

The Role And Contribution Of Migrants Interactions To Indigenous Technology And Value Chain Development Among Selected Small And Medium Scale Entrepreneurs In Southern Nigeria

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Abstract

Research on local technology and innovation in Nigeria has largely focused on the role and contribution of government to national development. In contrast, this article explores the way in which migrants (returnees from Europe, America, and Asia and their family members) serve as potential sources of knowledge and innovative ideas towards new and improved development on local technology. This article investigates the continuous interactions, cross-pollination of ideas, and exposure to the needs and demands of Nigerian Diaspora. Based on the qualitative data collected, the study revealed entrepreneurs in the small and medium scale industries ingenuities were often dependent on the mingling and interaction with migrants (returnee and family members living overseas) in fabricating metal and allied products that are in high demands abroad. Narratives revealed that the demands and peculiarities of African cuisines, fashion, and healthcare needs are greatly informed by these interactions. It is recommended thus that small and medium scale entrepreneurs should build and capitalize on the social capital migrants provide through their interactions by way of requests and patronages of locally fabricated goods and simple technology available in the Nigerian markets.

Keywords: Diaspora needs, indigenous knowledge, pollinated innovations, markets opportunities entrepreneurship.

Introduction

This article investigates the interactions that exist between **small and medium scale entrepreneurs/enterprises (SMSEs)** and **migrants as a value chain in the development of indigenous technology in Southern Nigeria**. Drawing from the fact that continuous interactions and cross pollination of ideas exist between entrepreneurs and diasporas, it is expected that further development can be achieved in the informal sector where the SMSEs dominate. In understanding a nation's economic and technological growth, entrepreneurial behaviour in skill acquisition is fundamental as a process involving innovation through demands and interactions that are capable of producing new and advanced ideas and products (Brewer, 2015; Onwuejeogwu, 1999). However the interactions of entrepreneurs and migrants in the global value chain is often not interrogated or highlighted in small industries. Neglecting the facts that migrants are not only key players in technological transfer and value chain development in the larger economy (Sinatti & Horst 2015). It is in this regard that technology can be seen as the transformation of ideas to practical skills, which are concerned with the production and transformation of raw materials into finished goods on one hand and understanding the value chain on how it gets to the consumers (Bair 2008; Brewer, 2015; Gereffi, 2014). What is more, **indigenous technological** development and transformation have been well acknowledged in the informal sector and among SMSEs as contributing in no small measures to the rise in global value chain in market economy. For which mobilisation on the part of agents and agencies involving local and international players might predict a larger capture of the rewards on offer in any economy. Simply put, many of the standard North-South patterns of agency, power and wealth creation are products of these interactions that cut across boundaries, with a wider impact on local communities in developing nations, with high statistics of migrants living in the more developed North (Gorodzeiky & Leykin, 2020; Ikuomola, 2015; Schans, 2012).

Migration, **technology and value chain development** as a process, **are** fluid and continuous in nature. It involves the engagement of people, through interactions within and across; between and among individuals beyond borders (Sinatti & Horst 2015). Technology is one of the means by which man seeks to adapt to his environment. It is said that technological development is evident in industrial and commercial activities (Akpomuvie, 2011). The history of technology has always been attached to human existence, interactions and migration. For instance in Africa the colonial experience played a pivotal role in shaping indigenous technology which was well expressed in the local systems. Several studies have been done on traditional skills, most especially from the pre-colonial era about Africa entrepreneurs, with evidence regarding the positive contribution of indigenous skills and techniques, particularly to the development and growth of various communities before colonialism (Andah, 1992; Okpoko & Ezeadichie, 1999; Akpomuvie, 2011). Remarkable technological innovations were made by pre-colonial Africans in traditional iron, wood and ivory working as well as in cloth weaving, pottery and indigenous drugs development. These are practical signs of the harmonious application of organized socio-cultural and scientific know-how to manipulate the environment with the intention of solving problems and satisfying human need. Therefore, the traditional skills and techniques used in the production of arts and crafts, blacksmithing, and iron smelting, carding and weaving, brewery among others can be summed up as indigenous technology in Nigeria. Most of the techniques involved in these processes were however, either disoriented or discontinued but were well suited to the environment and culture of the people (Okpoko & Ezeadichie, 1999). Traditional technology laid emphasis on the quality of life as measured in human, cultural and spiritual terms rather than in purely materials terms. Its primary goal was to equip everyone with the basic knowledge of how all essential tasks of life are carried out. In this manner (Andah, 1992), argued that everybody was instilled with a -feeling of self-respect borne out of confidence in their own ability to help themselves. But this confidence he further argued, has been eroded by the invasion of European forms of modernization. This is not because these forms are necessarily bad but because the way and manner they were introduced was subversive.

Nevertheless technology as a continuous developmental process brings about skills, growths advanced and production. The knowledge and skills about any technology is a function of so many attributes and directions (Agyeman, 2015; Balde, 2011; Bou-Wen & Daniel 2001; World Bank, 2013), one of which is the innate nature of man to seek for knowledge through interactions within or across borders to improve his locale. This has made migration and return migration an important issue in technological studies which often has not been interrogated in the social science community in the 21st century. It is in the same vain that less attention has been given to the role and contribution of migrants' interactions with indigenous entrepreneurs to foster new technological development. There have been serious effort to examine the developmental role of migrant contribution to local entrepreneurship other than simply on remittances since the 1990s (Massey, Goldring & Durand, 1994) after a widely held perspective that migration contributes to economic crisis in the period before the 1980s (Mines, 1981). According to Mines (1981:6) Influenced by dependency and world systems approaches, migration could play a positive role in development in both the rural and urban businesses. In reassessing their potential, a number of investigators argued that earlier work had grossly underestimated ideas through migrants' interactions beyond sending remittances to local communities and investing in businesses and to a large extent had unfairly represented international migration as the source of numerous social ills. They re-evaluated the direct productive role of remittances and factored in the indirect or multiplier effects of remittance-based consumer spending. Discussion of migration, remittances and development is marred by competing conceptions of 'investment'. A narrowly economic conception which restricts investment to the purchase of means of production, raw materials and labour power, disregarding migrants' interactions with local entrepreneurs as possible idea generating incomes to the host communities in reaching out to the demands of the Diaspora producing use values (consumed by the Diaspora group) or commodities (goods exchanged on the market) (Massey, & Parrado, 1998). This study is a departure to highlight migrants' role in shaping indigenous technology and entrepreneurial advancement in Nigeria from their interactions with local entrepreneurs in selected entrepreneurial zones in Southern Nigeria. The impact of migrant interactions (role and contribution) cum activities on *comparative* economic and technological development is shown in details in the analysis of the qualitative data presented in this study

Research Methods

This article reports on a purely qualitative study. It was conducted in Benin City, (Edo State), Aba (Abia State), and Ibadan (Oyo State) between September 2017 and February 2018. Aba in Abia State is a commercial, manufacturing and industrial hub in Nigeria that has attracted and received significant investors' interest in the last two decades for which the African Development Bank (AFDB) has invested over \$74.5million in the state since its inception in 1971 (AFDB, 2020). Just like Abia, Edo and Oyo States are locations in Southern-Nigeria known for their vast knowledge and production of arts and crafts (Ikuomola, 2015). A purposive sample with a convenience population was utilized. The sample was composed of fifty -four (54) entrepreneurs Abia (21 respondents), Edo (18 respondents) and Oyo State (15 respondents). In all the sample comprises of 41 (male entrepreneurs) and 13 female entrepreneurs in clothing, metal/wood fabrications, food herbal and medicine). The respondents' ages range from 38 and 56 years, and all had been in business as entrepreneurs for over a decade and have regular interactions with migrants and returnee migrants which have shaped their businesses over time. This was a major criterion in the selection of respondents for the study. A semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher in English and pidgin mixed with local dialects; all issues were transcribed and translated by the researcher. The discussion was limited to issues related to role and contribution of migrants to indigenous technology and value chain development among small and medium scale entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The principle of voluntary consent, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were maintained. This informed the use of pseudo-names in the transcription, sorting, and analysis of responses. All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews averaged one hour. The shortest interview was 40 minutes and the longest lasted just over one hour and 15 minutes. The variability in interview duration was a product of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, as well as variation among individuals in terms of experience and desire to discuss personal experiences with a relative stranger. Data analysis followed the iterative process that often characterises grounded theory in particular, and qualitative research more generally (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). During data collection, extensive field notes were taken on interactions and observations relevant to the study as it pertains to migrants' assistance in business development. After data collection was completed, we identified and sorted themes apparent in the entrepreneurs' narratives through line-by-line analysis. Once initial memos were written and links between themes became clearer, we returned to the full body of data to begin focused content analyses. Focused content analysis helped me to ensure that the themes that emerged from the initial subset of the data were both relevant to and appropriately configured for the full set of data. In the paragraphs below, we present the content and structure of these themes and demonstrated the role and contribution of migrants to indigenous technology and value chain development among small and medium scale entrepreneurs in Nigeria, from selected narratives of entrepreneurs in Southern-Nigeria.

Empirical findings and discussion

Migrants' interactions and cross pollination of ideas with Entrepreneurs

The interactions and information of migrants contribution towards entrepreneurship development was captured not from migrants themselves but from local entrepreneurs. Thus for emphasis sake, it connotes 'information' and 'interactions' between entrepreneurs and migrants, from entrepreneurs' narratives. In Nigeria like most other African countries in the sub region, net migration (considering both national and international migration) has been linked with the economic growth of cities (Hugo 1978; Zachariah & Conde, 1981; Lattes 1984; Adepoju, 2007; Ikuomola, 2015). Zachariah & Conde (1981) noted that nearly half of the growth rate of urban areas was contributed by migrants. With particular emphasis on Nigeria, Ghana, and Ivory Coast, Hugo (1978) and Lattes (1984), revealed that the growth of population in towns and cities, is largely the result of migration. The economic contribution of migrants to development in Africa has been described as phenomena amidst the poor performances of financial institutions. For which economic contribution of migrants to indigenous technology and value chain development among small and medium scale entrepreneurs has become an important part of the debate around migration and development, also, as a crucial component of socioeconomic well-being of individuals and of nations (House of Commons International Development Committee, 2004; International Organization for Migration, 2005; World Bank, 2013). But often neglected are the role and contribution of migrants to indigenous technology and value chain development among small and medium scale entrepreneurs in entrepreneurship as a study. Research on the role of migrants to technology development shows migrant

remittances are often used first and foremost by family members for basics, including food, clothing, and housing (Agyeman, 2015; Balde, 2011). The common perspective of remittances as a transnational activity often focuses on the economic, political, and sociocultural activities (Gorodzeiky & Leykin, 2020; World Bank, 2006). At the macro-level, the analysis of remittances has been found to improve health and/or reduce diseases through better nutrition and housing, and this in turn has a longer-term positive impact on countries of origin (Agyeman, 2015; Balde, 2011; House of Commons International Development Committee, 2004). According to respondent (a craftsman) in Benin, Edo State, narrating his experience with migrants on how to reduce the weight and sizes of his wooden pestle and small mortar, for exportation:

Interactions with our brothers and sisters coming home from abroad enables us to know what is trending and thus they give us information on what people overseas really -want from us in Africa (Male/42years/Craft Maker/Edo State).

Fig 1: Changing Phases of Bigger Traditional Mortar and Pestle to More Modern and Smaller Exportable Sizes



Traditionally, pounded yam is made by boiling yams in a pot, and once cooked; it is placed in a mortar and pounded or beaten into smooth textured dough with a three- five foot tall pestle. For Nigerians and other Africans overseas who prefer the pounded yam over the flour-type popularly called pouno-yam, the above smaller size becomes handy. One of the respondents echoed that:

Since yam is becoming common in shops and other commercial outlets owned by Africans, Indians and Pakistanis, Nigerians are now in the habit of going traditional once in a while to feel at home. It is only becoming possible as smaller mortar and pestle can now be exported from local artisans like us (Female/51years/Shop Owner/Oyo State).

The narrative above is in line with issues of entrepreneurship in the 21st century, as the usage of the term "entrepreneurship" expanded to include how and why some individuals (or teams) identify opportunities, evaluate them as viable, and then decide to exploit them (Brush, 2003; Scott & Venkatraman, 2000). As also with other respondents' narratives below, it brought out the discussion on how people use these opportunities to develop new products or services, launch new firms or industries, and create wealth. Mostly because there are often risks in business and the entrepreneurial process is often uncertain because opportunities can only be identified after they have been exploited (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2016).

In Aba, the interaction with a number of traders in the clothing cum fashion line of business was also reiterated as a key developmental factor in the presences of Aba products in other countries beyond Africa. For, Mr. Chima, a tailor, with experience of over fifteen years in exporting sewn clothing from Aba to Malaysia, his breakthrough in business was attributed to his contact with a customers who continuously told him that sewing and marketing of Igbo attires, cultural accessories and other appendages were not very common in Asian countries and that Nigerians of Igbo extraction would key into it, as many Nigerians do not come home very often as in the past. The Chairman in his line of business concluded that

Anywhere you go today, most especially in Europe, our goods are present as a result of the continuous interaction going on with relatives who are also business men and women in America and Europe, even in other parts of Asia as far as Cambodia and Philippines (Male/39 years/Fabric/Tailoring merchant/Abia State).

The knowledge of entrepreneurship as the capacity and willingness to develop organize and manage a business venture: Entrepreneurs Narratives in the metal and allied business

Respondents in the metal and allied sector had this to say:

In Benin, A respondent noted that his company has been able to fabricate a small electronic yam mixer that turns boiled yam into paste to serve as pounded yam. This was attributed to the increasing presence of yam in most countries in Europe.

Unlike in the past, precisely in the 1980s, yam was not readily available, but now it is everywhere, so many migrants on holiday have continuously informed us that the only problem they have now is how to pound the yam. So that was how we ventured into it. First it was too big for them to travel with, thus at a time we were only selling it for local use. But in the early 2000, we were able to fashion out a smaller machine, just like a small toaster for toasting bread. It is handy. So, it is one of our exports to the African Diaspora, not only Nigerians but Ghanaians too do come to make orders for their relatives abroad (Male/40years/Metal fabricator/Abia State).

The indigenous process of pounding yam is very laborious. It requires physical pounding by one or more people depending on the quantity in the mortar. In a bid to reduce the labour involved in yam pounding came the manufacturing first the electrical mixers by Hebert, Kenwood and Hammer mill in the early 1980s. According to Ikechukwu & Muncho (2015):

...these intended yam pounders failed due to some limitations in their operational functions. The Habert and Kenwood mixers had almost the same operational principle and they had been identified for poor pounding due to the flapping (moving up and down) of their stirrer or mixer which is keyed to the electric rotating shaft. In addition to the poor pounding of both pounders, the Habert mixer was found to heat excessively and as a result, the machine has to be stopped intermittently for cooling purpose. This cooling time takes up to ten minutes and this makes the machine inefficient since the pounding temperature has to be constant throughout the pounding process in order to obtain a fine textured pounded yam (P:1).

The production of Yam pounding machine, though not entirely indigenous to Nigerians or Africans in general, it was unanimously agreed to have been modelled after the electrical grinding machines. With smaller crafts and technology, the preparation of pounded yam has become much easier and available in climes where it was hitherto not available as a result of the increasing domestication of local and more durable yam pounder. One way is by slicing yam into small sizes and cooking them and placing them in a yam pounder which electrically blends the yam by crushing it and eventually mashing it into a smooth semisolid paste or dough. Nevertheless local producers of yam pounding machines do not have patent rights; neither do they mass produce like any registered company. For these reasons they only produce on request and very few are displayed for local sales. At best they place a label with a phone contact on their products as advert. Thus local products are often not documented in the records of Nigeria exports. Another respondent said:

Just in December 2017, I had to strike a partnership deal with a friend in Accra to capture the Ghanaian market and Ghanaians Diaspora, so he does not come to Nigeria to get fabricated iron mortar and pestle for local diet, I only way billed it to him in Accra, some other times he sent me addresses of customers abroad for me to make a direct delivery. He gets his share of the gain and I get mine (Female/50years/ Interior and kitchen vendor/Edo State).

Another highlighted the economic importance of yam and the associated technology:

Because of the ease and fabricated technology associated with pounded yam production, the consumption of yam has increased overtime among African Diaspora and their host communities. Yam and cassava, are processed into powdery form, starch extracted into other forms of diet as staple food throughout Nigeria, for local and foreign consumption as *fufu* and other *fufu*-like staples. Yam pounding machine from Benin is often of better quality than any other type from Asia or even in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons Yoruba living in

United Kingdom, will always make request for our products, even local customers are bound in States such as Benue Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun and Lagos where yam and cassava are highly cherished (Female/48years/Steel designer/Oyo State).

The study revealed that the demands and peculiarities of African cuisines, fashion and healthcare needs were greatly informed by these interactions. As a number of fashion houses have sprang specialising in exporting African fabrics most especially to Nigerian migrants:

Whenever there are ceremonies in London, which is almost all weekends during summer, we get several calls from families and friends living in UK. Some will send us magazines, of foreign designs and ask us to replicate such designs with local fabric, other times when they are on holidays they physically tell us what to do and how to do them (Male/ 56 years/Fashion Designer/Oyo State).

Mrs Irene acknowledged the role of migrants to her business as huge. She is into herbal products:

My breakthrough in business came as a result of a woman whom I once prescribed and sold a local concoction (herbal medication) for the treatment of jaundice and pile. She introduced me to her daughter, who lives in Malaysia, and ever since she has connected me to a number of her friends abroad who are now my customers. It was through the same lady I learnt how to neatly package herbal product for export. I am currently doing well. I have employed and trained over 50 apprentices in the last five years (Female/African Medicine Vendor/49years/Oyo State).

African cuisines are another aspect the research revealed. Respondents highlighted food condiment such as *iru*, *ogiri*, dried crayfish powder, and other substances added in small amount to food such pepper, mustard seed. Cocoa flavor, and local bathing soap that are prepared without any foreign substance added/ shell butter (*ori*). The unavailability or scarcity of these products that are peculiar to Africa are often well missed by migrants, so whenever they visit it becomes mandatory to stuff their bags with so much of it, so as to feel at home when they arrived - base overseas. The question thus is how much of these can they carry along with other luggage of theirs. This was evident in the need for them to find a way through interacting with entrepreneurs who can deliver to them these items whenever they are -needed:

As we all know migrants want to feel at home in America or any part of the world, by carrying along a lot of Africa products while living, but they are constrained not only by the amount they carry along but for the fact that some of these products have short lifespan based on the active ingredients. For instance there is a level to which *Ori* can be preserved after which it becomes useless, and when it is not needed you don't have to keep it for too long. Same with *Iru*, dry pepper, dry fish among others. Thus, there is the need for regular supply since there have discussed it with us, and we have realized that there is a market for local products we just have to key into this opportunity to fill the gap (Female/56years/African Medicine Vendor/Oyo State).

From the above analysis it is evident that the concepts of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship involves a lot of processes beyond economic to what is referred to as social capital (Bourdieu, 1983; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Entrepreneurs contact and alliance with returned migrants can be described as a resource, actual or virtual, that accrue to them either as an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, which was quite instrumental in the success stories of local entrepreneurs sampled in this study Broadly speaking from the sociological perspective, entrepreneurs' interaction and social network with returnee migrants become relevant in the value chain of economic development in acquiring information designing, launching and running a new business or exploiting business possibilities outside the shores of the country As posited by (Yetisen; Volpatti; & Coskun, 2015) in entrepreneurship, people are involved, knowledge, finance, ideas of creation and expansion are needed, thus returnee migrants involvement through their interactions with locally based entrepreneurs have not only exposed entrepreneurs and their products to foreign markets but also increased their financial base, and keep many continuously in business.. Nigerian migrants have also been responsive for the increasing expansion of small scale outlets in forms of shops and supermarkets overseas, most especially in London, and competing favourably well against Indians and the Caribbeans who were hitherto dominant players in the African cum Diaspora markets (Ratha, Mohapatra, & Silwal, 2010).

Conclusion

No doubt, migrants' roles beyond remittances to family members are a major transnational economic activity, often between migrants, family and friends; and entrepreneurs in their societies of origin. This study is a departure from several western researches which have only been able to document the destructive impact of migrant labour systems on family lives mainly in terms of the physical absence of migrants. The contribution of migrants to the value chain of entrepreneurial development and indigenous technology is quite fascinating from the sociological analysis and to the socioeconomic relevance of migrants' role in nation building and poverty alleviation.

Evidences from this study show that interactions with migrants create several opportunities and relationship among entrepreneurs as customers, marketers and producers, of which many have been able to capitalise on these ongoing interactions as a new form of social capital, which have been converted into real financial capital in economic terms. Thus the role of migrants in the value chain of small and medium scale enterprises in Southern Nigeria can not only be overemphasised as a vital factor capable of turning the tide of entrepreneurship positively, but also providing the knowledge of how different forms of capital exist beyond mere migrants remittances. Thus, this study concluded that migrants are critical players in wealth creation not only by remittances from abroad but also through interactions (depicted by their needs for local commodities in their destination countries) with local markets in their country of origin. Thus they contribute in local entrepreneurs' ingenuity to meet their needs.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to selected States in Southern-Nigeria for which generalisation cannot be made. Further research in the area of large industrial settings will be needed with a quantitative analysis on entrepreneurial skills acquisition and foreign remittances towards financing SMSEs.

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