scholarship, these shifts are not only reshaping Nigeria's spatial demography but also deeply impacting employment patterns, rural productivity, urban informal sector growth, and the nation's overall socio-economic development. The paper identified a clear nexus between internal migration and labour redistribution, asserting that migration acts as both a cause and a consequence of uneven development. Consequently, while urban centres experience economic expansion and labour surplus, they also grapple with overpopulation, youth unemployment, housing crises, and rising poverty. Rural communities, on the other hand, are increasingly characterized by ageing populations, labour shortages in agriculture, and deepening economic stagnation. Furthermore, the research underscores that labour migration patterns are influenced by structural deficiencies in policy implementation, poor rural governance, and inadequate investment in rural economies. Drawing from real-life evidence in cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, as well as rural zones in the North and South-East, the study highlighted the widening socio-economic divide and the spatial transformation of Nigerian settlements. The paper concluded that while labour mobility is a natural process in national development, the imbalance in Nigeria's labour spatial distribution poses long-term threats to national cohesion and sustainable growth. To reverse this trend, the work recommended strategic rural investment, decentralization of industries, improved infrastructure, and the establishment of inclusive national urban-rural development frameworks. These measures, if effectively implemented, will ensure balanced development, reduce urban overburdening, and optimize the productive potential of Nigeria's labour force across regions.

Keywords: Labour Shift, Internal Migration, Rural-Urban Migration, Spatial Transformation, Employment, Urbanization, Development Policy, Economic Disparity, Sustainable Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Labour mobility has historically shaped the socio-economic landscapes of nations, particularly in developing countries where rural-urban dichotomies are pronounced. In Nigeria, internal migration has become a powerful agent of spatial transformation, resulting in significant labour shifts between rural and urban spheres. These movements are often driven by a combination of push and pull factors ranging from economic deprivation, insecurity, and environmental degradation in rural areas to perceived opportunities, infrastructural development, and better living standards in urban centres (Ezeh, 2018; Akinyemi, 2021). The rural-to-urban migration trend is not new, but its contemporary manifestations reveal deeper structural imbalances in Nigeria's development framework. Rural areas, once sustained by agriculture and traditional industries, are increasingly depopulated and neglected.

Conversely, urban centres continue to expand at an unprecedented pace, straining under the pressure of overpopulation, housing shortages, traffic congestion, and burgeoning informal economies (Olayiwola & Adepoju, 2020; Abdullahi & Nwachukwu, 2023). This dual movement has created a paradox: while urban areas seem to flourish economically, they also face significant social and infrastructural challenges; rural areas, meanwhile, are drained of youth, labour, and innovation.

Scholars have noted that these labour shifts are intrinsically tied to Nigeria's internal migration patterns, shaped by ethnic dynamics, policy neglect, climate change, and historical inequities (Oyebanji & Abiola, 2021; Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2022). Migration, in this context, is not merely a demographic phenomenon but a socio-economic strategy for survival, advancement, and spatial restructuring. However, it raises critical questions about equitable development, national integration, labour market distortion, and the sustainability of urbanization without corresponding rural upliftment. Thus, this paper critically examined the implications of labour shifts between Nigeria's rural and urban spheres in light of internal migration and spatial transformation.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Internal Migration: A Discussionary View

Internal migration in Nigeria, particularly the movement from rural to urban areas, continues to reshape the country's demographic and socio-economic landscape. According to Akinyemi (2021), this type of migration is driven primarily by economic, educational, and security-related factors, which significantly affect both the origin and destination areas. Nigeria, a nation with a rapidly growing population, is experiencing increased urbanization rates, a trend that has been heavily influenced by the persistent movement of labour from rural zones to urban centres. In the same vein, Olayiwola and Adepoju (2020) emphasized that urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt are not only receiving the highest numbers of migrants but also bearing the burden of overstretched infrastructure and housing deficits.

Consequently, these labour shifts have brought about considerable spatial transformation, leading to uneven development, social inequality, and changing land-use patterns. Oduwaye (2019) observed that this transition creates both opportunities and challenges, which must be critically examined to ensure balanced national development.

Drivers of Internal Migration in Nigeria

Internal migration in Nigeria is largely influenced by economic disparities between rural and urban areas. According to Ezeh (2018), the search for better employment prospects remains the dominant factor encouraging rural dwellers, particularly the youth, to migrate to urban centres. He opined that the concentration of industries, corporate organizations, and informal businesses in cities attracts individuals from agriculture-dependent communities who seek higher incomes and better livelihoods. In the same vein, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2022) asserted that poor agricultural mechanization and lack of rural investment have rendered many village economies uncompetitive.

Furthermore, education and access to social services also play a major role in shaping migration patterns. Olowu and Amadi (2020) emphasized that the availability of tertiary institutions, hospitals, internet connectivity, and electricity in urban areas continues to lure people away from underdeveloped rural regions. Similarly, Adebayo (2017) noted that rural areas are often neglected in national budgetary allocations, resulting in insufficient social infrastructure and low standards of living. This, according to him, accelerates the push factors for rural-urban migration.

Insecurity has become another strong motivator of internal migration. With the rise of insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, and herder-farmer conflicts in the Middle Belt, many families are compelled to seek safety in relatively peaceful urban locations. Abdullahi and Nwachukwu (2023) observed that internal displacement due to violence has turned many urban areas into temporary or permanent destinations for affected rural populations. Consequently, migration is no longer solely voluntary but is increasingly becoming a matter of survival and safety.

Spatial Transformation in Nigeria

Spatial transformation in Nigeria refers to the dynamic changes in the use, organization, and structure of space due to demographic shifts, urbanization, infrastructural development, migration patterns, and economic policies. It is a key driver and consequence of regional and national development trends. According to Udoka and Chukwuma (2017), spatial transformation encapsulates changes in physical landscapes, socio-economic structures, and population distribution that emerge due to both natural forces and human activities. It also entails the reordering of settlements, land use patterns, and infrastructural layouts across geographical regions.

Evidence of spatial transformation is visible in Nigeria's rapidly expanding urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Enugu. These cities have witnessed significant physical, economic, and demographic changes, largely attributed to rural-urban migration and developmental planning. As noted by Olajide, Bello, and Akinola (2018), Lagos has expanded beyond its traditional boundaries, swallowing up peri-urban and rural communities, thereby altering land values, population density, and environmental conditions. Similarly, Abuja's emergence as the Federal Capital Territory led to the displacement and resettlement of local populations, transforming surrounding rural areas into urban corridors (Adepoju & James, 2020).

One of the factors driving spatial transformation in Nigeria is rapid urbanization. According to the United Nations (2019), Nigeria's urban population is growing at an average of 4.3% annually, which leads to the physical expansion of cities and reclassification of rural

spaces. In the same vein, economic centralization and infrastructural development also play a critical role. Adebayo (2021) emphasized that infrastructural projects such as expressways, flyovers, and rail lines significantly alter the spatial configuration of Nigerian cities and their peripheries.

Internal migration is another major contributor. Olayiwola and Adeleye (2022) observed that the increasing rate of rural-urban migration causes spatial restructuring, especially in housing, informal settlements, and land-use conversion. Consequently, cities like Port Harcourt and Kano have experienced the rise of informal settlements due to uncontrolled influx of migrants in search of economic opportunities. Nevertheless, such growth often lacks corresponding infrastructure and services, leading to spatial inequality and urban sprawl.

Similarly, governmental planning policies have played a role. The National Urban Development Policy of Nigeria (2012), though aimed at coordinated spatial growth, has faced weak implementation, resulting in chaotic and unregulated expansion in many cities (Bello & Yakubu, 2019). Notwithstanding policy gaps, initiatives such as the Abuja Master Plan and Lagos State Model City Plans have shown attempts to manage spatial reorganization, though outcomes remain mixed. Climate change and environmental degradation also shape spatial transformation. For example, desertification in the northern states has led to the displacement of farming communities and reorientation of land use in affected areas (Nwachukwu & Aremu, 2017). Flood-prone states like Bayelsa and Anambra have also experienced relocation of settlements, affecting spatial layouts and economic activities.

Technological advancement is a modern driver of spatial change. According to Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2023), the adoption of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing has enhanced urban planning, zoning, and spatial data management in cities like Abuja and Lagos. These tools support better planning outcomes and help visualize urban sprawl, infrastructure deficits, and future land use patterns.

Socio-economic consequences of spatial transformation are profound. On one hand, it promotes economic agglomeration, employment generation, and infrastructural modernization. On the other hand, it increases pressure on urban services, widens regional disparities, and displaces vulnerable populations. Eze and Eni (2020) asserted that while spatial transformation enhances growth in urban Nigeria, it marginalizes rural areas, deepens urban poverty, and stresses public infrastructure.

Labour Shifts and Spatial Transformation

The shift in labour between Nigeria's rural and urban spheres has had profound implications for spatial transformation. According to Ajakaiye et al. (2019), urban areas now account for over 60% of Nigeria's labour force, a trend that reflects the diminishing importance of agriculture and the rising dominance of service and informal sectors. This concentration of labour in urban centres leads to unplanned urban sprawl, congestion, and the expansion of informal settlements. Ibrahim (2020) observed that this expansion often outpaces infrastructural development, resulting in poor living conditions, especially for low-income migrants.

In the same vein, Oyebanji and Abiola (2021) stated that the labour shortage in rural areas has led to the under-utilization of farmlands, particularly in regions where manual labour remains a critical component of agricultural production. Consequently, food production has declined in many parts of rural Nigeria, contributing to food insecurity and a rising dependence

on imported goods. They asserted that rural depopulation is now a national concern requiring urgent intervention.

Nevertheless, the influx of people into urban spaces has contributed to economic diversification and innovation, especially in the informal sector. Ekunwe and Afolabi (2016) supported that many migrants become self-employed as artisans, traders, and transporters, thereby creating a vibrant though largely unregulated sector. However, they also noted that this informality reduces the tax base and makes it difficult for city governments to plan effectively. Thus, internal migration not only influences the quantity of labour available in different regions but also affects the quality and distribution of economic activity.

FACTORS SPURRING LABOUR SHIFTS BETWEEN NIGERIA'S RURAL AND URBAN SPHERES

Labour mobility between rural and urban areas in Nigeria has continued to grow, primarily due to socio-economic, environmental, and institutional factors. Labour shifts, defined as the movement of working-age individuals from one geographical region to another in search of employment opportunities, are often influenced by disparities in development, infrastructure, and livelihood sustainability. These shifts reshape the Nigerian labour market and create both opportunities and challenges across regions.

Economic Opportunities and Wage Differentials

According to Adebayo and Yusuf (2018), the primary motivator for rural-to-urban labour migration is the search for better economic prospects. The authors defined rural areas as economically stagnant environments with limited industrial presence and mostly agrarian livelihoods. In contrast, urban centres like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt are perceived as spaces of economic dynamism.

Similarly, Olayemi and Bello (2020) observed that wage disparities between rural and urban jobs encourage youth to abandon subsistence agriculture in favour of casual, skilled, and semi-skilled urban employment. Nevertheless, while some migrants succeed in securing meaningful employment, others are absorbed into the informal sector, where exploitation and job insecurity persist. Emphasized that labour shifts from rural to urban centres are often economically rational responses to survival and opportunity gaps (Ogbu & Yakubu, 2021). Consequently, the urban labour market becomes over-saturated, while rural productivity declines due to a shrinking workforce.

Educational Aspirations and Human Capital Development

Educational pursuit is another major driver of labour migration in Nigeria. According to Nwachukwu and Okorie (2019), many rural dwellers relocate to cities to access secondary and tertiary education, which are limited or poorly developed in most rural areas. They emphasized that migration for education is often interwoven with job-seeking behaviour, as many students stay on in cities after schooling to search for jobs.

Similarly, Musa and Daramola (2021) asserted that the human capital concentration in urban centres reflects educational inequality and a lack of governmental investment in rural institutions. Consequently, this pattern contributes to the brain drain from rural Nigeria and leads

to a skewed labour distribution. Okafor and Obi (2023) has observed that educational-driven migration not only reduces labour availability in agriculture but also creates a mismatch between skills acquired in urban schools and employment available in rural communities.

Rural Underdevelopment and Infrastructure Deficits

Poor infrastructure and limited social services in rural Nigeria also spur labour shifts. According to Eze and Nwankwo (2017), rural areas suffer from inadequate electricity, poor road networks, lack of portable water, and poor healthcare systems. These deficits degrade living standards and push working-age individuals to urban centres.

Averred that such disparities create a structural imbalance in regional development, incentivizing migration even in the absence of secure employment in the cities (Chukwu & Ibrahim, 2020). In the same vein, Adediran and Olatunji (2022) emphasized that successive governments have historically concentrated development in cities, thereby accelerating rural depopulation.

Nevertheless, the concentration of labour in urban centres overstretchers infrastructure and contributes to unplanned urban expansion. Notwithstanding these challenges, rural-urban shifts continue due to the prevailing perception that cities offer better futures (Osagie & Ifeanyi, 2021).

Agricultural Decline and Environmental Stress

Climate variability, poor agricultural policies, and environmental degradation have reduced the attractiveness of agriculture, which remains the primary occupation in rural areas. According to Iroegbu (2020), irregular rainfall, soil degradation, and flooding have led to decreased agricultural productivity in regions like the Middle Belt and Northern Nigeria.

Similarly, Bello and Tanko (2022) noted that the absence of irrigation systems, mechanization, and access to agro-financing disincentivizes youth from pursuing farming. Consequently, rural youth migrate to urban centres where alternative forms of livelihood be it formal or informal are more viable. Opined that unless rural agriculture is revitalized and made economically competitive, labour migration will continue unabated. In the same vein, Akpan and James (2019) concurred that climate change-induced stress remains a long-term threat to rural economic sustainability in Nigeria.

Insecurity and Communal Conflicts

Rural insecurity has increasingly contributed to labour migration. According to Danladi and Usman (2017), Boko Haram insurgency, herder-farmer conflicts, banditry, and kidnappings have created hostile living and working conditions in many rural regions, especially in Northern and North-Central Nigeria.

Observed that displaced individuals often migrate to safer urban centres where they seek both refuge and work. Nevertheless, this pattern of forced migration alters rural demographics and aggravates unemployment and slum development in urban areas (Nwosu & Ejiogu, 2023). Concurred that rural insecurity displaces not only people but also agricultural and labour capacity. Consequently, rural livelihoods collapse while urban centres bear the brunt of unregulated population surges (Ajayi & Bello, 2018).

The glamorization of urban life through media, music, movies, and digital platforms has created a psychological pull towards cities. According to Olatunji and Ibrahim (2020), the influence of urban pop culture shapes the aspirations of rural youth, creating the perception that city life is synonymous with success.

Averred that the media rarely reflect the hardships of urban poverty, contributing to unrealistic migration decisions. Similarly, Adeoye and Yusuf (2018) stated that many young people migrate not because of necessity but because of aspirational expectations shaped by the entertainment industry and social media.

Consequently, cities receive large inflows of migrants without the corresponding economic absorption capacity, resulting in high underemployment and informal labour practices. Nevertheless, the urban dream continues to drive migration decisions, especially among the youth (Okonjo & Ibrahim, 2020).

Government Policies and Regional Development Imbalance

Uneven regional development policies have also spurred labour shifts. According to Oladipo and Sulaiman (2021), the disproportionate allocation of federal projects and industrial zones in urban areas reflects a structural bias that undermines rural economic growth. Supported that such biases contribute to regional inequalities in employment opportunities, wage rates, and service delivery. In the same vein, Chidiebere and Nduka (2023) emphasized that policy neglect of agriculture, rural industries, and vocational training centres has reduced the competitiveness of rural labour. Consequently, youth leave rural areas not only in search of jobs but also out of despair over long-term prospects.

Nevertheless, policy responses have been largely reactionary and have failed to stem rural depopulation. Asserted that sustainable rural development must become a national priority to manage labour migration pressures effectively (Oluwole & Dike, 2024). The spurring of labour shifts from Nigeria's rural to urban areas is the outcome of a complex interaction of economic, educational, infrastructural, environmental, security, cultural, and policy factors. These shifts have led to urban congestion, informal sector proliferation, and rural decline. While rural dwellers perceive urban migration as a pathway to economic advancement, it often results in new socio-economic challenges. To achieve balanced regional development and a sustainable labour distribution, Nigeria must invest in rural infrastructure, agriculture, education, and security while decentralizing growth initiatives.

NEXUS BETWEEN INTERNAL MIGRATION AND SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION IN LABOUR SHIFTS BETWEEN NIGERIA'S RURAL AND URBAN SPHERES

Internal migration, most particularly rural-urban labour migration has emerged as a central force driving spatial transformation in Nigeria. Spatial transformation refers to the structural, physical, demographic, and socio-economic changes in geographic spaces caused by population shifts, infrastructure development, and economic restructuring. The nexus between internal migration and spatial transformation reveals how mobility patterns reshape the rural and urban environments and alter labour markets, infrastructure demand, land use, and settlement patterns. According to Adebayo and Adeola (2018), internal migration in Nigeria, particularly from rural to urban areas, is not merely a movement of people but a catalyst for significant spatial reconfigurations. They defined spatial transformation as the “restructuring of spatial and socio-

economic relations of regions resulting from population dynamics and policy shifts.” Similarly, Okonjo and Ibrahim (2020) emphasized that migration alters settlement systems by concentrating population and economic activities in urban spaces, thereby inducing infrastructural and labour-related changes.

Nevertheless, the process is not unidirectional. As labour shifts towards cities, rural areas experience depopulation and economic stagnation, while urban centers undergo spatial expansion, informal settlement growth, and infrastructural overstretch. In the same vein, Chukwu and Odu (2021) observed that internal migration patterns in Nigeria have reinforced the duality between thriving urban spaces and neglected rural areas, both physically and economically.

One of the most visible spatial transformations resulting from internal migration is urban expansion and sprawl. According to Olayemi and Hassan (2019), the influx of rural labour into Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt has necessitated the expansion of residential areas, transportation networks, and informal job markets. They asserted that urban fringes are increasingly being transformed into hybrid spaces combining peri-urban farming with unplanned residential settlements.

Observed that such labour-driven urbanisation changes land use from agriculture to residential and commercial functions. Consequently, this alters the socio-economic structure of host communities. Nevertheless, infrastructure development in these areas often lags behind population growth. Aina and Nwafor (2022) emphasized that the spatial transformation is therefore characterized by informal settlements and unregulated land acquisition.

Conversely, internal migration results in spatial transformation in rural areas in the form of labour depletion, land abandonment, and service withdrawal. According to Musa and Akintunde (2021), the outflow of economically active individuals from rural regions leads to the degradation of local economies, aging populations, and weakened agricultural output. In the same vein, Onu and Eze (2023) opined that spatial marginalization of rural regions is reinforced by neglect in infrastructure investments, education, and healthcare due to declining populations.

Similarly, Ajayi and Bello (2018) noted that migration-induced rural decline reduces the vibrancy of local labour markets and deepens regional inequality. Nevertheless, some rural areas adapt through remittance inflows, which transform the physical landscape by enabling new buildings, businesses, and access to technology. Notwithstanding, such transformations often benefit only select households and do not compensate for overall labour loss.

Informal Labour Markets and Urban Morphology

The proliferation of informal labour markets due to internal migration has contributed to unique urban spatial configurations in Nigeria. According to Ogbu and Yakubu (2020), the agglomeration of migrant labour in specific urban zones, such as markets, slums, and transport hubs, leads to uneven spatial development. They emphasized that labour shifts influence zoning patterns, public service distribution, and congestion.

It is no longer news, neither is it an over exaggeration that most Nigerian cities are experiencing “functional overload” due to rapid migration and weak spatial planning. In the same vein, Eze and Mohammed (2019) observed that informal settlements expand around economic hubs, perpetuating spatial inequality and environmental degradation. However, these labour markets also serve as transitional zones for socio-economic integration and contribute significantly to urban productivity. Some key issues affecting urban areas are:

Infrastructure, Services, and Spatial Planning Challenges

Internal migration-driven labour shifts exert pressure on urban infrastructure, necessitating spatial and developmental restructuring. According to Adediran and Olatunji (2022), city planners often struggle to accommodate the growing migrant population in terms of housing, transportation, healthcare, and education. They noted that spatial transformation becomes reactionary rather than strategic.

Similarly, Nwachukwu and Udo (2020) opined that the government's failure to decentralize development contributes to the congestion of select urban spaces, while others remain underutilized. Emphasized that this uneven development distorts national spatial planning frameworks. Consequently, a more integrated rural-urban planning approach is necessary to manage the labour-induced transformation.

Policy Responses and Urban-Rural Rebalancing

Efforts to address the spatial consequences of labour migration have included initiatives such as rural empowerment, infrastructure decentralization, and the creation of satellite towns. According to Osagie and Ifeanyi (2021), such policies aim to reduce migration pressure by creating employment in rural zones and improving spatial equity. Nevertheless, implementation challenges have undermined their effectiveness.

Averred that without deliberate investment in rural labour markets and infrastructure, spatial transformation will remain skewed. In the same vein, Oluwole and Dike (2024) supported that balanced spatial development requires both structural and human capital interventions across regions.

The nexus between internal migration and spatial transformation in Nigeria is multifaceted, driven by labour dynamics and reinforced by socio-economic inequality and governance inefficiencies. Migration patterns are both a symptom and a cause of spatial imbalance. While urban centers benefit from an influx of labour, they simultaneously face spatial congestion and planning challenges. Conversely, rural areas suffer labour losses and infrastructural neglect. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated, spatially conscious national development policy that recognizes the mobility of labour as both a challenge and an opportunity for equitable spatial transformation.

Evidence of Labour Shifts Between Nigeria's Rural and Urban Spheres as a Result of Internal Migration and Spatial Transformation

Internal migration and spatial transformation have significantly shaped labour dynamics in Nigeria, leading to considerable labour shifts from rural to urban spheres. These shifts are primarily driven by economic, social, infrastructural, and demographic factors. Real-case instances across Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and others provide concrete evidence of this migration pattern and its impact on labour distribution. According to Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe (2015), internal migration is defined as the movement of people within a country's borders, primarily motivated by the search for better employment, education, and living conditions. These movements have caused demographic shifts and restructuring of the labour force, particularly between rural and urban regions. Urban areas are becoming more

densely populated and economically diverse, while rural areas are increasingly experiencing a depletion of productive labour, especially among the youth.

From the Nigeria experience perspective, it is noteworthy that Lagos, Nigeria's commercial nerve centre, is a prime example of how internal migration has restructured labour markets. According to Adepoju and Boso (2019), Lagos attracts about 1,200 new residents daily, primarily from rural states such as Osun, Ekiti, Ogun, and Oyo. These migrants, mostly youths, are absorbed into both the formal and informal sectors, often taking up jobs in transportation, domestic work, construction, and services. Similarly, Abuja, as the political capital, has witnessed immense growth due to internal migration. Adepoju (2018) emphasized that the expansion of the construction industry in Abuja has created a steady demand for labour, attracting artisans, builders, and manual workers from less industrialized northern and middle-belt states.

Labour Decline in Rural Agriculture

Consequently, rural regions, particularly in northern Nigeria such as Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara, have reported notable declines in agricultural labour. Aderinto and Ogunjimi (2021) observed that the mechanization of agriculture has not kept pace with labour loss, leading to declining productivity. Farmers in these regions increasingly struggle to hire young workers, as many have migrated to cities. In the same vein, Ude et al. (2020) noted that the feminization of agriculture is emerging, with more women left behind to manage farms due to male migration.

Spatial Transformation and Urban Labour Shifts

Spatial transformation, involving the expansion and reconfiguration of urban spaces, has also contributed to labour shifts. In Port Harcourt, for example, the city's expansion into previously rural communities has brought about a transformation in land use and labour patterns. According to Amadi and Abang (2017), communities such as Rumuagholu and Igwuruta, once reliant on subsistence farming, have become centres for housing construction, trade, and services. This has redefined labour structures, with former farmers shifting to bricklaying, carpentry, and trading.

Nevertheless, this transformation is not without challenges. It has led to land conflicts, urban sprawl, and underemployment. Similarly, Kure and Danlami (2022) averred that urban expansion in cities like Kano and Jos has caused a mismatch between available jobs and the skills of rural migrants, resulting in underutilization of human capital.

The Informal Sector as a Major Absorber of Migrant Labour

The informal sector, comprising petty trading, motorcycle transport (okada), and street hawking, which serves as a major employer of rural migrants in urban areas. Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) asserted that this sector has absorbed a significant portion of internal migrants due to its low entry barriers. In Lagos, for instance, migrant youths from the eastern states dominate commercial motorcycle transport and roadside retail trade. Notwithstanding, such occupations offer limited job security, social protection, or upward mobility. For instance, in the southeast, cities like Onitsha, Aba, and Enugu have witnessed an influx of young men from rural communities engaging in apprenticeship and small-scale commerce. Eze and Nwangwu (2019) observed that this has contributed to the decline of traditional farming in localities like Nsukka

and Abakaliki. According to their findings, youth migration in search of entrepreneurial training has transformed the region's labour orientation from agrarian to mercantile.

Accordingly, gender impacts of Labour migration shifts are also witnessed. While male youths are more likely to migrate to urban centres, women often remain in rural areas and take on increased economic responsibilities. Okonkwo and Agbakwuru (2020) opined that this has led to shifts in family roles and contributed to changing gender dynamics in rural Nigeria. However, there is growing female participation in urban informal sectors, particularly in markets, domestic services, and hospitality.

IMPACT OF LABOUR SHIFTS BETWEEN NIGERIA'S RURAL AND URBAN SPHERES AS A RESULT OF INTERNAL MIGRATION AND SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION ON EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Labour shifts between Nigeria's rural and urban spheres, largely induced by internal migration and spatial transformation, have led to profound changes in employment dynamics and economic outcomes across both regions. These changes are evident in the redistribution of human capital, structural changes in employment patterns, and shifting contributions to national economic productivity.

Impact on Employment

According to Akinyemi (2021), labour shifts driven by internal migration result in a notable reallocation of the workforce from agriculture-dominated rural areas to urban economies dominated by the informal and service sectors. This trend, he emphasized, creates employment pressure in urban areas, where infrastructure and industries are often unprepared to absorb the influx. In the same vein, Ezech (2018) observed that many rural migrants are absorbed into informal employment in cities such as Lagos and Kano, engaging in trading, transport (e.g., okada and keke operations), and low-wage domestic labour.

Similarly, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2022) asserted that while urban informal sectors expand and provide job opportunities, the quality of these jobs remains questionable often lacking job security, benefits, or upward mobility. For example, in Lagos, over 65% of working-age migrants are employed informally, contributing significantly to local commerce but also complicating taxation and labour regulation (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020).

Nevertheless, the shift results in labour shortages in rural areas. Oyebanji and Abiola (2021) noted that outmigration, especially of able-bodied youths, has led to the abandonment of farmlands in states like Benue, Ebonyi, and Zamfara. They averred that this depletion undermines agricultural output and discourages agribusiness investments, leading to a national food supply challenge. Consequently, food inflation has remained high averaging 20% annually since 2021 (NBS, 2020).

Impact on Rural and Urban Economic Success

The economic impact of labour migration is uneven across rural and urban settings. Urban areas tend to benefit more from the inflow of labour and talent. According to Ajakaiye et al. (2019), cities like Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt have experienced accelerated economic diversification due to the increasing labour pool. Informal sectors thrive, and small-scale

enterprises multiply, contributing to city-level GDP growth. In the same vein, Olayiwola and Adepaju (2020) emphasized that these cities witness growing investments in construction, transport, and digital services due to the availability of low-cost labour. For instance, Abuja's construction sector alone grew by 9.5% between 2016 and 2021, largely supported by migrant labour (Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity [FMLP], 2022). However, they also noted that this success is accompanied by challenges such as slum development, overstretched infrastructure, and rising urban poverty.

Conversely, the economic base of rural communities is weakening. Adebayo (2017) asserted that the steady drain of productive workers from rural regions reduces agricultural productivity, limits local consumption, and shrinks tax revenue for rural local governments. Similarly, Olowu and Amadi (2020) emphasized that most rural areas suffer from low investment in public services, a situation worsened by population decline and weak economic activity. Notwithstanding, there are spillover benefits from urban-based migrants to their rural homes through remittances. Abdullahi and Nwachukwu (2023) observed that migrant remittances contribute to rural livelihoods by supporting family expenses, school fees, and small-scale rural investments. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (2022), domestic remittances amounted to ₦1.5 trillion in 2021, a considerable portion of which went to rural households.

Nevertheless, real-life cases suggest the imbalance is unsustainable. The erosion of rural labour weakens food systems, while unregulated urban expansion fosters inequality. Consequently, spatial transformation must be managed with policy interventions that boost rural job creation and balance development.

The Way Forward

To address the challenges and harness the benefits of internal migration and labour shifts, a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach is essential:

- The government must invest in rural infrastructure, mechanized agriculture, and rural-based industries to retain labour and reduce the push factors of migration. Improved access to credit, technology, and markets will encourage youth involvement in agriculture and agro-enterprises.
- A decentralized development strategy is key. Smaller towns should be developed into intermediate urban centres to absorb population overflow from major cities and serve as engines of local employment and innovation.
- To absorb rural migrants efficiently, urban centres must invest in modern infrastructure, housing, transportation, and service delivery. Smart cities and sustainable urban planning frameworks should be prioritized to manage growth effectively.
- Efforts should be made to formalize the informal economy through registration, access to finance, training, and inclusion in social protection schemes. This will increase tax revenue and improve workers' welfare.
- Security must be restored in vulnerable rural zones through community policing, conflict resolution mechanisms, and investment in security infrastructure, to curb forced migration and protect livelihoods.
- The Federal and State governments should formulate comprehensive internal migration policies that address labour redistribution, urban-rural integration, and human capital

development. Such policies must also include data tracking, remittance management, and social safety nets.

- Massive investment in vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and digital skills will empower young people in both rural and urban areas to engage in productive and innovative work, reducing the burden of migration on urban job markets.

CONCLUSION

Labour shifts between Nigeria's rural and urban areas, driven by internal migration and spatial changes, present a paradox of opportunities and challenges. On one hand, urban centres are witnessing economic vibrancy and population growth; on the other hand, rural areas are grappling with depopulation, food insecurity, and economic stagnation. These shifts are deeply rooted in structural inequalities, governance gaps, and underinvestment in rural development. The imbalance between urban pull and rural push factors has created unsustainable patterns of population distribution, pressure on urban infrastructure, and a widening rural-urban divide. Left unaddressed, these issues will continue to erode the productive potential of both rural and urban Nigeria, hinder equitable growth, and exacerbate social tensions.

Internal migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the aspirations, struggles, and adaptive strategies of millions of Nigerians. While it has contributed to urban growth and economic vitality, it has also created imbalances in labour distribution and spatial development. Thus, the sustainability of Nigeria's future depends on the ability to manage these internal shifts in a way that promotes inclusivity, equity, and national cohesion.

Consequently, policy interventions must focus not only on regulating the outcomes of migration but also on addressing its root causes. Ensuring rural development, urban resilience, and equitable resource distribution can help bridge the gap between Nigeria's rural and urban spheres. As the country continues its journey toward modernization and growth, the patterns and implications of internal migration must remain at the forefront of national planning and discourse.

Recommendations

- The federal and state governments should increase investments in rural agriculture, agro-processing industries, rural roads, power supply, and irrigation. This will improve productivity and create attractive employment opportunities.
- Provide access to modern tools, inputs, credit, and extension services for farmers to reduce dependence on manual labour and make farming more appealing to young people.
- Strengthen regional planning by developing smaller urban centres to serve as migration buffers and new hubs of job creation, reducing pressure on major cities.
- Upgrade city infrastructure (transportation, housing, sanitation, water, and healthcare) to support growing urban populations and prevent the proliferation of slums.
- Integrate informal businesses into the formal economy through incentives such as tax breaks, training programs, and access to microcredit. This will enhance productivity and tax revenue.
- Implement comprehensive migration management frameworks that support migrants, protect their rights, and promote rural-urban integration.

- Tackle the root causes of rural insecurity, conflict, banditry, and insurgency through community-based security models, intelligence-led policing, and conflict resolution programs.
- Expand internet access and digital skills training in rural areas to enable remote work, digital entrepreneurship, and educational advancement.
- Launch national programs focused on vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial training for youths in both urban and rural areas to reduce migration pressure and boost productivity.
- Strengthen migration data collection and research through collaboration between the National Population Commission, NBS, universities, and civil society to guide evidence-based policymaking.

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