

One People: Connecting Migrants and Changing Lives

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1. A Broken Family

In African culture, strong emphasis is placed on the role of the family. Family is considered to be the structure upon which an individual is nurtured, taught about life and most importantly it is the strongest support group a person can have. The role of the family is to raise a person who is conscientious, a productive member of society and a balanced individual. When people started migrating from Zimbabwe in large numbers, it resulted in gaps forming within families. Usually the pattern of migration started with one parent migrating to the United Kingdom. This left the children with one parent less and the spouse without a partner. A few years later the remaining spouse would also migrate. The children were often left behind to complete their tertiary education whilst in the care of relatives. The result of this has been to weaken the effectiveness of the family and to lead to the breakdown of the foundations on which our society once stood.

The family played an important role in the development of children and also acted as a support group for adults. The huge gaps left as a result of migration are ones that society has been unable to fill. The consequences of this migration are not immediately noticeable but they surface later in life when the children are adults and they fail to adjust properly into society. When I was in high school, it was a well known fact that the children with parents who were living abroad were the ones with the most money and the ones who misbehaved the most.

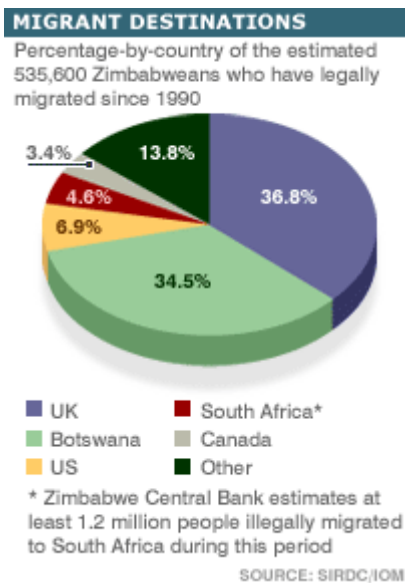
One of my close relatives left for the UK in 2000. She left her 10 year old son and her 4 year old daughter in the care of her mother. Ten years later and the effect of their mother's migration is evident in the children's behaviour. The son grew up feeling emancipated because of the large amounts of money the mother sent them and he always assumed he would go to the UK to be with the mother. As a result he did not perform well in school and last year his Visa to UK was declined. Now he is stuck with few prospects and difficulty adjusting into society. The daughter because when she was left at a younger age she grew up with the grandmother filling the mother role. This made her respect her grandmother's authority better and as such she is still in school. In the ten years since their mother left they have only seen her twice on her two visits home. Financially the children have been well provided for but their social development has been stunted and this is evident in their behaviour now. Their story is the typical one for most migrant families. With such large

numbers of Zimbabweans migrating the families affected by this situation are many. There are many broken families today suffering from the effects of migration.

1.1 A broken Nation

The effects of migration start on a small scale as a problem within families but they soon escalate to become a national problem. Migration in Zimbabwe started getting serious in the early 2000s when people started leaving the country to escape the difficult economic situations and to search of better paying jobs abroad. The exact number of Zimbabwean migrants living abroad is not known but estimates range anywhere from 500 000 to millions people(Pearce,2005). The first major group of individuals to migrate were Zimbabwean nurses. Each year large numbers of Zimbabwean trained nurses would migrate abroad primarily to the UK. The main reasons for migration were that they would get better remuneration for doing the same job in the UK. After nurses the next group of people to migrate were teachers and then as the situation in Zimbabwe worsened any person despite their qualifications were looking for better opportunities abroad.

The main group of people migrating from Zimbabwe are young professional individuals aged between 20 – 45. The loss of highly skilled and trained professionals has hit the Zimbabwe economy and society very hard. This mass exodus of professionals has left the country weakened in many areas of the service industry. It has also resulted in a lack of qualified people to head up any development or improvement projects that may be started.



Migration destinations of Zimbabweans

My first experience of the effects of the migration of trained professionals was 2 years ago when my grandfather fell ill. He was sick and he needed to have an operation. My family was faced with many challenges in trying to secure medical attention for him. The problems we faced ranged from the most basic one of the hospital not having a qualified doctor, to finding a place where we could have scans done as the hospital machine was not working to having to go out to purchase complex medical equipment because the hospital did not have that. After we had managed to acquire all the required equipment my grandfather still had to wait longer in pain while we waited for the qualified doctor to come back from South Africa. One of the nurses explained to us that due to the migration of skilled and qualified doctors the hospital had to rely heavily on trainee doctors and that they had to refer many people to South African hospitals to have an operation they once could have had done in Zimbabwe.

My next experience was in South Africa. Many South African students credit their good education to Zimbabwean teachers. There has been a large exodus of teachers especially Science and Mathematics teachers from Zimbabwe to neighbouring SADC countries. This has caused the education standard in Zimbabwe to go down and has reduced the number of qualified people especially doctors and engineers that are produced in Zimbabwe. Many other sectors of the Zimbabwean economy have been affected badly by migration. This has contributed to the slowing down of industry and the decline of quality service provision. With over million people estimated to have migrated from Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe is a country that is suffering immensely from the negatives of international migration(Pearce, 2005).

2 The Upside

There are many facets to the issue of migration. Migration brings with it some advantages for both the sending and the receiving country. My country is primarily a sending country with more people leaving than coming in. The main and biggest benefit the people have seen is the influx of foreign currency. It is estimated that in 2009 alone over 300 billion US dollars was sent back home by migrants living abroad (World Bank, 2011). This money is sent to the remaining family members to help them with bills and to better their living standards. The remuneration sent by migrants has indeed increased the standard of living for most people. One example of migrant money helping the nation was in 2008. At this time the country was suffering from food shortages and the shops were not stocking food items. It was the money sent by migrants that enabled people to travel to neighbouring countries like South Africa and import food. Had it not been for this many people would have suffered even more.

Remunerations sent by migrants are also used to better the community. Many low density suburbs are emerging and the funding for this has mainly come from people in the Diaspora. Also, many rural areas have seen a lot of infrastructural improvements. The other area that has been improved by migrant money is technology. People who migrated to first world countries were exposed to new technologies. This technology they would send back to home. As a result most people in my country own a cell phone or have access to one. This in a way has also prompted local service providers to upgrade and improve the quality of their service. Recently Econet Zimbabwe a local company introduced 3G service on their network. Now most people have easy access to the internet. This has opened up many opportunities for people as they can now easily access information from the internet.

Apart from technology, the other thing that people in the Diaspora have assisted in is boosting local trade. This is achieved in two ways. The first is in increasing the spending power of people and this directly increases the flow of local trade. The second is an increase in entrepreneurial activities. People in the Diaspora are providing the capital and funding for small local businesses. Individual incomes have increased and this has led to an increase in the standard of living.

2.1 Is it Worth it?

It is very difficult to conclude whether overall international migration is positive or negative. This is because the core issues surrounding the reasons for migration are varied and complex (Zimbabwe's Exodus, Crisis, Migration, Survival., 2010). The other problem is that no two migrant's tales are the same. Where one person failed, another could have succeeded. This makes it difficult to state beyond doubt whether migration is a positive or a negative.

International migration in Zimbabwe has been prompted by two main issues, economic and political. The main reason people state for leaving Zimbabwe is that it is for economic reasons. These people leave the country hoping to find better working and paying conditions in other countries. For some groups of people migration has provided them with the better paying jobs they desired. Qualified professionals especially are more likely to find employment quickly. Unfortunately these same people are faced with many unforeseen challenges the minute they arrive in the new country. Most migrants despite their professions state that they had difficulty finding a job(Lowell). It is not uncommon for a migrant to end up settling for a lower position in a company with lower pay because they cannot find employment at their own level.

The other problem people face is settling into the new society and the new lifestyle. Most migrants are faced with some animosity from citizens in the host country. The level of this animosity ranges from small to very serious issues. African migrants who move to first world countries are usually faced with racism and for most of them it will be the first time they encounter it(Zimbabwe's Exodus, Crisis, Migration, Survival., 2010). They are easy targets for racism because usually they stand out instead of blend in within the new society. The other major contributor is the language barrier. Although most migrants will have some basic knowledge of English, this may not be enough to navigate through society. Language barriers and heavy accents are some of the big problems hindering the success of migrants.

The other problems migrants face is from the local people who may feel that the migrants are stealing their jobs. This was the case with Zimbabwean migrants in 2008. Zimbabweans especially those living in high density areas were victims of Xenophobic attacks in South Africa(BBC, 2008). At least 22 people were killed and property belonging to Zimbabweans was destroyed(BBC, 2008). The attacks caused a lot of discussions and debates. One of the main questions was whether the Zimbabweans should go back home. A few people, those

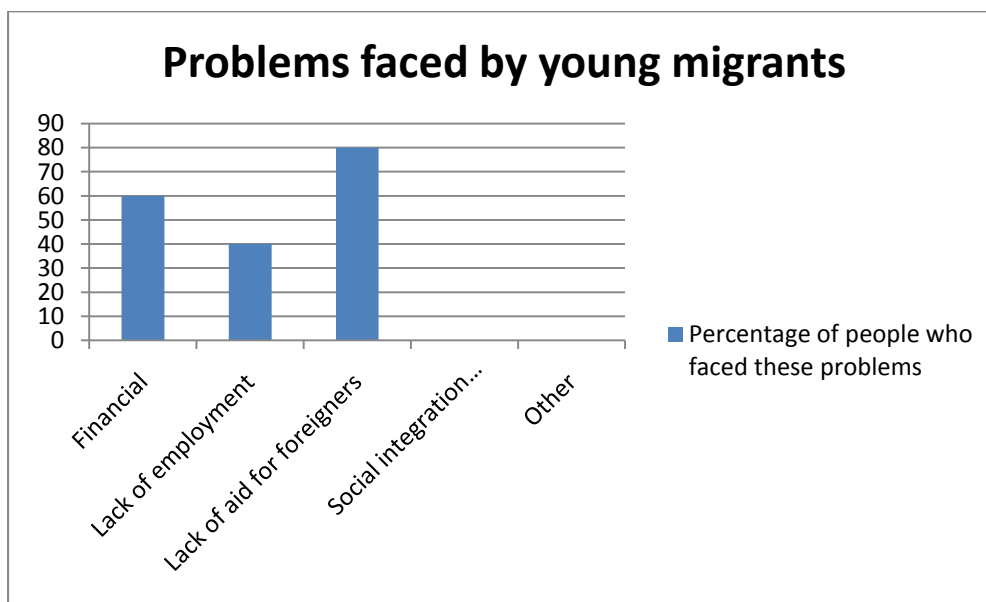
who could afford to, chose to move elsewhere. A very small number returned to Zimbabwe but the majority chose to stay in South Africa despite the attacks.

It would seem that for most Zimbabweans living abroad and being subjected to discrimination, abuse and attack is better than living in Zimbabwe. Based on this alone it would be easy to conclude that for most individuals migration is a positive, no matter what circumstances one might have to endure.

Unfortunately when dealing with the issue of migration we cannot just take an individual's condition and apply it everything. The effects of outward migration on the sending country have to be taken into account. For the most part the sending country does not benefit immensely from migration. Remittances are sent, but these only benefit a few individuals. Take for example a case where a doctor migrates to another country. This doctor may send back money to the remaining family members and this money may be used to better their lives or to start businesses. Though he may send money, in my opinion the service he could have provided for people in his country is far greater than any money he may ever send.

2.2 Opinions of young migrants

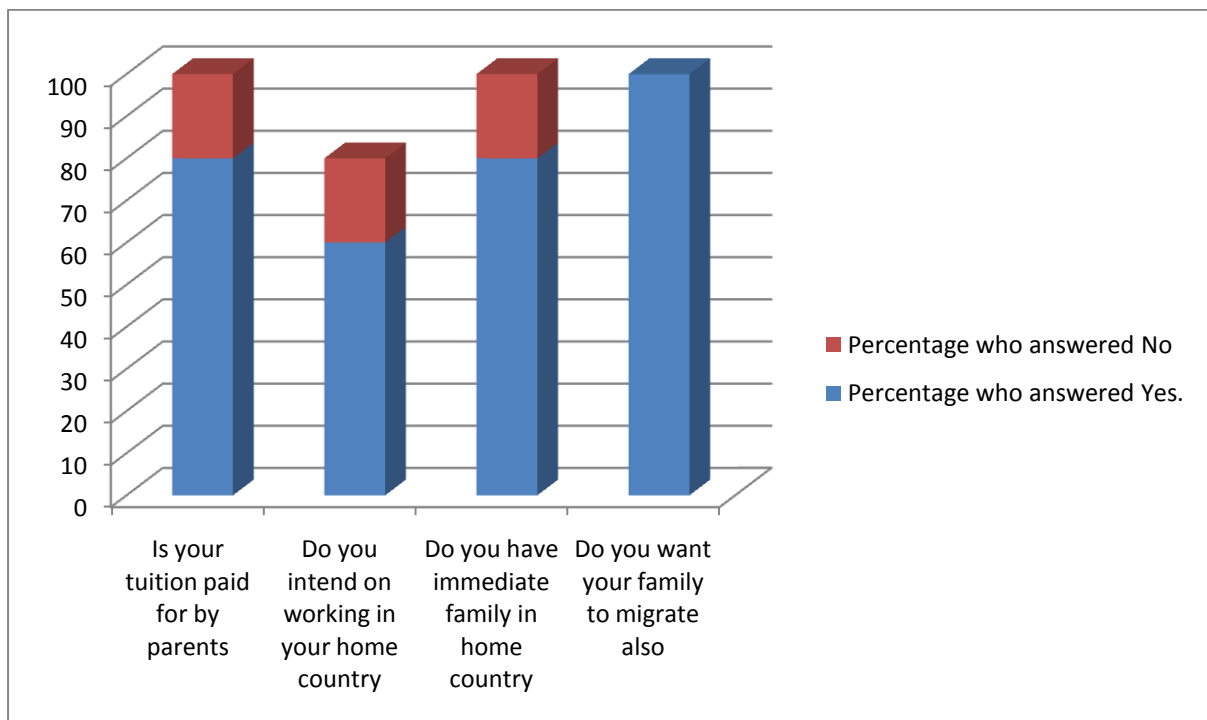
To better understand some of the challenges faced by the youth, I took an informal survey of Zimbabwean students studying at a local South African university. The average age of the students who participated in the survey was 21.



This graph shows some of the main problems faced by migrants

The main problem faced by migrant students was that there was a lack of financial aid for foreign students. About 80% of the students said their tuition and living expenses are paid for by their parents or guardians who still live in Zimbabwe. In most cases the parents were struggling to keep up with fees payments and this has led to feelings of guilt by the students. One student said that her mother had had to migrate to the UK to be able to afford university fees. As a result the family is now separated with the father and siblings still in Zimbabwe, the mother living in the UK and the student living in South Africa. The student has admitted to feelings of guilt and depression. She blames herself for “breaking “up the family so to speak and straining her parents.

There are many bursaries, financial aid and funding available at the University. Unfortunately very little is assigned for foreign students. Students stated that there was a big difference in the way local students and international students were treated. For example if a local student made it on to the University Dean’s list, they would get a deduction on their fees. On the other hand if an international student made into the dean’s list, they would not get a reduction on their fees yet it is them that need it the most. These are all issues that affect young migrants and limit their opportunities.



Some of the views of young migrants

Of the students interviewed most expressed a desire to return to work in their home countries but only if certain conditions were met. Some of these conditions included better provision of educational facilities, political and economic stability and a decent standard of living.

3 Building a better future

3.1 Adapting at home

The first step in broadening the opportunities for migrants is to first realise the cause of migration and to address those fundamental issues. The main issues surrounding migration are core issues that the youth cannot solve alone. Issues like political unrest and economic unrest are ones that require the involvement of the youth and of the government. Some ways to improve opportunities for youth in their home country are

1) Increasing access to internationally recognised educational qualifications- one of the main reasons that people, especially youth migrate is in search for better education. Most of the students I spoke to stated that the need for better education was one that contributed significantly to their decision to migrate. Providing students with quality education can reduce the need to migrate. This can be implemented by:

- > providing access to reputable online courses. Most people in Zimbabwe have access to the internet. Introducing online distance learning is a way to improve education levels and at a lower cost.

- > introducing more trade based courses so people are able to join the work force early

2) Promoting entrepreneurial activities and giving the youth a stake in society. If the youth are able to provide for themselves by their own businesses, this promotes the growth of the economy and increases standard of living. Entrepreneurship activities can be implemented by

- > governments providing more access to loans.

A good example of this is that there are many entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe who lack the financial backing to expand their businesses. If they were provided with financial backing it would increase their opportunities and reduce the need to migrate.

- > availing more donor funds
- > exposing entrepreneurs to competitions and opportunities to showcase their business proposals

3.2 Adapting abroad

The main problems faced by migrants in foreign countries can be addressed with the co-operation of all groups of people involved. Some of the ways to help increase and better the opportunities of migrants are

- > Having the embassies of people in those home country offer their citizens more support. If the embassies assisted their citizens in finding job placements, this would make the people fit in into society more
- > Promoting dialogue between the sending country and the receiving country. Such dialogue could help facilitate the introduction of better laws for dealing with and catering for migrants. This could also help find ways in which to make the migration be beneficial for both the sending and the receiving country.
- > Improving the treatment of migrants by the treating them fairly in educational institutions and offering them equal employment opportunities as locals. Local people should be shown how migrants benefit their society and this will lead to better relations between the locals and migrants.

3.3 Vanhuvamwe.com

One of the values instilled in African people is a sense of oneness, a sense of community. It is this ingrained sense of togetherness that will cause strangers to help each other just because they are from the same country. When I first came to South Africa, it was my first time away from home. When I arrived at the airport I had no idea how to get to my school. Luckily at the airport I met another girl who was also starting school at the university. We started talking about home and our families. When she found out I had no idea how I was going to get to the school she offered to assist me. Her relatives who had come to collect her from the airport drove me to the school and helped me get settled in nicely. These are people who had

been virtual strangers to me a few hours earlier. This sense of community and that we are one people is one that is shared by most Africans.

Unfortunately with the age of globalisation it is difficult to maintain this spirit. People are scattered around the world and it is not easy to identify people from your home country.

Many migrants are willing to help new migrants but lack the opportunity to do that.

Vanhuvamwe is a shona word meaning 'one people.' Vanhuvamwe.com is my idea of a way to bring the spirit of togetherness and opening up new opportunities for migrants.

Function

The function of the website will be to create a network of all the migrants living in a specific country or area. The main thing that limits the opportunities of migrants is a lack of information. Vanhuvamwe.com will work to alleviate that. The website will serve as a platform for migrants to share information, ideas and to get help. The web content would include information on where to find the cheapest prizes and advice columns on how to settle into the new society well. The three top problems faced by migrants are lack of accommodation, lack of employment and not integrating well into new life.

The main functions of the website will be to

1. Provide listing of affordable safe accommodation
2. Provide a listing of potential employers, especially ones that have a reputation of treating migrants fairly
3. Have advice columns on how to settle in well – provide information on how to avoid scams and exploitation

Implementation

The idea is that the website will be run mainly by migrants. It can be implemented in the way Wikipedia works where the content of the website will be provided by members and volunteers. People will be encouraged to write articles and provide employment details and upload them to the website. There will be one paid position of overall site manager. The duties of the site manager will be to oversee the content of the website, keep the site up to date and to avoid scams and rogue activities.

Money to pay the manager and to keep the site running will be from donations made by the site users.

Benefits

The potential benefits from a site such as this one are limitless. Speaking from personal experience, if there had been a website such as this when I had moved to South Africa I could have saved a lot of time, money and I would have been more aware of the opportunities available.

Some of the anticipated benefits are

1. Migrants settling in easier – if you know beforehand how to behave and the certain rules and etiquettes of the new society it will make settling in easier.
2. Less exploitation of migrants – the website will provide information for reputable companies and people, and provide information on how to avoid exploitation
3. Emotional well being – sometimes, especially when in a foreign land, being able to speak to someone in your home language helps to reduce the feelings of homesickness and depression.

A website such as Vanhuvamwe.com has the potential to increase the opportunities of migrants by helping a person with some of the social and economic challenges faced by migrants. In a world where most aspects of life are dominated by technology, this website will be convenient and it will offer much needed assistance for migrants.

Conclusion

The effects of migration vary from place to place. In my opinion outward migration from Zimbabwe has been more negative than positive. The country has lost much more than just skilled and talented people. The society is now having to shape itself into a new globalised world.

It is my hope that through the implementation of the ideas proposed in this essay, especially the use of Vanhuvamwe.com, people affected by migration may be able to better their opportunities and thus increase their welfare and wellbeing.

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