Chapter 11
Return, Precarity and Vulnerability in West Africa: Evidence from Nigeria

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This chapter analyses how return and reintegration programmes for irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers construct and create vulnerabilities. The chapter analyses the lived experiences of returnees in Edo state, Nigeria. It examines the experiences of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers who were returned to their places of origin through AVRR programmes or other forms of return assistance programmes. First it examines the context of return migration in Nigeria and the legal-bureaucratic construction of vulnerability in the Nigerian context. Then it proceeds to analyse the efforts of the Nigerian state in implementing return and reintegration programmes. Based on 15 in-depth interviews with returnees, civil society organisations and government officials, it examines the experiences of returnees and their perspectives of vulnerability and precarity in returning to their communities of origin. The research finds that poorly implemented return programmes, may worsen the vulnerabilities of migrants instead of promoting their integration. However, migrants may reinforce their vulnerabilities in order to benefit from perceived advantages offered by the state or international organisations. Lastly, family and community efforts help migrants cope with the vulnerabilities they are exposed to in their communities of origin.

11.1 Introduction

In 2017, the CNN documentary 'People for sale: exposing migrant slave auction in Libya was greeted with frenzy and disbelief by African and especially Nigerian leaders. Regional and continental organisations (such as the African Union – AU and the Economic Community of West African States – ECOWAS) made plans to

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dismantle trafficking and smuggling networks in Libya and their countries of origin or transit. The United Nations and the European Union (EU), working together with the African Union and African countries, including Nigeria, undertook measures to evacuate migrants from camps or detention centres in Libya. Migrants who opted to return to their countries of origin or other designated African countries were repatriated to their countries of origin or moved to other countries like Niger and Rwanda (Zanker & Jegen, 2019). African governments together with the EU and international organisations continue to provide support to migrants trapped in Libya (Amnesty International, 2020).

Although migration is a politically salient issue in Nigeria, deportation of migrants (forced return) from Europe and other African countries to Nigeria remains highly politicised (Isbell & Ojewale, 2018; Arhin-Sam, 2019). While the government is vocal on issues concerning anti-trafficking in persons and promoting remittance transfers, the discussion on returnees is greeted with mixed feelings in the public sphere (Arhin-Sam, 2019; Bisong, 2021). Return of migrants from African countries like Libya, where it is obvious that migrants have been mistreated or faced difficulty is widely discussed and accepted. But return of migrants from Europe is not met with similar enthusiasm. The reality remains that, every year, returns of Nigerian nationals from other African and European countries are conducted with the support of international/ humanitarian organisations and the Nigerian government.

Return migration happens in different ways. It may be planned, spontaneous, initiated by the migrant, instigated by state authorities through voluntary means or coercion or organised and enforced by the state authorities of their representatives (Mensah, 2016). Policy and academic discussions around return migration have shifted from a voluntary decision of migrants to go back to their countries of origin, to focus on the deportation and reintegration of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants (Cassarino, 2020). But this new narrative which emphasises 'sustainable return and reintegration' focuses on the institutional requirements while paying little attention to the outcome of return of interrupted migrant journeys on the returned migrants themselves. This focus on sustainable return and reintegration of rejected asylum seekers and migrants in an irregular situation can be directly linked to the efforts of the European Union to stem irregular migration in especially in West and North Africa enabled by its approach on externalisation (Lücke et al., 2020; Zanker et al., 2019).

This paper examines how the process of return contributes to vulnerability and continued precarity in returnees in Benin city, Edo state, Nigeria. In the context of this chapter, precarity is not synonymous with vulnerability. It extends beyond the concept of vulnerability to uncover how practices and perception of return and reintegration programmes create and replicate uncertainties in the lives of returnees. From these perspectives, precarity is both a socio-economic condition and an ontological experience (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Five areas are identified through which vulnerability and precarity of migrants prior to and after migration are examined. These are the living conditions (changes in accommodation, feeding and personal safety); Employment/ work opportunities; Family support; Indebtedness;

Participation and access in communal activities and social settings. These areas span social, economic and political aspects of migrant reintegration (Arowolo, 2000).

This study situates itself in the broader research on return and vulnerability, which argues that poorly implemented return programmes, may worsen the vulnerabilities of migrants instead of promoting their integration. Although, migrants may project and reinforce their vulnerabilities in order to benefit from perceived advantages offered by the state or international organisations. Lastly, family and community efforts help migrants cope with the vulnerabilities they are exposed to in their communities of origin. The major contribution of this paper is its exposition on the role of local institutions in the reintegration of returnees. While protection of migrants has been seen as a duty to be performed by the state (Boateng, 2010), the chapter finds that social and societal structures in the communities help returnees in coping with the vulnerabilities they are exposed to in their places of origin. Post-return life is characterised by uncertainty and migrants where possible seek to succeed either through re-migration or through exploring entrepreneurship options (Kleist, 2020). While some returnees are in a worse or similar economic situation prior to migrating, others have through support received established livelihoods for themselves. The latter category deemed as 'successful' by the larger society, the international organisation and governments, are used as posters to promote the narrative on sustainable return and reintegration.

11.2 Precarity, Vulnerability and Return Migration: Conceptual Clarifications

Butler defines precarity as the "specific ways that socio-economic and political institutions distribute the conditions of life unequally" (Butler 2011). Munck (2013) argues that the genealogy of precarity extends back to the "marginality" debates in Latin America in the 1960s, the "informality" literature that arose from research in Africa in the 1970s and the discourse of "social exclusion" that became popular in Europe (and to a lesser extent, the United States) in the 1980s. In migration research, precarity has gained prominence in the linkages between labour and citizenship (Banki, 2013; Schierup et al., 2015). In viewing precarity from the perspective of labour and citizenship, Schierup et al. focused on shrinking labour rights and informalisation of labour which may be addressed through the focus on human rights and civil society engagement (Schierup et al., 2015). However, precarity goes beyond the linkages between labour and citizenship and includes a range of experiences which may be viewed as 'ontological' (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Precarity has both a subjective and objective dimension which examines the situation of endemic and permanent uncertainty that characterises the socio-economic realities of persons (Grewal, 2021; Masquelier, 2019; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that contemporary forms of precarity – 'endemic and permanent uncertainty that characterises the socio-economic realities of persons' – are observed in the

increasing prevalence of formally regulated 'managed migration' and increasingly criminalized irregular migration. Thus, in analysing how the return of irregular migrants to their countries of origin may entrench them in informality, the discussion seeks to unpack the uncertainties created in the lives of returnees and how this contributes to continued precarity in the absence of stability.

In analysing migration trajectories, the concept of vulnerability provides a useful framework for examining how spatial and temporal changes in migration may have consequences on migrants, especially those involved with irregular migration. Vulnerability may change or evolve over the migration trajectory, and thus it is important to examine how this is expressed and reflected by the migrant. Vulnerability implies that some people, or categories of people, are more exposed to harm or risk, relative to others (IOM, 2019b). This may be physical, psychological, social, environmental (Macioce, 2018; Paasche et al., 2018). In the context of high-risk and irregular migration, many migrants find themselves in situations which they may be prone to exploitation, physical and psychological harm. From their departure and along the migration process, migrants in an irregular situation are easy targets for abuse and exploitation in addition to the other risks they face during the journey (including death). Vulnerability can be increased by factors such as lack of eligibility for services, homelessness, being trafficked or a history of poverty. In this chapter, we examine vulnerability in context of migrants' return to Nigeria.

Return migration has evolved from the migration and development focus on voluntary repatriation of third country nationals and the return of migrants at the end of their migration journeys, to a focus on return of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants. This changes in narratives and categorisation shapes the way that return is discussed (Cassarino 2004). Cassarino (2020) notes that "talking about return today differs markedly from talking about return a few decades ago". Return migration has become synonymous with deportations, removal, repatriation and even connotes a form of pressure or coercion exerted by the state and its law enforcement agents.

There is a clear analytical link between vulnerability and precarity in the context of return migration. The process of return migration often puts migrants in situations of precarity and vulnerability. For example, in the process of return, migrants are often coerced by institutional conditions such as deportation or incentives of reintegration. However, when they return, the support received from institutional actors (the sending/receiving state and international organisations) is very limited. This limited support leads to uncertain socio-economic conditions, hence manifesting as precarity. On the other hand, the precarity experienced by returned migrants makes them vulnerable to exploitation and risk of falling into the hands of smugglers. Also, precarity exposes returnee migrants to livelihood insecurity, which is also a form of vulnerability. The primary data in this chapter is used to substantiate the linkages between precarity and vulnerability and how they manifest in the lived experiences of returnee migrants.

11.3   Context of the Study

11.3.1   Trends in Migration and Return Migration in Nigeria

Nigeria is an important country of origin, transit and destination in the discussion on regional and international migration. While nationals from neighbouring countries move to Nigeria for employment and economic opportunities, Nigerians also move to other countries within and outside the region (IOM, 2021). The number of Nigerians living abroad has been increasing consistently over the years and it is estimated that about 1.3 million Nigerians reside in other countries (UNDESA, 2020). A recent survey revealed that one in three Nigerians have considered emigration (Isbell & Ojewale, 2018). In regions like Edo state, migration in search of 'greener pastures' is rooted in the society and the daily discourse of young people and their families. Most families have a migrant family member who sends remittances (NBS, 2020). Others wish to be like their neighbours and friends who receive remittances from family members abroad (Arowolo, 2000).

Increasing numbers of young people in Edo state have participated in irregular migration either through migrant networks, family pressure or as a result of human trafficking (SOTIN, 2020; Obi et al., 2020; Iwuoha, 2020). Many of these migrants have been stuck in detention centres in North Africa. In attempting to reach Europe, all the interviewees travelled through the Sahara and a North African country. Only one was successful in reaching Europe, while the rest were detained and returned from Libya.

Nigerians have been identified as one of the top five groups of migrants using the voluntary humanitarian return scheme of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in order to return from Libya (IOM, 2020). IOM reports that it supported the return of 1914 Nigerian migrants in 2019 (IOM, 2020). Most of these returnees were through the voluntary humanitarian returns from Libya and Niger to Nigeria (IOM, 2020). In the same timeframe 2287 people were returned from European countries through AVRR programmes and other assisted measures (Frontex, 2020).

Cross- Saharan migration by road is extremely dangerous. The high fatalities and risks of migrating irregularly have been documented in studies and widely publicised by international organisations, humanitarian agencies and governments. However, migrants still embark on these journeys fully aware of the dangers and the possible death that await them along the route (UNDP, 2019). Interviewees shared experiences of being robbed by state agents and militia groups, encountering corrupt officials, being exposed to violence, abuse, kidnap, rape hunger, dehydration, forced labour etc. The current migration policy in Libya and several other North African countries through which migrants from West Africa transit while seeking to gain irregular entry to Europe (such as Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) criminalises clandestine/ irregular entry, thus migrants when caught by authorities are put in jail or in detention centres (BBC, 2018; Kleist, 2020). Interviewees confirmed that one could be bailed from jail, while in a detention centre, there was no alternative except

possible deportation by international organisations or national governments. It is this deportation process that is referred to as return migration.

The emphasis on migration control by European countries as evidenced in their activities at outsourcing migration control to North African countries has resulted in a situation where migrants are trapped in inhumane conditions in detention centres in Libya (Nashed, 2020; Riedy, 2020). Their focus on control contributes to raising the risk and cost of migration, diverting migration from regular to irregular channels and diverting migrants from one country of destination to another or migrant trajectories crossing through several countries before arriving in the final country of destination. All the while exposing migrants to human rights abuses and danger along the journey (Minter, 2011).

For the European Union, the narrative of a strong and efficient return system is linked to an effective immigration system with functioning legal pathways for migration and entry of third country nationals. This is reiterated in the new pact on migration and asylum (CEC, 2020). For countries of origin, this form of forced or spontaneous return migration is contentious because of how it is perceived by the domestic population. In the Gambia for example, protests initiated by returnees contributed to destabilising an already delicate political situation in the country (Zanker & Altrogge, 2019). Forced returns also have the potential to push returnees into a situation of precarity and poverty for example the return of migrants to Nigeria, leaving some of them worse off than prior to migration (Zandonini, 2020). Furthermore, return may exacerbate inequalities already prevalent in countries of origin. It is therefore important to review the role and effect of return policies in countries of origin and how these policies together with the administrative and legal structures in countries of origin contribute to supporting or reducing migrant welfare and reintegration in their societies.

The Nigerian government with the support of international organisations and humanitarian agencies and European countries are implementing measures aimed at promoting the 'sustainable return and reintegration' of these returned migrants (Arhin-Sam, 2019). Current measures aim to provide employment opportunities and livelihood skills to returnees, promote their reintegration thorough providing psycho-social support, legal support promoting community engagement etc. Studies show that to enable returnees to achieve sustainable reintegration, activities must include, in addition to economic projects, initiatives addressing the social and the psychosocial dimensions of sustainable reintegration (Samuel Hall, 2018).

In Nigeria, projects funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) have supported the return and reintegration of returnees in partnership with the government, civil society organisations and private sector. However, there were allegations of corruption and mismanagement of funds for some development projects. For example, funds allocated to create an agricultural training programme for returnees were allegedly mismanaged (Nation news, 2019). This situation leaves returnees with limited options at achieving reintegration. Some returnees have stated that they may turn to crime or re-migrate if no assistance is provided for them on return.

Societal expectations of migrants and returnees on the other hand identify 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' returnees. Successful returnees are expected to establish

their own businesses, build homes, live lavishly based on savings from working abroad (Samuel Hall, 2018; Kleist, 2020). Unsuccessful migrants are those who are indebted and require assistance from their family members for daily living. They are often stigmatised when they seek for paid employment. They are also stigmatised based on their experiences as returnees for example female returnees are frequently referred to as sex workers. Furthermore, the mode of return determines the access to reintegration support however, it does not change the societal perception of the migrant.

Thus, returnees are often self-employed or engaged in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and petty trading sometimes in a worse off condition than prior to migration, sometimes in a better condition. However, this level of informality predisposes them to precarity. This is because of the difficulty faced by MSMEs in Nigeria. While these businesses may last long enough to be counted as successful by monitoring and evaluation requirements of International organisations, most certainly die within the first 5 years making the sustainability of these businesses an issue that is not addressed by the current measures and remigration an option for migrants. There are limited or no diaspora groups where returnees can band together for support. These are mostly informal and because of the stigma attached in some contexts, some people refuse to identify as returnees (2 interviewees in this study). Others who do so because of the economic benefits through international organisations or the government – for example, e.g. granting interviews, being used in sensitisation activities to deter migration of other young people.

11.4 Methods

This paper is based on interviews conducted in November 2020, in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Edo state is a renowned region of origin for migrants in an irregular situation and victims of trafficking to Europe (SOTIN, 2020; Obi et al., 2020). I interviewed 10 Nigerians, six males and four females between the ages of 22–30, who had returned from Libya and Europe between 2017 and 2019. Among these, nine returned from Libya and one from Italy and Switzerland. Eight returned through the support of international organisations or the Nigerian government, two returned based on their own initiative. Interviewees were recruited through their network and snow balling technique.

Five key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations and agencies working on return and reintegration of migrants in Edo State. Purposive sampling method was used to identify the main actors involved in return and reintegration in the state. These civil society organisations and government officials interviewed play a key role in return and reintegration measures in the state. The interviewees included members of the Edo state taskforce on trafficking and return. In addition, the chapter builds on research by the author on migration governance in Nigeria and more broadly, West Africa.

The fieldwork in Nigeria, was conducted by a research assistant due to the corona restrictions which prevented the author from travelling to Nigeria to carry out the field work. The interview guide was developed after extensive literature review on vulnerability, precarity and return migration. The key informant interviews were conducted based on interview guide provided by the author. Voice recordings of the interviews along with transcripts were provided to the author. The interviews were conducted in Nigerian Pidgin and English.

11.5   The Efforts of the Nigerian State in Implementing Return and Reintegration Programmes

As stated above, return of irregular migrants is perceived with mixed feelings in Nigeria. However, the 2015 National Migration Policy aims to promote a multidimensional approach to return migration. More so return and reintegration is one of the five thematic groups of the national migration governance framework.

The 2015 National Policy on Migration includes objectives related to return, readmission and reintegration of Nigerian migrants. These objectives highlight the need to aid returnees through establishing legal and social structures for their reintegration and ensuring economic support aimed at promoting self-employment and economic resilience in returnee migrants. The objectives also recognise the need to strengthen the role of the government in the return and reintegration of migrants.

At the national level, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), is responsible for the coordination of the national migration policy in collaboration with all the ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) involved in migration and development programmes in Nigeria. The national migration governance framework ensures the whole of government approach in the implementation of the national migration policy (Arhin-Sam, 2019). The agency is mandated to coordinate the activities for the protection and assistance of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons and migrants and to ensure durable integration of returnees into the Nigerian society. The lead agency of the Thematic Group on Forced Migration and Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration is the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking In Persons (NAPTIP). NAPTIP works together with NCFRMI and international organisations, CSOs and NGOs active in areas of return and reintegration. IOM and other international actors in practice play a more dominant role in the implementation of the reintegration programmes for returnees from Europe, Libya other African countries and the reintegration of internally displaced persons in the North East of the country. Government organisations provide the relevant policy framework for returns, but operations are driven by international organisations regardless of the salience of returns locally, and in support of their mandate of using funding to drive foreign agendas within domestic settings (Adam et al., 2020a, b).

At the state level, there is an increasing amount of participation from state governments on issues of migration. Some states such as Anambra state and Edo state have set up migration agencies to facilitate diaspora engagement, promote remittances and in the case of Edo state, address the issue of human trafficking, irregular and return migration which is prevalent in the state. The Edo state government has been at the forefront of establishing initiatives and programmes to address irregular migration and human trafficking within the state. In 2017, the government established the Edo State Task Force Against Human Trafficking to combat irregular migration and human trafficking, which has become endemic in the state.

The taskforce is responsible for coordinating re-integration activities of returned migrants from Edo state. It implements a welcome programme aimed at reintegrating returnees of Edo state origin including those returning from Libya or other African countries. The government has established a shelter for returnees and also partners with local NGOs to provide accommodation for returnees. The government through the taskforce brings Edo citizens from the main point of entry and facilitates their transportation back to the state. According to a member describing the activities of the taskforce, *"the governor deemed it fit that the task force should go to Lagos, we bring in every indigene that is from Edo state, from Lagos down to Benin"* (Interview, government official 1).

Another government official confirmed the efforts of the Edo State government in implementing the Edo State Migration programme for which the governor of the state has been commended thus:

> *Apart from the reintegration of the returnees, … the Governor equally went ahead to ensure that whoever is even willing that has gone to Libya or in Italy, and want to come back, it has gone beyond the ones that are stranded in Libya, so there is arrangement for the ones that are already there, you're under a bondage, or you feel you want to come back, the government will take it up, and reintegrate you into the society* (Interview, government official 2).

This involvement of the state governments in the provision of reintegration support and coordination is an important way to ensure effectiveness, improved coordination and greater involvement and monitoring of local-level reintegration actors. This is because returnee migrants are eventually going to live within the state, and programmes of state governments, if effective, are more likely to improve the quality of life of returnee migrants and reduce the risks of precarity and vulnerability.

Beyond the national and state governments, there are also international organisations, NGOs and CSOs actively involved in return migration. For example, IOM operates a Migrants Reintegration Centre in Lagos and has reintegrated some persons through skills acquisition in hair dressing, tailoring, catering and others. The centre provides shelter for returnees for a period of 90 days, as well as skill acquisition trainings and pyscho-social counselling for these returnees. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programme has been in place in Nigeria offers migrants in a regular or irregular situation who seek, or need, to return home but lack the means to do so, a viable and safe solution to their plight. The programme has facilitated the return and reintegration of more than 14,000 returnees including irregular and stranded migrants, labour migrants, Survivors of

Trafficking (SoTs), unaccompanied and separated minors from more than 20 countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (IOM, 2020).

CSOs are critical partners in addressing return migration in Nigeria. In Edo state, there is a network of NGOs working on migration known as Network of Civil society organizations against Child Trafficking, Child Abuse and Child Labour (NACTAL). Amongst others, the NGOs focus on issues such as psycho-social support for victims of trafficking, legal support and victims counselling, advocacy, report of cases to the authorities, and sensitisation. CSOs are more visible in the implementation of return and reintegration measures. While some CSOs have a role in the taskforce, there are fewer involved in the policy making processes. Although through their experience, they have a wealth of information which can feed into migration policymaking processes (Bisong, 2019).

Several CSOs have worked in collaboration with the government agencies and IOM on migration issues generally, trafficking of persons, as well as Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). CSOs emphasize their local knowledge and access, which they believe should ensure they are more involved in the formulation of strategies and in the provision of reintegration support (Interview with NGO officials 1, 2 & 3). CSOs have the potential to provide support to returnees in economic empowerment and psychosocial services, however they also require assistance in all dimensions, especially financially. According to an NGO official, *"We have trained people in 3months and we will on our own reintegrate them … if you really train somebody well, reintegration becomes easy. It's not been easy, but to God be the glory we have very wonderful sponsorship from the Swiss Embassy in Nigeria, which really helped us."* (Interview, NGO official 3). This shows that despite their best efforts, the outcomes are still far from what is desired by both national, state, international and CSO actors.

There is a clear link between all levels of institutional actors in migration management in Nigeria. This link is established within the 2015 National Migration Policy which aims to promote a multidimensional management of migration that involves different policy actors and stakeholders. While national actors are largely responsible for governing migration within the country, state-level actors are focused on managing the reintegration of returnee migrants who are indigenes of their state, while trying to curb irregular migration. On the other hand, international organisations such as IOM are focused on facilitating returnees and facilitating international norms and practices in the migration trajectory of both regular and irregular migrants in Nigeria. CSOs are mainly focused on advocacy and implementation of projects that are in line with both international and national agenda, depending on their partners. The linkages between different institutional actors in migration management creates the legal-bureaucratic contexts in which both vulnerability and precarity occurs in the lived experiences of returnee migrants in Nigeria.

11.6   Legal-Bureaucratic Construction of Vulnerability

One overarching argument in this chapter is that the interactions between different level of institutional actors constructs vulnerability. This is so because rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants who are retuned to Benin City, Edo state fall into the institutional constraints generated by the state and international / humanitarian organisations working in the sector. It is common practice for migrants to fund their journeys through the sale of personal belongings and socio-economic assets. Hence, returning back to their towns of origin without significant economic capacity, either in savings or assets gained from remittances, leaves migrants in vulnerable situations. As they need to face their debtors (especially for migrants who took loans to finance their journey), hostile or disappointed family members and face societal pressure and disapproval which may be higher in the case of female returnees. Consequently, many migrants who return to Nigeria postpone going back to their cities for days or weeks while staying in the main entry city (Lagos or Abuja). For others, support is organised by the state government or other organisations to provide transportation to their communities of origin. Thus, when such returnees are supported to travel to their states, as a result of the limited time and support provided for them at the reception centres run by IOM in Lagos, the policies of facilitating return from Lagos to Benin and the incomplete support provided by NGOs based in Benin, they are suddenly placed in a context where they have limited control of the outcomes which they experience.

Vulnerability of migrants in return changes along the migration trajectory. Whereas migrants in detention may face the risk of abuse, hunger, forced labour, rape, kidnap etc., on return, they are exposed to a different set of risks. In this study, we highlight five aspects that span socio-economic and political aspects to better understand the vulnerabilities that returnees are exposed to. From the perspective of the state and international organisations, vulnerability is viewed as a phase to pass through (Paasche et al., 2018). But this is a lived reality of the returnees who do not view their vulnerability as a phase. Furthermore, returnees respond differently to the vulnerable and precarious situations in which they find themselves. While some may be deemed successful based on their responses in line with the preconceived outcomes of the international organisations and the state, other outcomes may not be aligned with the expectations of the international organisations and the state. As government official noted

> *Yes, I can mention her name, her name is Queen, she was a returnee, then she went into fashion, she finished, luck run into her, an NGO, empowered her and at the end a shop was opened for her and other things. I send people to her for training and she is doing extremely well, and she sews both male and female* [clothes].... *Not even her alone, I have others that did training on soap making and bleach and they are now producing, and they are doing well, like Happy, Happy is doing well with her soap making and perfume too* (Interview, government official 1).

IOM defines vulnerable migrants as "are migrants who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who,

accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care (IOM, 2019b). The determinants of migrant vulnerability model used by IOM identifies five factors where migrants may be vulnerable during or after migration. These are individual factors, household / family factors, community factors and structural factors. This handbook on vulnerability is used by IOM and local NGO staff to identify the possible vulnerabilities returnees are exposed to and find solutions. However, there is no clearly objective criteria on how vulnerable returnees are identified. In addition, the complexities of vulnerability make it difficult for staff to assess and determine eligibility (Paasche et al., 2018).

The national migration policy does not clearly define vulnerability and in which contexts returnees may be in situations of vulnerability. Although the policy refers to comprehensive reintegration assistance through AVRR programmes, the focus of this assistance is on economic aspects, human rights and psychosocial support. From the perspective of the Nigerian government, return and reintegration programmes should provide returnees with training and education to promote their sustainable livelihoods and comprehensive reintegration assistance. The details of which are not spelled out should be provided through AVRR programmes and the human rights of returnees should be protected during and after return. While state officials may view and be sympathetic towards victims of trafficking, returnees are not viewed with similar empathy as they are seen to be responsible for their conditions through participating in irregular migration (Interview, government official 1).

11.7 Lived Realities of Returnees and Their Perspectives of Vulnerability and Precarity in Returning to Their Communities of Origin

The physical aspect of returning to one's community of origin may include a transition period, mostly in cities of entry, where migrants attempt to build their confidence and modify their appearance before meeting their families or communities (Kliest, 2020). The complexities surrounding return migration is more pronounced in the cases where people return with little or no resources. This is viewed as shameful and unsuccessful by the migrant themselves and the community (Kliest, 2017, 2020; Paasche et al., 2018). However, post return life evolves differently for returnees. Similar trends have been noted in return of migrants in other West African countries. Studies show that some returnees are in similar or worse social and economic conditions as prior to emigration. For other returnees, social and economic reintegration leads to better outcomes through which they create businesses and are deemed as successful in their communities. While the uncertainty of post return life may result in remigration for others (Mensah, 2016; Kleist, 2017, 2020; Zanker et al., 2019). Post return life is further complicated by failures in multi-stakeholder coordination at the institutional level which contributes to further exacerbating the uncertainty faced by returnees. In Ghana as in other West African countries,

institutional challenges to the reintegration of forcibly returned migrants are pronounced when migrants' journeys are interrupted or their return is unplanned (Kandilige & Adiku, 2020; Zanker et al., 2019; Tiemoko, 2004).

This section examines the lived reality of returnees and identifies how their experiences of return may differ based on how they returned from where they returned and the support that they received. In line with other studies, it finds that some returnees may find themselves in a worse or similar condition than prior to emigration (Kleist 2020). The chapter finds that remigration as an option is actively explored despite the known dangers en route, regardless of whether or not reintegration programmes are successfully completed by the migrants (Kandilige & Adiku, 2020). While some returnees find themselves in a better position than prior to migration, these become posters of the government and international organisations to promote reintegration dialogue. However, some other migrants project vulnerability to benefit from possible economic contributions by international organisations and the government.

Focusing on five aspects of post return conditions, the paper examines the vulnerability and precarity experienced by returnees. These five themes are discussed below from the perspective of the returnees and government and NGO officials.

11.7.1 Living Conditions (Changes in Accommodation, Feeding and Personal Safety)

Most returnees having sold their property including houses before embarking on their journeys have no accommodation on return. They may also be avoiding family members who are disappointed by their return or facing community disapproval, hence the need to find accommodation (landing spot), pending when they have stable source of livelihood support. Consequently, returnees are exposed to homelessness except they can find family or friends to accommodate them. As a result, the government in partnership with international organisations such as IOM has established shelters for returnees that provide initial accommodation assistance.

The state provides initial accommodation for returnees for a limited period, during which training activities are conducted. Psychosocial counselling and medical screening are also conducted. Afterwards, more permanent accommodation may be provided for returnees especially those with families or children left behind. But there is no systematic manner of deciding who can have access to accommodation support or for how long this accommodation is provided. Consequently, returnees may face the threat of eviction after the initial rent paid for by the government or international organisations run out (Gänsler, 2018) or may resort to family members to pay their rent. The assumption that engaging in business will provide enough resources to cover daily sustenance including paying rents may not be right in all cases. Some businesses may fail or struggle initially, leaving returnees on the verge of homelessness.

Many of the interviewees noted that they were employed or self-employed and had a normal standard of living prior to emigrating. Economic reasons were the main motivation for migrating, either to seek a better life for themselves or their family members. An interviewee noted that *"Before I go* [went] *to Libya, I was living fine, just that I was not that ok. I just have to go and make more money"* (Interview male returnee 1). Most returnees prior to migration were able to afford their own accommodation and daily expenses and had a feeling of personal safety in their communities. Restating the difficulty faced after return from Libya an interviewee noted that "*Everything is rough to me. [there is] Nothing for me."* (Interview male returnee 1). Another returnee remarked that post-return life is better than life prior to emigration. In the words of one interviewee *"Everything change. E con be like say I con dey live well than before I comot [It appears I have a better standard of living than before I emigrated]"* (Interview Female returnee 3). For others, there have been no major changes in their living conditions before or after emigrating, for these the consideration of re-migrating is an option that may be explored if not soon, in the future.

For Nigerians who decide not to emigrate, access to decent housing is equally a challenge that they face. The housing shortage in Nigeria is over 17 million units and there are over 25 million homeless people in the country (NBS, 2013). Several housing schemes introduced by the government aimed at providing affordable housing and accommodation for the citizens have not fully addressed the realities of lack of housing and the enabling legal and policy frameworks that reproduce homelessness (Anugbum & Osudike, 2019; Olarenwaju et al., 2016). Instead these schemes have been captured by political elites, resulting in more investment in luxurious accommodation, speculation and land grabbing (Olarenwaju et al., 2016). Consequently, leaving those who need accommodation in a more vulnerable situation.

In addition to the challenges with accommodation, the high level of increasing insecurity in various parts of the country contributes to a lack of feeling of safety for both returnees and those who choose not to emigrate. Intercommunal violence in many parts of the country as herder – allied armed groups, vigilantes and criminal gangs clash resulting in the death of hundreds of civilians, attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers and kidnaping for ransom in many parts of the country have contributed to the rising feeling of lack of personal safety (HRW, 2021). This heightened insecurity to which people are returns means that they are likely to be displaced again inside the country or seek for places of alternative remigration where they can find safety.

11.7.2   *Employment Opportunities/ Livelihood Support*

Given that the primary reason cited by most migration for emigrating is economic (all 10 interviewees alluded to this), the economic empowerment of returnees ranks high in the priority of the government, international organisations and third

countries providing support to return and reintegration like the EU member states. The national migration policy 2015 emphasises the need to promote training and education of returnees. Consequently, returnees are trained in different skills ranging from agriculture (farming, poultry, fishing), digital skills, movie production, hair dressing, hospitality. Training on soft skills such as time management, presentation, team building and business entrepreneurship skills are also provided. NGO and government officials noted that some returnees take the training process serious and work towards establishing successful businesses. An official noted that

> *Frankly quite a number of them, particularly those who have families, they took it quite seriously. Along the road, there is a lady that sells food, she is a returnee. She was empowered, and through that empowerment, she has been doing that business now for two years. Such, she takes it seriously. We have quite a number of them who are taking it seriously (NGO official 1).*

However, the emphasis on entrepreneurial skills does not mean that all returnees have the ability to be entrepreneurs with improved skills to develop successful business initiatives and who lack only capital and other government support. There may be some returnees who succeed as entrepreneurs but other would require further support either in accessing salaried employment or continuing their education. While the option to further their education exists, interviewees could not confirm that actual support from the government or international organisations was received. Instead they fund it out of their personal savings/ effort.

Returnee migrants may face difficulties in accessing salaried employment due to stigmatisation by employers or fellow colleagues. A recent survey reveal that employers may be less likely to higher an unsuccessful migrant. Employers may perceive the tendency to migrate as a negative trait (Samuel Hall, 2018). The labour migration policy and the youth empowerment programmes of the government do not include any specific reference to returnees but are targeted at addressing unemployment in youths in general and empowering them to create business and employment opportunities. Recent efforts funded by the European Union Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) aim to establish community projects that create employment for both returnees and the host communities. An example is the establishment of Cassava and pineapple processing factory in Edo state which will provide employment opportunities for both returnees and the host community (Odeyemi, 2020).

These programmes located in regions with high incidence of emigration are funded by international organisations in partnership with the government. They seek to address the challenge of unemployment faced by both returnees and young people in the host communities. Thus, they reduce the stigma that returnees may face in accessing employment and also provide employment for young people in the host communities with a view to discouraging emigration through irregular channels (IOM, 2019).

With a high unemployment rate of 33.30% in 2020 (NBS, 2020), employment opportunities are scarce for job seekers who choose not to emigrate and returnees also. Consequently, entrepreneurship is encouraged by the government to boost the industrial sector, create employment and utilise labour. However, the unstable

macroeconomic environment and frequent policy changes by various levels of government adversely affects the survival and growth of these SMEs (PWC, 2020). According to a study conducted by UNIDO, the average survival rate for Nigerian SMEs is 20% (Nation News, 2017). State led employment initiatives have been unable to address the challenges of unemployment, being fraught with allegations of corruption or political favouritism. The limited success of these initiatives by successive governments such as N-POWER and SURE-P have resulted in high dissatisfaction in the ability of the government to provide employment (Tochukwu, 2019). This high unemployment rate has results in economic uncertainty, relating to livelihood, for both returnees and non-migrants.

11.7.3   Family Support

The family and social networks play an important role in migrants decision making and their migration trajectory (Stark, 1991; Cassarino, 2004). They equally play an important role in the return and reintegration of migrants (Mensah 2016; Cassarino 2004). Iwuoha (2020) shows how the family environment can shape the perceptions and preferences relating to irregular migration and trafficking. She observes that poverty and unstable family upbringing are some of the driving force that propel people towards irregular migration in Edo state. Some families support the decision to emigrate because of the economic benefits which they envisage (SOTIN 2020). As there are no safety nets provided by the government, families rely on remittances from migrants for their survival. This often creates a high level of dependency on migrants and a pressure to re-migrate when migration journeys are interrupted (Mensah 2016; Kleist 2020). An NGO official observed that

> *Families don't support them [returnees], rather families try to push them to go back. Families as well in Benin, maybe the mentality or non-educated Benin parents, they seem to have this attitude or laughable character towards their children when they come back from outside the country whether Libya or however, that your mate and they brought cars and they came to build houses but you are here. So, a lot of them are stigmatized* (Interview, NGO official 1).

Returnees have often because of the rejection of their families and the 'shame' of return been pushed to commit suicide or have become addicted to illicit drugs (Molobe & Odukoya, 2021). Migration frustration, trauma, rejection are often the most common reasons for the use of illicit drugs (mostly marijuana) by an increasing number of returnees from Libyan detention centres (Molobe & Odukoya, 2021). Observing this rejection by the family a returnee noted *"But I know of people who came back, the nature by which they came back, they were not really accepted. They were regarded as what we call 'badluck'."* (Interview Male returnee 10). Unplanned returns and unsuccessful journeys are also hard on family members who have contributed to funding these journeys either through selling their property or incurring loans. In some cases, these family members may increase the pressure to re-emigrate on the returnee.

There are some migrants who do not inform their families about their decision to migrate, because they feel they would be discouraged from emigrating using irregular channels (SOTIN, 2020; Interview with returnees 4 & 5). These family members are usually educated and resident in other urban cities in Nigeria, thus they are aware of the dangers of irregular migration (Interviews with returnees and NGO officials). These family members also actively support the reintegration of returnees by reaching out to NGO and government officials to inquire about support for their returnee. Families equally organise reintegration support for their members when government support is lacking or insufficient. An interviewee noted that her family paid for their training in hair making. *"But my family support me, they put me for work as I come, so I learnt the work (Na hairstylist I learn), but no support to take open the thing [no support to open the shop]."* (Interview Female returnee 4).

For migrants who had a longer stay abroad and were sending regular remittances, family members were more eager to welcome them back, compared to others with a shorter stay and whose journeys were viewed as unsuccessful (Kleist, 2020). A returnee from Europe who was sending remittances to his family while abroad noted a different reaction and acceptance by this family. According to him "*When I came back, I was accepted. Probably the nature of which I came back. I have lived, I have spent years there and I was not doing bad. I came back and I was not looking tattered. When I came back If they tell you that I was deported, you won't believe."* (Interview Male returnee 10).

Family and social networks provide an important safety net for returnees. They help to build their confidence and self-esteem, as they seek to return to their previous lives (Iwuoha, 2020; Arowolo, 2000). When there is no supportive family response, this can be harmful to future decision-making regarding migration and emigration (Digidiki & Bhabha, 2020; Mensah, 2016). Returnees that have the support of their family member fare better in reintegration and adapting to life after returning from Libya. These families are grateful to receive their family member alive especially after returning from Libya. There are no specific government policies targeted at family members, however in practice their role and influence over migrant decisions is acknowledged. Consequently, sensitisation programmes by agencies such as NAPTIP and international organisations and local NGOs are targeted at family members. Although some returnees choose to stay with friends or fellow returnees rather than return to their family members (Digidiki & Bhabha, 2020).

Similarly, in other West African countries, the role of the family especially having a supportive family and community to return to has been acknowledged as essential to successful reintegration. Mensah (2016) while studying the conditions of returnees from Libya to Ghana observed that returnees receive varying degrees of financial and emotional support from their family and friends. However, financial support received was conditional on the financial situation of the family members and friends. Where most of them are poor, it is unlikely that they will offer financial support. Instead the emotional support from the family contributed to pressuring migrants towards re-emigration because of their dependence on remittances (Mensah, 2016).

11.7.4 Indebtedness

Many migrants and their family members borrow to fund migration journeys (SOTIN, 2020). Officials from the NGO and the government confirmed that several returnees had borrowed money to fund their journeys. *"A lot of them borrowed money from excess of 500, 600, 300,000 naira to leave. Some took money from LAPO (Microfinance Bank) to also leave. They took it on the guise that they were going to do business and they left"* (Interview NGO official 1). They cannot refund these loans on return. In some cases, police authorities have been involved in debt collection from returnees. Government and NGO officials responsible for reintegration intervene when the police are involved, in other to seek a peaceful resolution, without legal or criminal consequences. In other cases, returnees are able to set up payment plans or relocate to another state in the country to avoid debt collectors. However, this state of indebtedness exposes returnees to more abuse and exploitation by creditors or their agents. But there are no official means to address this. According to an NGO official, *"these people [returnees] will eventually leave the camp we put them, so they are still faced-out with the issue of people coming to harass them to give them the monies that they borrowed to go [fund their emigration journey]"* (Interview NGO official 1).

For some returnees, paying back creditors in addition to adjusting to their new realities is difficult to balance. As an interviewee noted, *"I borrowed part of the money to travel. As I came back, when I started working, I started paying back. When I came back people came for their money, then I now told them that gradually, I will pay 'installmentaly', they should just pardon me."* (Interviewee male 5). Others had to sell their businesses or possessions to fund their journey, and became indebted during the migration process because they had to pay ransom to kidnappers or extra funds were required for another part of the journey or to try again after a failed attempt at sea. Another interview stated that *"Somehow, partially I didn't borrow money because I had a shop then, so I sold almost everything. I was a technician, a phone technician. I have to sell most things I have in my shop to travel. When I got there, due to the challenges, we* [I0 *have to call them* [lenders]*, to borrow monies and do some other things too* (Interviewee male returnee 9).

Returnees on arrival in their countries of origin are at risk of economic, psychosocial and physical harm (Alpes & Sørensen, 2016). This is no different in Nigeria especially for returnees who are exposed to physical harm from lenders using thugs or the police to enforce the repayment of their loans. For these returnees, there are no legal alternatives and mediation between the officials at the return centres and lenders may not be respected. This leaves them in a more vulnerable situation and at the mercy of lenders who may further exploit their already difficult situation through bonded service or unfavourable repayment plans.

11.7.5 *Participation and Access in Communal Activities and Social Settings*

Overall, the role of social networks is crucial in return and reintegration. Returnees often become stigmatized and may be excluded from their network of family or friends upon arrival resulting in depression or even suicide (Alpes & Sørensen, 2016).

NGOs and civil society organisations together with international organisations provide psychosocial counselling and support or returnees. The cases of abuse, especially relating to survivors of trafficking, are reported to the authorities who conduct investigations into tracking smuggling and trafficking networks. However societal discrimination of returnees remains high especially for those that are deemed unsuccessful (Ikuteyijo, 2020). Returnees may face discrimination in seeking employment (Samuel Hall, 2018), participating in social and communal events like village meetings or religious organisations. However, there are a few examples of migrant returnee associations in Benin city although these support groups may exist informally, they are not very vocal or visible. Thus, emphasising that migrants do not want to be identified as returnees because of the stigma attached except where economic benefits may accrue to them.

Returnees recognise that they are excluded from participating in societal matters or that their level of participation may have changed due to the perception of their status as 'returnees or deportees'. Hence there is a requirement for them to be assimilated into their groups or activities. According to an NGO official *"we start by making them feel among others in the society. We start by making them feel that we are one, we don't discriminate them. If not for myself, nobody knows that these people are from this Libya returnees and all."* (Interview NGO official 2). Some female interviewees noted that they face discrimination in the larger society "*When we come newly it was not easy at all because people go say, this one don go do ashawo for Libya o, dem don go do this one, many many talk dey fro grouns. So we just need to encourage ourselves.* [when we just came back, we faced some difficulties because of what people said. They accused us of being prostitutes in Libya and other unfounded things] (Interview Female returnee 8).

NGOs provide support for social integration and are helping to change the negative social perception of returnees in their communities through sensitisation activities (e. g the activities of NACTRAL). IOM also uses returnees in its campaign against irregular migration. Here, they are useful in telling their stories in community outreaches and sensitisation programmes (Obi et al., 2020).

These experiences reveal that returnees often remain in precarious circumstances on return to their communities of origin. Efforts by the state and international organisations, do not address this question of precarity and uncertainty which returnees find themselves in. Rather, prolonged social and economic uncertainty remains part of their living conditions. Thus, undertaking precarious migration projects constitute a perceived potential livelihood or escape from this uncertainty.

It is not only returnees who find themselves in similar or worse off situations on return that choose to re-migrate. Some returnees who had passed through

reintegration programmes successfully have also re-migrated. The difference is that these returnees have the initial capital to pay for their journeys. After the monitoring period of the projects are over, these returnees liquidate their business and make attempts to emigrate, still through irregular channels. As two NGO officials noted *"a particular lady called me, we even made her an Ambassador (during the project) and she called me 2months later that she is now in Sweden. She went back."* (interview NGO official 1). "*Not one not two not three, I can give you over forty that has passed through me that have supposedly been reintegrated or rehabilitated by different organization* [who have re-migrated]*."* (Interview NGO official 3).

As a survival strategy, returnees project vulnerability on return in order to participate in reintegration support programmes offered by the government and international organisations. Some returnees have participated in several of these programmes and now use this as a source of livelihood. As noted by an NGO official, *"… that's why the returnees now feel that people are using them to make money, so they also will make money from it."* (Interview NGO official 3). Returnees perceive that they are being 'used' by the government and the international organisations, reports of corruption in government run reintegration projects have also damaged their trust in the reintegration process. Returnees participate in several training programmes run by different local and international organisations, they gather equipment from these programmes which are either sold to fund daily expenses or remigration projects. Because there is limited coordination between the organisations running these programmes, returnees can access the system in this manner. However, some officials also feel that returnees may be looking for handouts. "*So rather than taking those things and plunging it into profitable businesses, they just eat it and are look for hand-outs. I think, so to say, they are not really helping situations"*. (Interview NGO official 1).

11.8   Linking the Political Economy of Return and Reintegration with the Lived Realities of Vulnerability and Precarity Faced by Returnees

In West Africa, and in Nigeria also, the issue of returns remains highly sensitive especially for governments (SOTIN, 2020; Zanker et al., 2019; Lücke et al., 2020). While there may be some limited cooperation between West African and European governments on humanitarian returns, the cooperation on forced returns from Europe is erratic and unstable as it may undermine the domestic legitimacy of governments especially since remittances received from migrants abroad contribute significantly to the economic development of these countries (Zanker & Altrogge, 2019; Adam et al., 2020a, b). West African governments try as much as possible to distance themselves from the implementation of forced returns from Europe. As part of their sophisticated strategy of dealing with the demand for migration cooperation from European countries on return migration, state actors work hard to keep

these returns under the radar, so as not to affect their legitimacy or elections negatively (Mouthaan, 2019). For Nigerian policy makers, the investment on return is not commensurate with the domestic losses they will face politically, considering the increasingly important role that the diaspora (comprised of regular and irregular migrants) is playing in domestic elections (Bisong, 2021).

As earlier noted, return migration programmes in Nigeria are spear headed by development partners and international organisations. These programmes though aimed at assisting returning migrants and their host communities, are not effective in successfully creating alternative livelihoods for their target participants because of the underlying difficult political and economic context which is prevalent in Nigeria. This is also similar in other West African countries, where rising unemployment rates, increasing insecurity and difficult political and economic situations have prevented the successful reintegration of returnees (Mensah, 2016, Zanker et al., 2019).

The Nigerian government is currently tackling more domestically charged issues of insecurity, high unemployment and a worsening economic outlook (HRW, 2021). These issues are the priority of the government therefore, addressing return migration, which is an agenda driven by the EU is not a priority for the Nigerian government (Arhin-Sam, 2019). This explains the limited institutional resources allocated towards supporting the reintegration of returnees. A similar situation is observed in other west African states, where return migration programmes are equally driven by international organisations and do not fall within the priority of the national governments, Consequently, the inability of the government to support returnees further exacerbates their vulnerability and precarity.

More so, the institutional failure of governments in supporting return migration has been well documented and this contributes to exacerbating the uncertainty in which returnees find themselves in and their exposure to harm and lack of access to services (Tiemoko, 2004; Kandilige & Adiku 2020). As a result of this lack of interest by the government in providing a supportive reintegration system, returnees are doubtful of the socio-economic programmes provided to support Nigerians such as Sure – P and N-Power, which have also not worked. Consequently, they view the current reintegration programmes as an extension/ continuation of these failed state programmes and do not rely on their efficacy. Their perception of the support received by the Nigerian government and international organisations reveals that there is limited coordination of the reintegration support provided. While the quality of this support has improved over the years as noted by NGO officials, the uncoordinated manner in which the support is offered still makes it difficult for returnees to adequately access their support and assistance (Samuel Hall, 2018; SOTIN, 2020). This may also have to do with the less active role of the government especially at the federal level in the return of migrants (Arhin-Sam, 2019). This lack of trust of the system in combination with the unfavourable domestic economic and political conditions do not support the reintegration of returnees (Mensah 2016).

Thus, through the actions of government and institutional actors, returnees find themselves in situations endemic and permanent uncertainty, being entrenched in informality especially as it relates to their socio-economic realities. More so, this

absence of stability predisposes them to physical, emotional or verbal harm either from the lack of access of services or the exclusion faced in he society, thus heightening their vulnerability. While it is clear that this precarity situated in the broader context of the Nigerian society is also evident in non-migrants, the effects on returnees undermine the measures taken towards reintegration.

11.9   Conclusion

This article sheds light on the lived experiences of returnees in Benin city, Nigeria, showing how their return contributes to recreating vulnerabilities and precarity due to institutional lapses in the return process. The perspectives from returnees reveal that they find themselves in situations of uncertainty and unpredictability over which they lack control. More so, their inclusion into informal businesses exacerbates their precarity, as some of these businesses would not survive the difficult business environment in Nigeria. While the current return programmes enable some migrants to adjust on return, several others cannot do this without the support from their family members or communities. However, the limited coordination in providing support still makes it difficult for returnees to adequately access their support and assistance. Consequently, poorly implemented return programmes, may worsen the vulnerabilities of migrants instead of promoting their integration. However, migrants may reinforce their vulnerabilities in order to benefit from perceived advantages offered by the state or international organisations. Lastly, family and community efforts help migrants cope with the vulnerabilities they are exposed to in their communities of origin. Although returnees may be stigmatised by their family and friends, this contributes to negatively affecting their reintegration and their social and economic status.

More broadly, the current economic and political situation in Nigeria with the increasing levels of insecurity and high unemployment contribute to further worsening the condition of both returnees and non-migrants within the Nigerian society. National policies and programmes exist that may be beneficial to both migrants and non-migrants, but their lack of trust in these government processes prevent them from accessing these programmes. Although efforts aimed at addressing unemployment in host communities of returnees contributes to alleviating unemployment in these communities.

The policy implications of these findings can be widely applicable in other West African countries who are facing similar conditions in reintegrating returnees. Consequently, it is important for the government to play a more active role, beyond setting the policy frameworks in the return and reintegration process. Governments need to take a more active role in the reintegration of returnees and not the current passive role where international organisations are driving the activities. Government programmes designed to respond to the needs of returnees, which may be different from that of non-migrants should be established. More so, the government should review current policies to include the specific needs of returnees (e.g labour and employment policies). Lastly, there should be programmes aimed at equipping the

family and social networks to support returnees, current sensitisation programmes have helped reduce the number of irregular migrants, however these measures should be targeted at providing families with skills to support their returnee members to rebuild their lives.

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