



## Migration and National Development in Nigeria: A Critical Examination of Lee's Theory of Migration

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### Abstract

Migration has long been a focal point of sociological inquiry, with scholars always seeking to understand the forces driving human mobility. Everett Lee's push-pull theory is a comprehensive theory applied in explaining migration and is a more advanced replacement of the earlier, economically deterministic theories. Lee's analysis reveals diverse factors that instigate migration. He submits that what leads to migration in most cases is a response to the complex interplay of factors at the place of origin and destination. Unlike reductionist theories, his approach emphasizes the multifaceted nature of migration and its potential to produce both positive and negative outcomes, depending on the context. This paper employs a qualitative research design, alongside critical and conceptual analysis of secondary data, to examine the relationship between migration and national development through the lens of Lee's theory, using Nigeria as a case study. This paper explores the determinants and scope of migration as well as its effect on national development. It argues that migration greatly contributes to national development since the mobility of human capital and socio-economic integration of migrants make a significant contribution to development impacts. The research attests to the double potential of migration in terms of spurring or slowing development based on how integration policy is handled, as well as controlling socio-economic factors. The paper asserts that strategic policy interventions are necessary to realize the development dividends of migration.

**Keywords:** Migration, Development, Demography, Push and Pull factors, Lee.

## INTRODUCTION

Migration, as a fundamental human phenomenon, has consistently shaped the course of civilizations throughout history. In broader terms, migration involves the movement of people from one location to another, driven by a variety of reasons that range from socio-economic necessity to political instability and environmental changes (Castelli, 2018). Scholars have often debated the factors that influence migration, and Everett Lee, in his push and pull theory, provides an analytical framework that identifies forces compelling individuals to leave their place of origin and those attracting them to new destinations. However, while these factors have been widely explored, there remains an inadequate emphasis on the interrelationship between migration and national development (Fägerlind & Saha, 2016; Massey, 2019). This undeniably leaves a gap in understanding how migration can either propel or hinder a nation's progress, depending on how the push and pull factors are addressed.

To this end, this paper seeks to address this gap by examining Lee's push and pull theory within the broader context of national development. Specifically, it posits that national development is fundamentally tied to human development, as the individual is the primary agent of societal progress. It further advanced the argument that the pull factors serve a crucial role in national development when individuals harness them effectively. However, if left unaddressed, push factors can significantly impede a nation's development. The rationale behind this thesis is that migration, managed strategically, has the potential to transform societies positively, but its mismanagement could lead to socio-economic challenges and instability. This analysis aims to provide an understanding of migration's dual potential; both as a driver of development and as a factor capable of undermining it.

To achieve this overarching goal, this paper is divided into four sections. The first section explores the concept of migration by providing a foundational understanding of its key dynamics that inform human societies. The second section examines the concept of development as national development by unveiling its dimensions and how it serves as a benchmark for societal progress. The

third section presents a detailed exposition of Lee's push and pull theory. It highlights its relevance to contemporary migration issues and its implications for development. Finally, the fourth section critically analyses the relationship between migration and national development, using Nigeria as a case study, this study emphasizes how the interplay of push and pull factors as contributed to the issue of development in Nigeria and how it can either further contribute to or detract a nation's development.

### The Concept of Migration

The word 'migration' has its root in the Latin verb 'migrare' which denotes the movement from one location to another. In its broad sense, it is defined as the movement of a person or people from one location to another for whatever purpose. It is viewed as a change in location either within or outside a state-nation and even within a hall. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English captured "migration" as those happenings "when large numbers of people go to live in another area or country, especially to find work" (Longman, 2005). Also, The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (DEX II, 1998) defines migration as "the mass movement of some tribes or populations from one territory to another, determined by economic, social, political or natural factors". It can therefore be deduced from these two definitions that migrants transit from one location to another majorly for the betterment of their socio-economic status.

Migration can be classified in two ways. It can either be internal or international. Internal migration is the movement or relocation of persons within the state, society, or country, while international or external migration conveys the movement or relocation of persons from one nation to another nation of the world (Tataru, 2019). Migration can either be voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration is the movement from one location to another based on the migrant's desires and considered factors to better his/her economic conditions. On the other hand, forced migration occurs when migrants are threatened by circumstances in their place of origin or settlement beyond what they can cope with or handle. Forced migration, according to Castles (2006), mainly involves people who have been expelled by governments or who have been transported as

slaves or prisoners from one location to another. This position is also evident in the work of [Erdal \(2020\)](#). Thus, inferring from the arguments above, we can agree that migration does not just occur, but rather, it is reason-oriented. In other words, there is always a ‘why’ question and responses to migration. Having established this view, the section further exposes the notion of development, focusing on driving towards national development.

### **Conceptualizing Development: A Focus on National Development**

The notion of development has been defined from diverse points of view by various developmental scholars. Some scholars have defined development as growth in respect increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capital Income, while some scholars also held that development is much more than Gross Domestic Product (see [Seers, 1972](#)). According to [Seers \(1969\)](#) economic growth is not tantamount to development. For there can be an increase in National Income and Per Capital Income without development. [Seer \(1969\)](#) posited three main indicators of development, which are drastic reduction in the level of unemployment, poverty and inequality. The study posits that if one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, or all the three, it is a symptom that development has not actually taken place even when there is an increase in Per Capital Increase.

[Rodney \(1972\)](#) alluded that development in human society is multi-faceted and therefore implies different things at different levels. At the individual level, [Rodney \(1972\)](#) holds that, it denotes heightened skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being, while at the social group level, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships, and at the economic level, he posit development as the increased capacity of members/citizens put jointly together in order to combat their environment.

[Adrian \(2000\)](#) also agreed with Seer, asserting that development ought to be measured in respect to the efficiency of all forces and means of production, as it improves people's living standards, thereby eradicating hunger, poverty, disease, and dependence.

[Khoi \(1992\)](#), on his own account, views development from three perspectives: cultural,

social, and economic. The cultural perspective emphasizes creativity and initiative rather than imitation, as he acknowledges the mingling and exchange of cultural items, both material and non-material. It is on this basis that Le Thanh Khoi critiques any educational system that is based on garbage in, garbage out, which fails to allow room for individual student creativity. Since [Khoi \(1992\)](#) focuses on education, he argues that the transfer of cultural knowledge should be encouraged, as individuals, because of the development they have attained through education, will be able to contribute to community well-being. [Khoi \(1992\)](#) also expands on the economic aspect of development, arguing that individualistic ideology should be replaced with a collective ideology that fosters the common goals of the community. He states that environmental pollution and over-exploitation, among other issues, stem from economic activities driven by individualism. He also notes that people migrate from one nation to another because of individual ambition, which in turn alters the national development of their home country. Prioritizing the interests of the individual over those of the community will contribute to national stagnation. Hence, he emphasizes the importance of individual contributions to national development, suggesting that migration, a result of advancements in the transportation sector, can also impact national development. In essence, he argues for a holistic understanding of development that integrates economic, social, and cultural dimensions. From his perspective, development is not merely a matter of economic growth or technological advancement as also conceived by [Sen \(1999\)](#); rather, it fosters human potential, cultural identity, and social cohesion. Hence, he further argues for the essential role proper education plays in achieving this integrated vision of development, which serves not only to build skills for economic productivity but also to preserve and transmit cultural values and empower individuals as active participants in society.

[Sen \(1999\)](#) defines development as real freedom. [Sen \(1999\)](#) argues that development should not be measured purely by GDP growth or Par capita income. He posits further that development should be measured based on the freedom enjoyed by the citizens of the nation. These freedoms include political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and protective

security. Political freedom entails the citizens or members freely participating in elections and the right to voice out their opinion on issues that involve criticizing or evaluating the government. Economic facilities have to do with the provision of loans and credit facilities that would enhance macro and micro business organizations. It also entails opportunities that individuals enjoy to meet their economic demands. Social opportunities entail standard school, good health care services, among many others. As expressed by Sen (1999), he argued that economic facilities and social opportunities are interwoven. By this, he meant that having access to good education will pave way for good job, and a better payment scheme will also grant one the financial freedom one needs in order to enjoy the health care facilities. As a result, in the long run, this will reduce the rate of mortality. Furthermore, education also helps one to participate in politics and engage in some jobs which demand literacy. Regarding transparency, Sen (1999) asserts that transparency fosters openness, thereby curbing corruption through the demands for proper accountability. Lastly, Sen (1999) highlights the importance of what he terms "protective security." He argues that even in developed nations, it is essential to implement measures such as unemployment benefits and famine relief programs. These measures aim to avert abject poverty and provide a safety net for vulnerable populations.

Supported in the work of Tayebwa (1992), he exposed that development should not be limited to denote economic welfare or material well-being alone but be captured in its entirety to include improvements in economic, social, and political aspects of the whole society, like security, culture, social activities and political institutions. This thus explains why Rogers (1990) argues that "development is a long participatory process of social change in the society whose objective is the material and social changes for the majority of the population through a better understanding of their environment".

Hence, from the foregoing, development can thus be argued to have shifted from higher GDP and Per Capita Income alone to become more anthropocentric in conception, of which Rodney alluded that national development is a product of the joint effects of individual development. It was

considered to be the summation of an individual's development in respect to science and how to conquer nature, that birth national development. Furthered by Roger (1990), he argues that the objective of development is the material and social changes for most of the population. Thus, it becomes expedient to ask the question 'how are the majority of the populations faring in other to determine the scope of development'. In response to this, Roger (1990) emphasizes the need for individuals' development as he posits national development would be attained through a better understanding of their environment. In bid to portray this view, Owens (1987) also posited that development is when there is development of people (human development) and not development of things. In other words, it is the developed individuals that enhance national development.

The term 'national development' can be considered to encapsulate all cultural institutions of the country. It is considered as the expansion in agriculture, industry, welfare, religion and the living space of all people. The United Nations defined National Development as the compilation of growth with changes in social, cultural, economic and political life of a nation. Development is the transformation of a community from a less desirable state into a more desirable state. This is achieved through improving its social, economic, political and educational aspects with a view of bettering the lives of the citizens. Tinuola & Ogunbor (2021) contends that National development, therefore, can be described as the comprehensive advancement of a country, encompassing social, economic, political, technological, and scientific progress. In this vein, Chukumerije (2008) argues that national development is a multifaceted concept comprising various interconnected variables. These include educational attainment, socioeconomic status, media exposure, agricultural innovations, the acquisition of technical knowledge, mass production, and deep cultural awareness (cited by Tinuola & Ogunbor, 2021). In essence, he emphasizes the interdependence of these factors in driving national development.

### **Lee's Push and Pull Theory of Migration**



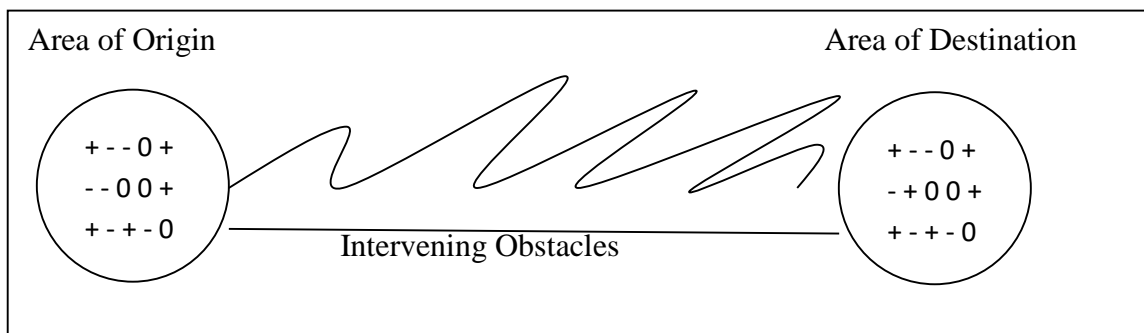
Everett Spurgeon Lee, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Georgia, is best known for his unique theory of migration, referred to as the Push and Pull Theory or Lee's Theory. Lee in his theory of migration affirms that there exists an area of origin and that of destination when it comes to migration. He then proceeds to assert that there exist certain factors that drive people out of their places of origin; this factor is what Lee labeled as the Push factor. These factors however include poor health facilities, lack of job opportunities, inadequate educational system, insecurity, fear of political crisis, natural disaster among others. While the Pull factors can be seen as the opposite of the push factor. The pull factor is what draws or attract people in into a specific location, state-nation. This factor includes good health facilities, job opportunities, security, religious freedom, good educational system, political freedom among others.

Lee then proceeds to pinpoint four factors engulfed in the decision to migrate. These factors are:

1. Factors associated with the area of origin.
2. Factors associated with the area of destination.
3. Intervening obstacles. 4. Personal factors.

Lee (1966) avers that there are various factors associated with the place of origin and that of destination, although these factors may differ, and is also premised on the foresight of the potential migrant. He posits that every potential migrant is more familiar with what his/her place of origin holds, however, not that certain of what will eventually play out in the area of destination. In this respect, he discussed the possibility of discrimination, assimilation among others. Lee (1966) noted that between every two points there stands a set of intervening obstacles which may be slight in some instances and insurmountable in others. This is to affirm that from between the area of origin and that of destination, there exist some intervening obstacles. These obstacles involve transportation cost and distance, legal restriction among others. Finally, the personal factor is of most important. This is because we understood that it is not the actual factors related to the area of origin and destination that influence the actual migration process but the individuals' perceptions of these factors.

Lee (1966) explains each of these four categories, noting that there are many factors in each area.



Everett S. Lee (1966) push and pull diagram

The + sign represents the positive factors at both the place of origin and that of destination. While, - sign represents the negative factors present at both areas. The 0 sign is an indication of neutral factors.

### The Link Between Migration and National Development: Nigeria as a Case Study

Having established that it is the developed individuals who jointly develop a nation. In a bid to establish the nexus between migration and development, it is essential to begin with the words of Tataru (2019). Tataru (2019:11) holds that since

the inception of migration, the migration phenomenon has been manifesting on a global level, with advantages and disadvantages, which represents an indisputable element of our age, and influences the social and economic life of the states. This denotes that migration influences development, and this effect can either be positive or negative. This position is also evident in the work of Rodney (1972) as the echoes that Europe underdeveloped Africa, and Africans in return developed Europe based on human and material

resources migration from Africa to Europe. Tataru (2019:11) further strengthens this view when he avers that “we live in a constantly changing world, where migrants have a significant impact on the economic, political and social agendas of sovereign states, intergovernmental agencies and civil society groups”

Bringing the notion of Push and Pull theory into play, when people in the nation that houses the push factor migrate to another nation which possess the pull factors, development is however enhanced to a certain level in the sense that it will reduce unemployment rate at the place of origin and increase economic surplus at the place of destination. Using Nigeria as a case study, several health workers are now hinged on a mentality referred to as ‘Japa’, which can be well captured as brain drain. At the slightest opportunity, most health workers desire to migrate to another nation of the world where they would be entitled to better pay and other social amenities that would enhance their lives. Using Lee's pull and push theory, a study by Eze (2023) reveals that over 3.6 million people migrated from Nigeria to another country within the space of two years due to economic hardship, student admission, among others, which has also informed Nigerian government to initiate an easy visa on arrival for businessmen who are willing or planning to invest in Nigeria as a pull factor. Ileyemi (2024) notes in the words of the Nigerian Minister for Health, Muhammad Pate, that Nigerians are left with 55,000 licensed doctors as 16,000 emigrate in five years to the UK, USA, and others, with over two hundred million Nigerians to attend to. Mr Pate further averred that “the mass exodus of doctors, health workers, tech entrepreneurs, and various professionals abandoning the country for better opportunities abroad, while the country is 'barely managing' the available ones.” (Ileyemi, 2024). This position corroborates our earlier stance that erecting buildings and putting tools into places without having equipped or developed individuals to use these tools is no development in the real sense (Motadegbe *et al.*, 2023).

However, development at the place of destination is only feasible when the migrant possesses the ability and capacity needed at the place of destination or pull area. If the migrant fails to meet the economic requirement of the pull area, such a

migrant will, on the other hand, cause nuisance or chaos to the hosting nation.

Also, the migration of skilled and intellectual people from the area of origin because of the push factor to another nation that houses the pull factors can be detrimental to the nation of origin. This is premised on the claim that it is the developed individuals who may help develop the nation. Their absence will deter the nation's development, for example, having a good health facility without an adequate number of medical personnel available will not reduce the mortality rate. The question is ‘who will take proper care of the ill ones in their nation?’ and standard health facilities without an adequate and qualified number of medical personnel would not foster development, as this scenario would lead to an increase in death rate, poverty, and inequality. The brain drains, also referred to as ‘Japa syndrome’ in Nigeria, encapsulates a negative effect for the nation's development as it makes potential leaders and entrepreneurs lose confidence and hope in their dear nation. Some of the developed nations now maintain their standard through the use of capable, skilled, and intellectual migrant based on their purchasing power. In alignment with this, Penn Wharton Budget Model (2016) notes that “immigrants are at the forefront of innovation and ingenuity in the United States, accounting for a disproportionately high share of patent filings, science and technology graduates, and senior positions at top venture capital-funded firms. In addition, the presence of immigrants often creates opportunities for less-skilled native workers to become more specialized in their work, thereby increasing their productivity.” Therefore, the movement of qualified individuals or group from Nigeria in search of economic well-being or prosperity contributes positively to the hosting nation when managed properly, and affect the home country negatively. Hence, it is essential that the Nigerian government makes her nation more homely for its citizens to foster their returns and provides reason to those who intend migrating for the same reason to stay behind.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has carefully explored the nexus between migration and national development using Nigeria as a case study. The findings of this paper align with Lee's theory of migration, or the push-pull approach, which postulates that certain incentives trigger migration. The paper concludes by highlighting the imperative need for the Nigerian government to address these push factors in a bid to retain its human capital, a key resource for attaining sustainable national development.

### Recommendation

1. Every nation should make a concerted effort, within its capacity, to promptly address the push factors driving migration. This involves not only improving infrastructure and public services but also ensuring competitive compensation for human resources to reduce the incentive to migrate.
2. National borders should be effectively secured to regulate the flow of migrants. When individuals lacking the necessary qualifications and potential enter a host country, they can contribute to social instability and public disorder. Such issues are commonly observed in developing nations, such as Nigeria.

**Author's contributions:** The first author conceptualized the concept of migration and national development. He also explored Lee's Push and Pull theory of migration. The second author worked on the data that led to the research conclusion and recommendations.

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