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# Effective Migration Information Campaigns in Schools as A Panacea to Irregular Migration Aspiration in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Changing the narratives of migration from negative to positive is what is required to mobilize migration as a tool for development. Misinformation or lack of appropriate information is a factor that will continue to hinder the global efforts to manage what seems to be growing impact of irregular migration if it is not properly addressed. This paper proposed that effective migration information campaign (EMIC) should be part of a holistic approach to manage irregular migration. It utilizes evidence from existing literature on migration information campaign to make a case that designing and implementing an EMIC protocol that will target Nigerian students at the secondary and tertiary institutions will increase their knowledge base about regular migration and reduce irregular migration aspiration among these groups. Evidence from literature supports that developing and implementing an EMIC that is strategic, trustworthy, simple and contextualized can be the panacea to irregular migration aspirations among college students.

Keywords: information campaign, irregular, regular, migration, aspiration to migrate, students.

## Background to the study

The pragmatic efforts and commitments of various local, national and international migration agencies (governmental and Non-governmental) around the globe seemed to have yielded some positive results towards making migration a veritable tool for human resource and national/international development (Achieng, El-Fadil & Righa 2020; Fargues, et al., 2020). Collective actions by concerned and allied agencies (e.g. United Nation, International Organisation for Migration(IOM), European Union, African Union, among others) such as sponsoring the drafting of some important international conventions and committing member states to ratify and adopt these conventions as working documents, sponsoring advocacy and information campaigns for creating awareness and sensitization on cogent issues in migration are some of the strategies used in ensuring that migration is repositioned into a tool for development (Adepoju, 2015; Tjaden, Morgenstern & Laczko, 2018).

In recent years, migration issues and discourses have gradually been re-designed to include the gains that can be obtained from migration, rather than on the negative aspects of migration (IOM, 2022; 2021). Thus, in various migration fora, issues such as the roles of diaspora remittance, brain gain, brain circulation, migrants right, safe, orderly and regular migration, and migration governance in national/international development are now salient themes and are the targeted focus during planning and designing of migration policies.

Scholarly articles have iterated the inevitability of human migration through their postulations as presented in the various theories of why people migrate (de Haas, 2021). For instance, de Haas (2021) classified the various migration theories into four important perspectives (functionalist, historical-structural, symbolic interactionist, hybrid/ internal dynamics) and each of the theories in these perspectives provided some important views on why people migrate. The views of these different theories on why people migrate could be summarized to include the following: pull and push, economic, geographical, demographic, individual optimization strategy, cost-benefit calculation, power inequality, everyday experiences, perception and identity factors (de Haas, 2010; Sassan, 1991; Vertovec, 2009).

Given the above pressing factor that drive migration globally, it would not be surprising that the estimated number of international migrants as of 2021 may have exceeded 281 million (IOM, 2022). Despite all the efforts by local and international agencies to ensure that the positive attributes of migration are harnessed through advocacy and various information campaigns for safe, orderly and regular migration of people (International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD),2022; IOM, 2021;Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007), a significant percent of the people still migrate through the irregular routes and stay irregular in transits or destination countries (Spencer &Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Irregular migration is simply described as movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms, laws or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the state of origin (the sending), transit and destination countries (IOM, 2011). According to Chappell (2011) and Tapinos (2000) individual or group of individuals are regarded as irregular migrant(s) When they:

- Have entered the country of their destination illegally by avoiding migration inspection at the point of entry.
- Have entered a country on false documents such as using forged documents or visa.
- Broke the visa conditions by overstaying or working without permit.
- Are not in possession of their paper: for instance, missing/stolen/lost.
- Failed to leave after a negative asylum decision by the host country.
- Are born in a country by an irregular migrant.
- Have entered a country illegally by being smuggled into the country.
- Are trafficked into the destination country.

It might not be tenable to quote the exact index of global irregular migrants considering the continual fluctuation in migrants flow and stock (Spencer & Triandafyllidou, 2022). However, IOM (2017) suggested that about 3.3% of the world's population are migrants in different capacities, out of which about 20% (over 40 million) could be classified as irregular migrants.

One of the motivations for this article is that Nigeria apart from contributing to a good percent (e. g .UNHCR, 2017, reported that about 1.2 million Nigerians were international migrants in 2015, representing 0.7% of the population) of the international migrants, also

outnumbered other sub-Saharan African countries in contributing to irregular entries to other countries (Hovy, 2020; Ndiaye & Robin, 2010; Mosler Vidal et al., 2019). Some scholars have claimed that the incidents of irregular migration from Africa and Nigeria may have been reduced since 2015 (Achieng, El-Fadil&Righa 2020). And that most migrants from Africa and Nigeria migrate within the continent (intra-continent) or travel to the global north first through the regular route before becoming irregular through overstay (Achieng, El-Fadil & Righa 2020). What is worrisome about the Nigeria scenario is that in 2021, the migration rate in Nigeria stood at -0.29 per 1,000 population (Saua, 2022) implying that the number of people leaving Nigeria is slightly higher than that of those entering the country. Additionally, Idemudia & Boehnke (2020); Ikuteyijo (2020) have reiterated the Pew Research Centre (2018) data that Nigeria ranks high in irregular migrants to global north.

**Why should we care about the rate of aspiring irregular migrants from Nigeria?**

Migration is one of the tools for national development when it is safe, orderly and regular (IOM, 2021). However, migration made outside these basic guidelines qualified as irregular and usually have negative socio-economic and psycho-emotional consequences for the migrants, their country of origin, the transit and destination countries (Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020). Presently, irregular migrants still suffer disturbing humanitarian abuses and death at Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea route to global north (Human Right Watch, 2022; IOM, 2022) and these called for the attention and actions of stakeholders to

find ways to manage irregular migration. What is more challenging in the Nigerian situation is the fact that the majority of the population on the irregular migration routes and those who are aspiring to migrate by all means, are youths between 15 to 35 years who should be driving the nation's development (de Haas,2008; Ikuteyijo, 2020, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2020). Also, European Migration Network (2018) reported that Nigerians constitute the group with the largest irregular migrants attempting to cross into Europe through the Mediterranean Sea and among the top 9 countries detected for irregular stay in Europe.

Scholars (Fargues, et al., 2020; Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020; Olaoluwa, et al., 2019) have explored the risks from various irregular migration routes and status and some of these risks are categorised and highlighted as follows:

**Physical Risks**

- The scourge of bandits, traffickers, smugglers, Kidnappers and terrorists in the trans-Saharan route
- Navigating minefields – which are relics of the many past wars of North African countries
- The harsh geographical realities of the Sahara Desert. Sahara is the hottest and driest desert in the world
- The risk of drowning in the Mediterranean Sea.
- Risk of being raped especial for women and children.
- Force labour and slavery

- Other physical and sexual abuses for both men, women and children

**Social Risks**

There are many social risks faced by migrants who are on irregular route which impact many domains of their lives including well-being and mental health. Most of these social risks are encountered in the transit countries and destination countries.

- Discrimination due to race, religion and language
- Risk of Being Caught in Crossfire: These may include gang wars, drug wars, and civil wars amongst others when on transit.
- Political risks: These may include change of government or change of policies in the transit countries which can hinder the irregular movement and may lead to persecution and detention of irregular migrants.
- Risk of conscription: The land routes are very volatile as such the migrants on transit are sometimes captured by rebels and are forced to join the rebel movements as combatants.
- Risk of rejection: Most of the European destination countries have reviewed their policies which made it difficultfor migrants to gain landing access at European ports

**Medical Risks**

- Risk of Organ Harvesting: Evidence have shown that irregular migrants are now faced with the growing risk of being captured or tricked to trade their freedom with their vital body organs especially kidney. These organs are most times harvested without their consent and in unprofessional manner that will leave the victim with many other medical complications. More so, because of their status they cannot seek for redress.
- Unforeseen illnesses: There are many unforeseen medical emergencies that might arise on transit and the migrant might die in the process because of the nature of the route

and because they are not eligible to access medical facilities. This is even worse if there is pandemic.

- Risk of Unbeknownst Surrogacy: Among the emerging medical risk is being tricked to leave homeland with a promised of better life but ending up being used (without ones consent) for baby factory (to carry pregnancy as surrogate).




Figure 1 Irregular migration route from a southern Nigeria city (Benin city) to the global north (Taub, 2017)

These risks involved in irregular migration can be increased or reduced by some factors including:

a. The nature and quality of information and knowledge the aspiring migrants have about the routes, and entry requirements of the transit and destination countries.

b. Distance between the sending, transit, and destination countries (farther distance more risks)

c. The route through which the migrants' access or enter the transit and destination countries (see Figure 1: it is more risky to use the land/desert and sea than the air)

d. The socio-political atmosphere of the transit route (e.g., civil war, terrorist activities and criminal activities)

e. The border regime and policies of the transit and destination countries.

**How can the incidence of Irregular Migration be Managed?**

Migration is a global phenomenon that requires concerted efforts from the local, national, and international agencies, in designing/redesigning and implementing policies that will help in managing the irregular migration flow (Hahn-Schaur, 2021; IOM, 2019). Effective anti-irregular migration programmes, if implemented appropriately have the advantage of controlling/reducing the unnecessary deaths, humanitarian challenges, socio-economic losses and psycho-emotional challenges that are associated with irregular migration ( Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020; Dunsch, Tjaden & Quiviger; 2019). One of the projects that

shows the global commitment to manage migration is the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (GCM) in 2018 (GCM, 2018). Before then, there were many other United Nations conventions such as United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime , Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime , Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea, Supplementary to the UN Convention, Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Adepoju, 2015) that have direct and indirect implications for migration policy designs and irregular migration management. All these policies, compacts and conventions were designed to make migration safe, orderly and regular, thereby providing alternatives to irregular migration. One of the important gaps between these existing policies and their implementations is the communication of the policies to the appropriate targets or audience. Trauner, Cham and Caleprico (2022) opined that potential migrants seem to lack adequate, complete, and accurate information on the reality of a migration trajectory, their rights as migrants and the life and opportunities in the transit and destination countries. Similarly, scholars (Dunsch, Tjaden & Quiviger; 2019; Hahn-Schaur, 2021; Obi, Bartolini, &D'Haese, 2019; Trauner, et al., 2022) have consistently argued that the best technique to bridge the communication gaps is through effective migration information campaign (EMIC) that has the capacity of increasing people's knowledge base about the processes of migration and dangers of irregular migration.

This article utilizes evidence from existing literature on migration information campaign to make a case that designing and implementing an EMIC protocol that will target Nigerian students at the secondary and tertiary institutions will increase their knowledge base about regular migration and reduce irregular migration aspiration among these groups.

**Effective Migration Information Campaign (EMIC)**

Generally, information campaigns have become public policy instruments for shaping public behaviours to achieve some desirable outcomes (Schans, & Optekamp, 2016; Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). According to Atkin and Rice (2013) it involves purposive attempts to inform, persuade and motivate behaviour by reaching audiences through organized communication activities. In a similar way, within the migration parlance, information campaigns are designed to promote a specific behaviour or change certain perceptions regarding some migration related issues. Indeed, designing, implementing and evaluating information campaigns require high level of expertise given that information campaigns are designed to influence outcomes that are also affected by a broad set of other factors including peer influence, demographic influence, personality and socio-economic influences (Schans, & Optekamp, 2016). Migration (e.g. irregular migration) is a phenomenon that can be affected by these similar factors (NBS, 2020). Nevertheless, since early 90s information campaigns have become one of the veritable tools within the migration paraphernalia for promoting regular migration and discouraging irregular migration (Hahn-Schaur, 2021). Scholars (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021) have opined that the basic

assumptions that informed the idea of developing and implementing migration information campaign included any of the following:

a. Aspiring migrants may be lacking information on migration.

b. The idea that the information available prior to the campaign may be incomplete or inaccurate,

c. The idea that the good new information is trusted and can alter knowledge, perceptions and aspirations, which would then lead to behaviour change.

d. The nature and content of the information can deter aspiring migrants (e.g. fear appeal messages)

As a result of the anticipated desirable behavioural changes from public migration information campaign, the European Union has funded over 104 campaigns targeting irregular migration between 2015 to 2020 (European Migration Network, 2019; Pagogna, & Sakdapolrak, 2021). Although there have been some concern about the purpose and effectiveness of migration information campaigns (Hahn-Schaur, 2021), however, scholars (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021; Pécoud, 2010; Schans, & Optekamp, 2016) have indicated that migration information campaigns are designed as a migration management and a humanitarian intervention, to protect and deter aspiring irregular migrants from the risks involved in an irregular journey by influencing their behaviour and decision-making through the provision of information. Therefore, various information campaign could be designed to inform potential migrants about the humanitarian risks of irregular migration

and the harsh life conditions in the transits and destination countries, or they may centre around security related arguments or a policy strategy to dissuade aspiring irregular migrants (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021).

An Effective migration information campaign is therefore, a systematically designed instrument intended to influence migration decisions, counter disinformation, and discourage potential migrants from embarking on an irregular migration trajectory. For an effective information campaign to be credible, it should offer facts on the possibilities and advantages of regular migration, the disadvantages of irregular migration, and change perception concerning the safer methods of migration.

**How effective are Migration Information Campaigns**

A few studies have probed the effectiveness of migration information campaign in changing decisions of migrants to move by all means (irregularly) (e.g., Browne, 2015; Obi, Bartolini, & D'Haese, 2019; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021; Paramijt, 2012; Schans, & Optekamp, 2016;Tjaden&Gninafon, 2022; Tjaden, Morgenstern, & Laczko, 2018; Trauner, et al., 2022). A review of these studies revealed some lines of thoughts by scholars on evaluation of effectiveness of migration information campaign. The first group believed that a standard evaluation of the effectiveness of migration information campaigns is very difficult giving the facts that control and management of some migration and irregular migration drivers, such as poverty, conflicts, economic depression may not be possible in the course of the information campaign(Schans, & Optekamp, 2016, Trauner, et al., 2022 )

thus, such factors could confound the real impacts of the campaign. The second group of scholars opined that the difficulty of determining the exact index of irregular migration in real life and the fact that such an evaluation may require an international longitudinal study which seemed to be difficult, have limited the validity of some evaluation studies (Browne, 2015; Tjaden & Gninafon, 2022). The third group opined that the evaluation of migration information campaign should not focus on the general impact, rather it should be on changes of some specific proxies (e.g. Knowledge (awareness and information retention on migration); Perceptions (of migration); Attitudes (toward migration); Intentions (to migrate or not); or Behaviour (migrating/not migrating)) that represents the targets and objectives of developing the information campaign (Hahn-Schaur, 2021; Tjaden&Gninafon, 2022; Obi, et al., , 2019).

Trauner, et al., (2022) conducted a simple literature review of those who adopted the first and second line of thoughts and reported that information campaigns seemed to have limited impacts on the migrant's decision-making. Similarly, Pagogna & Sakdapolrak (2021) asserted that determining the impact of migration information campaigns from the studies they reviewed was difficult because some of the campaigns fail to follow an objective strategy, the right audience and most of the studies were not focused on the effectiveness of irregular migration.

Contrary to the above reviews, Tjaden & Gninafon (2022); Tjaden, Morgenstern, & Laczko (2018) in their studies in some parts of Africa reported that the results of their randomized

controlled experiment using information campaigns were successful in changing the targeted behaviour proxies of their participants such as increasing knowledge, perception, attitude towards regular migration and decreasing intended behaviour toward irregular migration. Obi et al., (2019) reported similar findings in their controlled experiment. Participants who received information campaign showed more awareness, perception and decreased intentions when compared with the controlled group.

In an important study of "migrants as messengers", Dunsch et al., (2019) also adopted proxies and experimental method to show the effectiveness of migration information campaign. The results of their study showed that the participants who received migration information campaign feel more informed, more aware of the irregular migration risks, less likely to migrate irregularly and have potential change in their migration perception and intention behaviour than the controlled group.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that migration information campaign is a panacea to irregular migration when the impact is measured using the proxy indicators. However, it is also important to iterate that the issues involved in irregular migration management are dynamic and information campaigns alone are unlikely to sort them. Therefore, information campaign must always be part of a more holistic response to migration management.

**What to consider in designing EMIC**

The systematic steps that are involved in designing, constructing, implementing, and evaluating of an effective migration information campaign are key determinants of the

reliability and validity of the instrument. The Bali Process (2014) published a comprehensive handbook that explained step by step procedures that are required in the development of EMIC.

These unique steps which are vital for designing EMIC as proposed by The Bali Process (2014) are highlighted below.

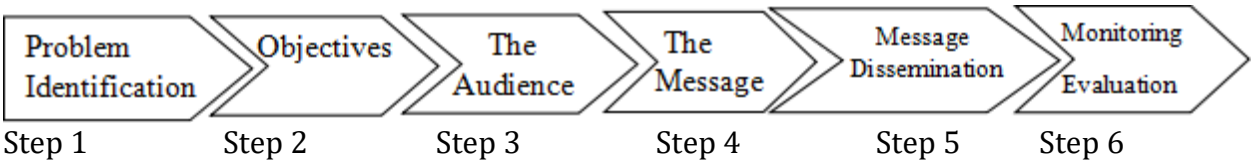


Figure 2: Steps in developing an effective migration information campaign (The Bali Process, 2014).

**Problem identification:** No single information campaign can effectively deal with all the different aspects of irregular migration. Therefore, developing a new EMIC requires a clear idea of the migration problem a particular campaign intend to address and focus on ways of developing a campaign that can address such idea without distractions. Some potential issues that could be address in information campaign according to The Bali Process (2014) may include raising awareness of the risks associated with irregular migration, influencing the decision making of family members of potential migrants, empowering migrants with information about regular migration and how they can protect themselves, encouraging people to report suspected incidents of traffickers or smugglers.

**Objectives:** Once the problems to be addressed by the information campaign have been identified the next step is to outline the objectives of the campaign. The overall objective could be raising awareness about irregular migration, shifting attitudes/beliefs/perceptions about irregular migration or changing behaviour about irregular migration. As we mentioned earlier it is more profitable to focus on one objective in a campaign. Any of the desired selected objective can be broken down into measurable and actionable goals. An effective information campaign must be **specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant and time-focused (SMART)**

**The Audience:** An important guide for determining audience is to note and understand that the 'general public' is not a target audience. The information campaign must be tailored to the specific communities or individuals because each target audience may require a different communication approach. Therefore, the targeted audience for any EMIC must be broken down into the smallest and most homogeneous group possible to ensure the campaign message is meaningful to them. The audience could be any of these targets:

i. Primary Targets: People who the campaign wants to create awareness/change their behaviour.

ii. Secondary Targets: People in a position to directly influence the decisions or actions of the primary audience.

iii. Tertiary Targets: People with more indirect, yet important decision-making roles, such as religious organizationsand community leaders.

**The Message:** This indeed is the main instrument in any EMIC and is usually develop based on the understanding of the problem, objectives and the audience. Every EMIC message must have the following characteristics: strategic, trustworthy, simple and contextualised. In other words, EMIC message must meet the specific objective, speaks directly to the target audience, should be based on the best available evidence, should be balanced and trustworthy, should be delivered in a way that will motivate the targeted audience, should be short, consistent, simple, actionable, realistic, and appropriate for the context. Usually the messaging may adopt negative emotional framing appeals (negative aspects, dangers of journey ahead, difficult circumstances of living illegally in the country of destination) or positive emotional framing (empowerment, opportunities, happiness) or a combination of both depending on the objective and audience.

**Message Dissemination:** Communicating EMIC usually involve a careful selection of the channel of communication that would be the best to reach your targeted audience effectively. Sometimes information campaign may be communicated through a single channel or mix channel. Another important aspect of dissemination would be the number or length of exposure of the audience to the message and the cost of any chosen channel. Some of the channels of communication that can be use include the following: posters, leaflets, advertisement in newspaper, radio and television commercial, community meetings, workshops and seminars, public forum held in schools, movies and comic books to educate the targeted audience, social media outlets, among others.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** This is an important aspect of EMIC development process, without which the impact, reliability and validity of the instrument cannot be ascertain. This process helps to monitor feedbacks and evaluate impact thereby helping for future adjustments in the information campaign instruments. For monitoring and evaluation to be possible, there must be measurable indicators. There are two common types of indicators:

Monitoring indicators – These indicators record the extent of the dissemination of the campaign, to who and where has been reached.

Impact indicators – These indicators assesses what the campaign has achieved in terms of raising awareness about migration, shifting attitudes/beliefs/perceptions about migration or changing behaviour about migration.

The indicators should be well-defined, quantifiable, and measurable. It should not be too many and must focus on what is most important. Before each information campaign a baseline data that is related to indicators are usually collected. Thereafter, a post campaign data is equally collected and compared with baseline data to evaluate the impact of the campaign.

**Conclusion**

Designing and implementing an effective migration information campaign requires a systematic process and cannot not be completed if the mechanisms and indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign were not factored in during the designing and

development stage. Because of the delicate nature of information campaign developing and implementing it requires a high level of expertise so that the audience can trust the message and the messenger. This is even more important when the target of the information is younger people in secondary schools or tertiary institution. Caution must be taken to ensure that the framing of the campaign is appropriate. Overly negative emotional frame campaign may repulse the audience who may know one thing or the other about migration. Thus mix-framing of positive and negative emotional appeal can bring the desired attention, or the change needed in achieving the goals of information campaign.

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