

## Not Only A Man's World: Women Also Cross Borders

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### **Abstract**

*The migrants from Niger Republic move into the neighboring Nigerian communities in numbers in search for greener pastures. Previously, research in the region has shown migration to be male dominated (Liman, 2021). However, a new wave of women participation was noticed hence the need for literature update.*

*The study was conducted at Danra Local Government Area, Katsina state in Nigeria. The study area shares with Niger Republic a manned border at Kongolom and unmanned borders throughout the expanse of its several remote villages making the influx of both human and animal resources uncontrolled. Women, just like men move freely into the study area yearly. In order to understand the reasons behind the decision by these women to cross the borders, four (4) Focus Group Discussions were conducted with the 35 migrants using a checklist as a guide. Four (4) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) also held with their hostesses. Qualitative data was therefore collected and reported in descriptive narration. The results of the FGD show all respondents were female within the age range of 12-56 years. Some were married, some widowed, a good number divorced and the rest were spinsters. None of them had formal education but some had basic Islamic knowledge. They engaged in farming, post harvest activities, domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and babysitting and others street begging. Findings reveal that economic gains were the major reason for coming to Nigeria. For some respondents, this is the first time of partaking in migration, others have had the joy of returning yearly thereby making them circular migrants. These ladies and others practicing this migration type are commonly referred to as 'Yan Tabiradi.*

*Information gathered from the 3 of 4 of the hostesses, who were elderly women, all widowed and lived in 2-3 room houses explained that some migrants pay a token fee to stay (N150-N200 monthly/ less than 50cents) for accommodation. The fourth hostess, relatively younger, entertained her relatives at no cost.*

*Finally, it can be concluded that, women from southern Niger Republic do partake actively in short distance, seasonal, circular migration in parts of northern Nigeria. They come due to availability of work, a good network of family and friends that secure the work and accommodate them and also the ease of crossing the border.*

**Keywords:** Seasonal migration; 'Yan Tabiradi; Border; Women; Hostesses

### **Introduction**

People move across borders for several reasons. Challenging circumstances are thought to push migrants from Niger Republic to move into the neighboring Nigerian communities in numbers in search for greener pastures as highlighted by the global migration pattern where it shows an increase of population movement towards countries with higher GDP (Docquier, 2013).

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Women of different ages, tribes, cultures and status migrate from rural to urban areas due several reasons including to accompany their husbands, to be part of a workforce, economic circumstances, seeking to satisfy increasing aspirations and opportunities. And to also fulfil kinship obligations that may sometimes prove burdensome. The International Labour Organization estimates that women constitute about 41.5% of the global migrant population sometimes accounting for up to 70-80 per cent of some countries emigration (Fleury, 2016). Twum-Baah *et al* (1995) found that women dominate short distance emigration to nearby countries accounting for 64%, 57% and 56% respectively of Ghanaian emigrants in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Togo in the mid 1990s. Previously, research in the region has shown migration to be male dominated (Labo, 2000; Liman, 2021). However, a new wave of women participation was noticed hence the notion that in northern Nigeria female migration is associational is gradually eroding. This study aims at understanding the reasons behind this new movement.

## **Methods**

This study was conducted at Daura Local Government Area, Katsina state in Nigeria. The study area shares with Niger Republic a manned border at Kongolom and unmanned borders throughout the expanse of its several remote villages making the influx of both human and animal resources uncontrolled. Women, just like men move freely into the study area at will.

Four (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs, 8-10 participants) were conducted with the 35 migrants using a checklist as a guide. Four (4) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) held with their hostesses, also guided by a checklist. Qualitative data was therefore collected and was reported in descriptive narration.

## **Results & Discussions**

The results of the FGD show 100% respondents were female within the age range of 12-60 years. About 60% were over 35 years of age. Some were married, others widowed, a good number divorced and the rest are spinsters.

None of them had formal education but some, especially the younger ones, had basic Islamic knowledge which for most is believing in Allah, attesting that Muhammad is his last Prophet, saying the five daily prayers, knowing how to perform the ablution, and memorization of a few chapters of the Holy Qur'an.

## **Migration Histories**

### **Places of Origin and Destination**

The migrants interviewed were all found to originate from villages around the town of Zinder in Zinder region of Niger Republic and all of them went to Daura, Katsina state in Nigeria. This migration pattern is as noted by Labo (2000) that rural areas were the main sources of migrant labor and urban areas are the final destinations regardless of whether there was an international border between the points of departure and destination. Liman (2021) found that migrants' destination seemed influenced by three factors. The first factor is the purpose of migration. The migrants have a pre-destined destination where they hope their ambition or purpose of migrating will be fulfilled where for this research the purpose is purely economic and destination is Daura.



The second factor is the existence of a relationship with migrants at the destination of choice. Family members and friends serve as catalysts and host migrants as when they arrive. In this research, the respondents were majorly return migrants who came for agricultural work and have had cordial relationships with their hosts.

While some simply trekked across the border, a majority came to Nigeria by road in cars and lorries. The cars used for this purpose are Golf and Sharon while Canter is the preferred choice for lorries. Cars are more expensive paying as much as N2,000 from Damagaram to Daura compared to lorries where one could hitch hike or pay as low as N200. So thirdly, the availability of a major road network and several un-official pathways provides ease of movement/transportation from the source regions to the destination (Labo, 2000; Liman, 2021). Hence, these migrants from Zinder province were found at Daura because of the availability of an excellent road network.

### **Purpose of migration/ Means of livelihood**

About half of the respondents (mostly aged) engaged in farming and post harvest activities such as planting, weeding, fertilizer application, pruning, harvesting and post harvest work. On the average, for farming activities, they receive N200 to N400 daily while for post harvest activities, the payment depends on the type of work, type of grain and the size of the bundle (*dame*) that is being processed.

39% partook in domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and babysitting where the earnings range from N3,000-N6,000 monthly (approx. \$7-\$14). The younger ones are more engaged here even though a few elderly ones are comfortable doing house chores.

Despite the fact that most of the respondents find it unacceptable to their values, 11% of the migrants who are able bodied women engage in street begging. On a good days outing, they can get up to N300. They always say its circumstances that made them beggars and there is nothing ashamed of.

Findings reveal that economic gains are the major reasons for coming to Nigeria and money was raised for different activities. About a quarter are saving to finance daughters' weddings; younger ladies are saving towards their own weddings and around 5.7% are saving to contribute towards the medical bill of a sick relative. Sadiya & Abu said

...This is the first time we are coming to Daura, our elder brother has been sick for months and he has not been able to afford the medical bills so we came to do some domestic chores to raise funds to assist him...

The research team was surprised that married women would partake in migration to finance weddings so Rabi explained

...quite a number of us are here to raise money to buy the necessities required of us as parents of the bride that is the "*kayan 'daki*" which consist of a bed, beddings, kitchen utensils and some household basics... my husband is not showing much enthusiasm and I fear that time is closing up on us, lest we get embarrassed in the society...the spinsters here are also saving towards the same goal...

About 30% came to find means of family sustenance while others came just for the fun of it as recounted by Bintu

... I have no one to cater for, I only came to explore new places...

Her friend Laminde quickly added

... I also just followed the wagon to see the city...

34.2% of the migrant women have only just begun partaking in migration for the very first time, the rest have had the joy of returning yearly thereby making them circular migrants. These ladies and others practicing this migration type are commonly referred to as *Yan Tabiradi*.

At Daura, ladies in the new suburbs around the Government Reserved Area (GRA) hosted the respondents. These ladies also served as the Key Informants for this research. Information gathered from three (3) of them, who were elderly women, all widowed and living in 2-3 room houses explained that some migrants paid a token fee for accommodation. They paid N150-N200 monthly that is about less than 50cents. The fourth hostess, who is relatively younger than the other three, entertained her relatives at no cost. The 4 key informants mentioned their source of electricity is through illegal connections from the community while water is sourced from a nearby well at wee hours of the morning... Hadiza explains

...we fetch water from a well that is like 100metres away from this house so we have to go as early as 4am to get the clear settled water and to also avoid the long queue...

The respondents partake in an array of jobs but their wages are low so they engage in monthly contribution (*adashé*). This is an arrangement whereby a number of people pledge to contribute a certain amount of money to one person at a stipulated time (daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly) and then each take turns to receive the money. This goes a long way in assisting a person to save and buy goods that ordinarily she would not be able to afford.

## Conclusion

Generally, almost all the respondents testified to having one or multiple monetary problems to address which prompted dissatisfaction with living conditions and this is the primary motivation for migration. It then can be concluded that, women from southern Niger Republic do partake actively in short distance, seasonal, circular migration in parts of northern Nigeria. They engage in agricultural practices, domestic chores and street begging. This simply means that not all migration by women to/in northern Nigeria is associational, some women migrate without the men and some even cross borders.

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