

## Implementing #MMN In Southern Nigeria

### Executive Summary

The migration of West Africans to Europe has risen exponentially in the last two decades resulting in public and media uproar, the intensification of border controls, diplomatic tensions, to mention a few. It has been noted that the majority of West Africans who enter Europe do so legally for such reasons as education, work, business, leisure, and resettlement<sup>1</sup>. Lamentably, a significant portion eventually overstay their visas. However, of particular interest to policy makers, international organizations, and scholars, among others, are those who explore and utilize irregular migration routes from sub-Saharan Africa to Southern Europe. Inspired by an amalgam of pull-factors such as the demand for cheap labour across certain sectors in Southern European countries, and push-factors including conflict, environmental crisis, and poverty<sup>2</sup>, these migrants defy numerous natural and man-made constraints to embark on the perilous journey across the Sahara and/or Mediterranean.

Scholars and analysts are divided on the primary cause of irregular migration from West Africa to Europe. While some believe that the burgeoning movement as witnessed in this context over the past few decades is a response to European Union migration policies that are unfavourable to “Third World nations”<sup>3</sup>, others point to the centrality of ingenuous smugglers<sup>4</sup>, desperation fueled by destitution in some African countries<sup>5</sup>, and unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about the destination countries<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, one thing remains clear; the

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<sup>1</sup> De Haas, H. (2008). *Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An overview of recent trends* (Vol. 32). Geneva: International Organization for Migration.

<sup>2</sup> King, R., & DeBono, D. (2013). Irregular Migration and the 'Southern European Model' of Migration. *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 22(1), 1-31.

<sup>3</sup> Ikuteyijo, L. (2014). The impact of European Union migration policies on irregular migration in sub-Saharan Africa. In *Territoriality and Migration in the EU Neighbourhood* (pp. 97-110). Springer, Dordrecht.

<sup>4</sup> Triandafyllidou, A., & Maroukis, T. (2012). *Migrant smuggling: Irregular migration from Asia and Africa to Europe*. Springer.

<sup>5</sup> Ikuteyijo, L. O. (2020). Irregular migration as survival strategy: Narratives from youth in urban Nigeria. In *West African Youth Challenges and Opportunity Pathways* (pp. 53-77). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

<sup>6</sup> Schippers, V. (2018). Nothing will keep me from taking the backway. Deconstructing aspirations and desires of male Gambian youth taking the path of irregular migration.

militarization of borders and enactment of stricter immigration policies by EU countries are insufficient in tackling the issue of irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. International development programmers and donors have sought to focus on “addressing the root causes of immigration”. This approach consists of the increase in development aid and the liberalization of trade in origin countries. But experts have shown the “development approach” does not have the potential of reducing emigration, at least in the short and middle term. In fact, evidence shows that this kind of approach leads to an increase rather than a decrease in the desire to emigrate<sup>7</sup>.

There is a need to devise critical approaches to understanding and tackling irregular migration in Africa. The Migrant Media Network (henceforth #MMN) is at the frontline of efforts to rethink and revitalize interventions in the area of immigration in sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative provides young Africans with reliable information and training on migration issues and social media to make informed decisions and be aware of safer migration options to Europe. #MMN promotes youth entrepreneurship at home as a way to build economic and social resilience, encouraging youth to create their own opportunities and work within their communities. #MMN believes in a bottom-top approach that involves listening to and working with communities to understand context-specific conceptualizations as well as dynamics of migration, and in turn supporting the utilization and strengthening of local resources to approach migration issues creatively and meaningfully. Initiated by Thomas Kalunge, himself an immigrant, and implemented by r0g agency in Germany, Ghana, and more recently the Gambia, #MMN continues to foster a platform of dialogue between immigrants in Germany and their communities back home. With an impressive record of success across the communities where we work, and following an identified need for the resources and expertise of #MMN, we now wish to extend our project to southern Nigeria.

### **Context: Why Nigeria**

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<sup>7</sup> De Haas, H. (2007). Turning the tide? Why development will not stop migration. *Development and change*, 38(5), 819-841.

With a population of approximately 200,000,000 people, which is expected to double within the next 30 years<sup>8</sup>, Nigeria continues to assert its primacy within the sphere of international politics, demographics and sovereignty. The most populous nation and biggest economy in Africa, the West African nation is a major player in the wave of heightened transnational movements sweeping through the globe. A 2018 study by Pew Research Centre identifies Nigeria as being a major source of immigrants to the EU<sup>9</sup>. With over 400,000 Nigerian born immigrants living in the EU, Norway, and Switzerland, the country easily tops the chart of sub-Saharan immigrants in that region. Indeed, a study by the Washington-based Think tank - Pew Research Center - shows that 74% of Nigerians are seeking to leave the country, either passively or actively<sup>10</sup>. Knowing exactly how many Nigerians explore irregular migration routes is difficult, as many end up in Libya and other North African countries undocumented, while some lose their lives in the dangerous journey through the Sahara and across the Mediterranean. Moreover, a significant number do not correctly declare their origin.

However, it is estimated that between 2014 and 2016, way over 50,000 Nigerians crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe<sup>11</sup>. Another source shows that over 80,000 Nigerians arrived by sea in Italy from 2013 to 2018<sup>12</sup>. Little wonder the EU listed Nigeria among the five priority countries where efforts to regulate irregular migration must be intensified<sup>13</sup>. Even as thousands continue to depart Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries in search for an often-elusive

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<sup>8</sup> Statista (2021). "Forecasted population in Nigeria in selected years between 2025 and 2050". <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1122955/forecasted-population-in-nigeria/>. Accessed 21/08/2021

<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Centre (2018). "At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010". <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/03/22/at-least-a-million-sub-saharan-africans-moved-to-europe-since-2010/>. Accessed 21/08/2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Vanguard News (2016). "22,500 Nigerians cross Mediterranean Sea, in 2016 says EU" <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/22500-nigerians-cross-mediterranean-sea-2016-says-eu-2/>. Accessed 21/08/2021.

<sup>12</sup> Obi, C., Bartolini, F., & D'Haese, M. (2019). Evaluating the impact of information campaign in deterring irregular migration intention among youths. a randomised control experiment in Edo State, Nigeria.

<sup>13</sup> EU (2016). Migration Partnership Framework: A New Approach to Better Manage Migration. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3\\_migrationpartnershipframework\\_2pg.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3_migrationpartnershipframework_2pg.pdf). Accessed 21/08/2021.

promised land - Europe, the spotlight is beginning to shine more and more on the complexities of the journey, as well as the vicissitudes of removal, return and repatriation. Since 2017, thousands of irregular and undocumented immigrants have been returned to Nigeria from North Africa and Europe. Many of these returnees carry with them a burden of physical and psychological injuries. In addition to their scars and trauma is the burden of stigma, disorientation and poverty<sup>14</sup>. #MMN will take these intricacies into effect in the structuring of social, educational and economic programs and systems for a multi-faceted approach to migration in Nigeria.

Interestingly, as Nigeria has been identified as a primary source of irregular migrants to Europe, it has been established that a huge percentage of these emigrants are from Edo State<sup>15</sup>. Practically, there are already a number of NGOs working in the region, many of which are focused on providing support to returnees, while others mobilize returnees help sensitize communities on the realities of irregular migration<sup>16</sup>. Many of these organizations and bodies are domiciled in Benin City, the capital of Edo state. Following a baseline study, #MMN Nigeria will potentially focus on peri-urban and rural communities close to Benin City. Targeting younger people in schools, churches, and networks, #MMN will use already produced and tested guides and kits, adapted to suit the local context to work with and alongside community members. We will equally identify partners and resource persons for collaboration and sharing of resources.

### **Resources We Have**

Currently, we have identified and contacted individuals and partners who share the vision of #MMN. A priest and principal of a secondary school in a rural community close to Benin has indicated interest in working together to provide immigration information and sensitization - a theme he has pursued personally through his career. We have equally connected with other individuals who have experience in NGO work and community building around the area. These

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<sup>14</sup> The New Humanitarian (2020). Nigerians Returned from Europe face Stigma and Growing Hardship  
<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/07/28/Nigeria-migrants-return-Europe>. Accessed 21/08/2021.

<sup>15</sup> IPS (2019). Nigerians Hear How Migrating Irregularly “Is Like Killing Yourself”.  
<http://www.ipsnews.net/2019/02/nigerians-hear-irregular-migration-like-going-kill/>. Accessed 21/08/2021.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

persons will help us navigate the environmental cum social terrain. Furthermore, we have identified potential partner organizations in the area. Such partnerships, in addition to providing an opportunity for mutual learning, will enable us mitigate some of the uncertainties of wading into a new geographical space.

It is important at this point to highlight some of the tools which have we have successfully implemented elsewhere and are ready to adapt to the Nigerian context. Our Migrant Media Network Field Guide Kit consists of many resources, all created to help potential migrants clarify their goals and make informed migration decisions.

(Please insert other technical resources here, etc).

### **Beneficiaries**

The direct beneficiaries of this project are young men and women between the ages of 14 and 25 living in rural and peri-urban areas around Benin City in southern Nigeria, many of whom are illusioned by the phenomenon of migration. It is estimated that thousands of youth will receive migration and social media training in the first year of the project. The project will also benefit migrants who will have a chance to tell their stories and contribute to educating the youth on the realities of migration based on their lived experiences. The communities will also benefit as entrepreneurs with a new mindset will emerge from the program. Finally, as we aim to train individuals who will subsequently become trainers. In this way, the benefits will ripple into other communities and social circles around the state and beyond.