

# Macro-Level Dimensions and Push Effects on Sub-Saharan African Immigrants to the United States: 1991–2000

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*The immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans to the United States has a long history dating back to trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the flows were mainly involuntary. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, voluntary immigration gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. Using the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service data, this article examines three dimensions of recent flows of Sub-Saharan African immigrants for fiscal years 1991–2000. These are: the size of the flow, the composition and characteristics of the stream, and the emigration dynamics underlying the flow. The results show that all Sub-Saharan African countries have become zones of emigration and that increasing immigration to the U.S. is fueled by the presence of military despots and corrupt, sit-tight and ethnic-oriented political leadership that oversee economic deterioration, civil wars and population displacements. An analysis of occupational structure shows that Sub-Saharan African immigrants are of very high quality, with 44 percent being classified as professional/executive compared to 42 percent for the total world migrant stock in the U.S. The argument that remittances from immigrants rival the value of primary agricultural and mineral exports in some countries must be countered against the loss of educated and skilled labor in this era of technological innovations.*

*Keywords:* Sub-Saharan Africa, immigration, highly skilled professionals, emigration pressures, political oppression, corruption, military dictatorships, civil wars.

A cursory glance at the literature reveals the lack of attention given to immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in the United States. Indeed several writers have lamented the paucity of research focusing specifically on African immigrants to the U.S. in comparison to those from Asia and the Americas (Peil, 1995). A major reason for the relative lack of interest in this area is the small number of African immigrants in the U.S. For instance, the U. S. 2000 Census of Population shows that Africa's share of the immigrant population is a mere 2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Latin America is the leading sending region (51 percent),<sup>1</sup> followed by Asia (27 percent) and Europe (16 percent).

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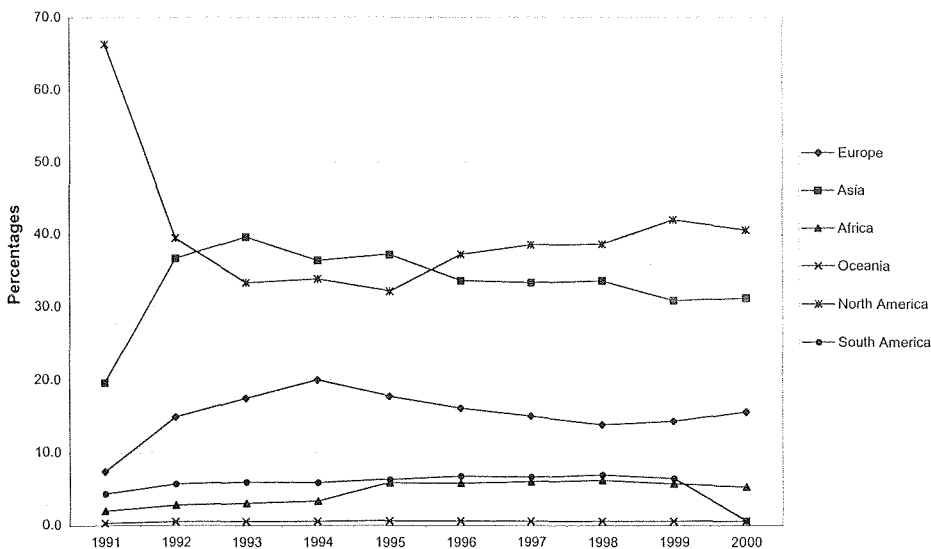
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Trends in immigration from 1991 to 2000 showing the situation of Africa in relation to other sending regions is depicted in Figure 1 which uses data from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). As can be seen in Figure 1, in 2000, Africa became an important source area, overtaking South America as a sending region, a finding that has been observed in the literature (Rumbaut, 1994). The figure shows clearly the steady increase in the flow of immigration during the period under study from 1991 to 2000.

Previous research has examined Africans as one homogeneous immigrant entity, labeled invariably as 'Africans' or 'Blacks' (Takyi, 2002; Kanya, 1997; Doodoo, 1997; Peil, 1995; Takougang, 1995).<sup>3</sup> In spite of the well-known large differences between countries of North Africa and those of SSA, some academics still continue to lump immigrants from the two sub-regions together thus confounding the real causes of emigration from the two areas of Africa. The reason for this lumping of SSA with North Africa may be due to the fact that the U.S. Census Bureau and the INS, the two main sources of immigration data, compile data on foreign-born populations for Africa as a whole without consideration for the two sub-regions. In the case of the Census Bureau, data for Africa is classified under 'Other Areas' that combines Africa, Oceania, Bermuda and Canada.

This is unfortunate because other international agencies such as the World Bank, compile statistics separately for SSA and North Africa. As well, North Africa is more often combined with Middle East. For instance, SSA is the world's poorest region; in 2000, it had a Gross National Income (GNI)<sup>4</sup> per capita of \$470, whereas that for North Africa and the Middle East was \$2,090. In that same year, agriculture accounted for 17 percent of the GDP in SSA but only 14 percent in North Africa and the Middle East (World Bank, 2002). Furthermore, in SSA, Nigeria is an oil exporting

Figure 1: Immigration to U.S. by major world regions: 1991–2000.



country but the World Bank classifies it as 'severely indebted' economy, whereas in North Africa, Libya, also an oil exporting country is classified as 'upper-middle-income' economy.

The foregoing structural differences between SSA and North Africa mean that emigration dynamics will differ between the two sub-regions. The argument could be made similarly that the size, composition and characteristics of Sub-Saharan African immigrants to the U.S. will be quite different from those from North Africa. Furthermore, the historical trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that depopulated several Sub-Saharan African countries, especially those along the West coast, that explains the presence of blacks among the U.S. population, did not equally affect North Africa. Thus Native American Blacks might serve to create links and networks, e.g., through marriages and thus attract more immigrants from SSA but not from North Africa. Unlike the situation in North Africa, some scholars have lamented with grave concern the increasing rate of emigration from SSA, where international migration flows and refugee migration involve considerable loss of highly qualified professionals and other skilled workers (*West Africa*, 27 May–2 June, 2002:20).

Previous research has been concerned with investigations of the social and economic conditions of black immigrants in comparison with other immigrant groups in the U.S. (Butcher, 1994). Other previous investigators have stressed the adjustment and assimilation of black refugees or immigrants into American society (Kamya, 1997; Doodoo, 1997). It has been noted that next to Caribbean immigrants, Africans constitute the largest flow of blacks to America (Doodoo, 1997). Missing in these discussions is the identification of who these blacks are. Are all Africans blacks? Are North Africans blacks? It must be stressed that North Africans are Arabs who do not consider themselves as blacks; they look more to the Middle East and the Arab world than to SSA for cultural, economic, social and political relations. Also traditionally the word 'black Africa' is used more often to refer to SSA.

This article attempts to contribute to the literature on recent African immigrants to the U.S. by focusing specifically on a relatively neglected dimension of the phenomenon, that is, the flow of Sub-Saharan African immigrants. The analysis will focus upon three dimensions of the immigrant flows, namely, the size, the composition and the dynamics underlying the increasing emigration from SSA. Such analysis is important for two main reasons. First, emigration from SSA is increasing in an age when migration has become a sensitive international political issue, with several developed countries including the U.S. urging control of immigration (*The Economist*, November 2, 2002). Second, it is argued rightly that nowadays emigration factors outweigh those of immigration, modern migratory flows being impelled more by demographic, socio-economic, and political-religious differences within sending countries (Bodega et al., 1995). This means that a proper understanding of the forces that impel Sub-Saharan Africans to leave their home origins is needed before migration can be factored into development policy (Appleyard, 1992) that is aimed at stemming the tide of loss of skilled and unskilled nationals. The data for the analysis comes mainly from the INS 2000 Statistical Yearbook that documents immigrants

admitted during the fiscal years between 1991 and 2000. Some supplementary data is obtained also from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the sources of data used for the study. Following that changes in trends in immigration from SSA to the U.S. are outlined, and the impact of changes in U.S. immigration legislation is then discussed. This leads to an analysis of the major dimensions of the Sub-Saharan African immigration flows, and then a discussion of the underlying factors that are seen as emigration pressures that propel current population movements. The final section contains the conclusions and some policy implications.

## DATA SOURCES

There are two sources of immigration data in the United States. First is the U.S. Bureau of the Census of the Department of Commerce that compiles data on foreign-born populations during decennial censuses. A limitation of this source of data is that Africa is categorized under 'Other Areas', a group that combines Bermuda, Canada, and Oceania. In addition to the population census data, the Census Bureau also provides detailed data on a 5 percent population sample in the form of Public Use Micro data (PUMS). PUMS data contain detailed statistics on characteristics of resident population, inclusive of U.S. foreign-born, and are not classified into major world regions and so is a useful source for immigration analysis (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1990). However, the PUMS data for the 2000 Population Census was not available when this paper was prepared. According to the Bureau of the Census, the data might be available some time in 2003 (personal communication).

The United States INS provides the second source of immigration data that is used in this study. The INS collects data on the flows of legal immigrants into the United States on a yearly basis. The data shows trends in immigration as well as characteristics of the immigrant flows for sub-regions of the world. The INS publishes the statistics in annual Statistical Yearbooks. The data for this study comes from the 2000 Statistical Yearbook. Unlike the Bureau of the Census, which compiles data for all of Africa, the INS data is tabulated for various countries that send out emigrants to the U.S. It is therefore possible to extract data for the sub-regions of Africa such as North Africa or SSA.

Since the INS statistics is compiled annually, it is useful in providing actual flow of immigrants into the U.S. However, there are important limitations of the INS data that must be pointed out. The data does not contain all the characteristics of immigrants needed for in-depth analysis. For example, the only socio-economic characteristics of immigrants collected are their occupational status. Important variables such as education and income are omitted. In the case of SSA, although the data is collected for the various countries, demographic characteristics such as age and sex are available only for Nigeria (INS, 2002). The reason for this may be due to the comparatively small number of Sub-Saharan African immigrants on country-

by-country basis and the dominance of the Nigerian flow in that stream. In spite of all the drawbacks, the INS data is a useful source, and even the only source, for the purposes of this study. It provides a picture of trends and patterns in immigrant flows into the U.S. (Figure 1).

## CHANGING MIGRATORY TRENDS

International migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa to North America has a long history, dating back to the 16th century when the flow was mainly an involuntary migration of African slaves to the United States and Latin America. After the abolishment of the slave trade in 1865 African immigrants to the United States have been mainly voluntary migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The INS records show that only small numbers of African immigrants have been admitted to the U.S. in comparison to Asians and Latin Americans. For example, for a period of one hundred and forty years from 1820 to 1960, the year in which many African countries gained political independence from their colonial masters, the number of immigrants admitted totaled only 47,519. It might be argued that the small number of immigrants was due to prevailing U.S. immigration restrictions that made it difficult to obtain immigrant visas at the time. A second reason might be that many Africans did not have the financial wherewithal to undertake the costly trip to the U.S.

A more plausible reason for the relatively few Sub-Saharan African immigrants coming into the U.S. before the 1960s is that the direction of international migration flow has traditionally been dictated by historical and cultural links with former colonial powers, Belgium, Britain, France, and Portugal. The choice of destination is now more diversified, and Sub-Saharan African emigrants can be found in several countries of the world, including Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2001; Peil, 1995). As documented elsewhere, before the 1960s, most immigrants to overseas countries were students who eventually returned to Africa and became part of the nationalist agitation for independence (Takougang, 1995).

After gaining political independence in the 1960s the economic, political and social fabrics of Sub-Saharan African countries started to plummet and, precipitously so in the 1970s and 1980s (Adepoju, 1995). As pointed out by Martin and Midgley (1999), the 1980s saw rising levels of African immigration to the U.S. Thus the dynamics of recent African emigration, including immigration to the U.S., are related to certain internal factors within African societies. According to Findley et al. (1994), in Africa, 'migration is and has been a predominant response to the cumulative destabilization of social, economic, and environmental systems'. The destabilization process begun immediately after Sub-Saharan African elites assumed political power in the 1960s, a period during which immigrant receiving countries were initiating changes to their immigration policies to attract more skilled workers. For example, in 1967 Canada introduced immigration reforms that removed national-origin restrictions and shifted

the emphasis in the allocation of visa system toward skill requirements. The United States similarly introduced certain immigration policies during this period.

## IMPACT OF U.S. IMMIGRATION LAWS

Although emigration pressures in origins are more important than destination pull factors, it is widely claimed that changes in immigration policies adopted by the U.S. have markedly influenced the size and composition of international migration flows. Some scholars argue that the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments, by abolishing the national origin quota system, resulted in an increase in the number of legal immigrants admitted to the U.S. as well as an influx of 'Third World' immigrants (Massey, 1995). The significance of the 1965 Amendments for 'Third World' immigrants is the fact that family reunification was emphasized and a higher preference given to professional-level workers. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990) note that most immigrants are sponsored by U.S. citizens as a consequence of the family reunification provisions of the immigration law. Their point gives empirical validity to the concept of family and kinship networks in migration studies. Sub-Saharan Africans use migration not only as a family survival strategy but also as a social mobility strategy of family members (Akwawua, 2001). Families sponsor particular members to undertake both internal and international migration.

In addition to the 1965 immigration law, other legislations that have influenced Sub-Saharan African immigrant flows include the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and the Immigration Act of 1990. According to the IRCA, all illegal immigrants who entered the United States before 1982 could apply to become permanent residents. The IRCA therefore explains the noticeable surge in African immigration in the 1980s, previously pointed out by Martin and Midgley (1999). The 1990 Immigration Act introduced a diversity program that required the allocation of a specified number of visas to nationals of countries that had been adversely affected by previous immigration laws. The 1990 Act therefore accounts for the finding of the 2000 U.S. Population Census that most immigrants are recent migrants; they arrived in the country after the 1990s.

## THE SIZE OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANT FLOWS

The recency of all African (i.e., North Africa and Sub-Saharan African) immigration is indicated by the fact that during the one hundred years from 1861 to 1960, the total number of Africans admitted to the U.S. was only 47,183. However, in only over two decades from 1961 to 1990 African immigrants admitted were 286,626. Whereas in the ten year period from 1991 to 2000, as many as 354,939 Africans were admitted (INS, 2002). As pointed out previously, in addition to the force of emigration pressures (that are discussed below) in the source areas of migrants, a

Table 1: African immigrants to U.S. 1991–2000 by sub-regions.

<i>Fiscal year</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>North Africa</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>%</i>
1991	36,179	8,061	22.28	28,118	77.72
1992	27,086	5,801	21.42	21,285	78.58
1993	27,783	5,602	20.16	22,181	79.84
1994	26,712	5,145	19.26	21,567	80.74
1995	42,456	8,429	18.85	34,027	80.15
1996	52,889	9,509	17.98	43,380	82.02
1997	47,791	8,441	17.66	39,350	82.34
1998	40,660	8,412	20.69	32,248	79.31
1999	36,700	8,495	23.15	28,205	76.85
2000	44,731	9,484	21.20	35,247	78.80
Total	338,256	67,895	20.07	305,608	79.93

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

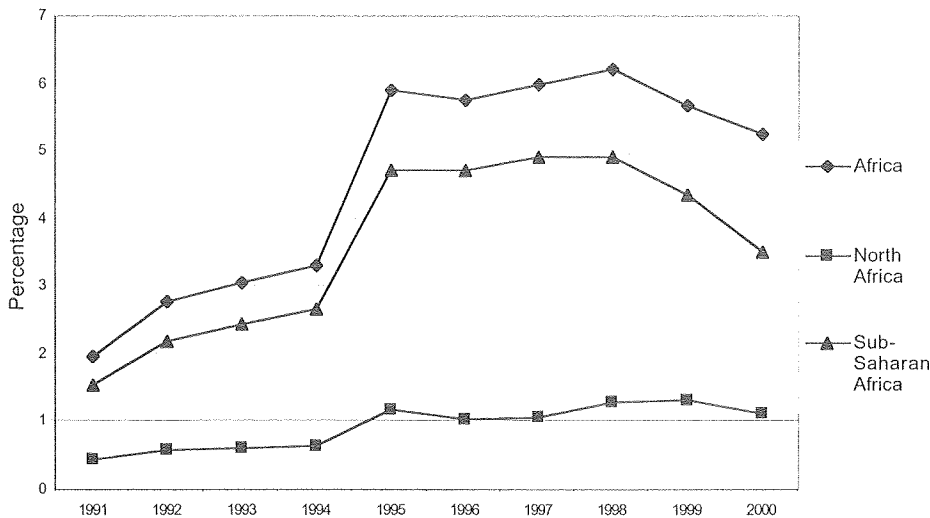
major contributory factor to this phenomenal increase in African immigration is the destination pull effect represented by changes in U.S. immigration laws of 1965, 1986 and 1990 discussed above.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN IMMIGRATION

Table 1 shows the predominance of Sub-Saharan Africans in African immigration flows to the U.S. The number of immigrants fluctuates considerably for each of the fiscal years. However, during the ten-year period under study, from 1991 to 2000, on average about 30,000 Sub-Saharan African immigrants were admitted to the U.S., accounting for 80 percent of African flow.

Table 1 shows that in 1991 SSA accounted for 77.7 percent of all African immigrants and in 1996 and 1997, 82 percent. Figure 2 shows trends and patterns in the immigrant flows. It can be seen that the share of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in the total U.S. migrant stock rose from an average of about 2.5 percent in 1994 to 5 percent in 1996, but then declined to about 4 percent at the end of the study period in 2000. The observed fluctuations might be attributable to the difficulty of obtaining immigrant visas at U.S. consulates in Sub-Saharan African countries. It is common knowledge that when U.S. immigration officials in SSA notice an increase in the number of applications for visas, they reduce the number of successful applicants. This confirms the view that although large numbers of people are willing to

Figure 2: Immigration to U.S., Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa compared: 1991–2000.



emigrate to the U.S., the immigration laws do not permit them to do so (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1990).

As pointed out previously, traditionally the direction of flow of international migration from SSA has been dictated by links with former colonial powers with few immigrants being drawn to the U.S. (Peil, 1995). That this trend has changed is revealed in Table 2, which shows that all fifty-one countries in Sub-Saharan African send immigrants to the U.S.

Although all Sub-Saharan African countries are represented in the immigrant flows to the U.S., the countries that send most immigrants are Nigeria (over 24 percent on average), Ethiopia (18 percent), Ghana (12 percent), South Africa (8 percent), Somalia (7 percent), Liberia (6 percent), and Kenya (5 percent). It is significant to note that these are some of the countries with severe and persistent emigration pressures. For example, Ethiopian famine and civil war, Liberia's brutal and savage civil war, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and the mass poverty in Nigeria in spite of the country's oil wealth, are only a few of the politico-economic underpinnings of the mass emigration of Sub-Saharan African nationals into foreign countries.

## COMPOSITION OF THE SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN IMMIGRANT FLOWS

The literature shows that an issue of concern in the U.S. is the changing composition of the 'new' immigration. Some scholars claim that because immigration laws emphasize kinship ties, the quality of recent immigrants particularly those from



Table 2: Size of Sub-Saharan African immigrant flows to the U.S. by country of birth, 1991–2000.

<i>Country of birth</i>	1991	%	1992	%	1993	%	1994	%	1995	%
Cameroon	452	1.61	236	1.11	262	1.18	305	1.41	506	1.49
Cape Verde	973	3.46	757	3.56	936	4.22	810	3.76	968	2.84
Eritrea	X	X	X	X	85	0.38	468	2.17	992	2.92
Ethiopia	5127	18.20	4602	21.60	5191	23.40	3887	18.02	5960	17.50
Ghana	3330	11.80	1867	8.77	1604	7.23	1458	6.76	3152	9.26
Kenya	1185	4.21	953	4.48	1065	4.80	1017	4.72	1419	4.17
Liberia	1292	4.59	999	4.69	1050	4.73	1762	8.17	1929	5.67
Nigeria	7912	28.10	4551	21.40	4448	20.10	3950	18.32	6818	20.00
Senegal	869	3.09	337	1.58	178	0.80	213	0.99	506	1.49
Sierra Leone	951	3.38	693	3.26	690	3.11	698	3.24	919	2.70
Somalia	458	1.63	500	2.35	1088	4.91	1737	8.05	3487	10.20
South Africa	1854	6.59	2516	11.80	2197	9.90	2144	9.94	2560	7.52
Sudan	679	2.41	675	3.17	714	3.22	651	3.02	1645	4.83
Tanzania	500	1.78	352	1.65	426	1.92	357	1.66	524	1.54
Uganda	538	1.91	437	2.05	415	1.87	391	1.81	383	1.13
Rest of Sub-Saharan Africa*	1998	7.11	1810	8.50	1832	8.26	1719	7.97	2259	6.64
Total Sub-Saharan Africa	28118	100	2128	100	2218	100	2156	100	3402	100

con't.

Table 2: Continued.

<i>Country of birth</i>	1996	%	1997	%	1998	%	1999	%	2000	%
Cameroon	803	1.85	898	2.28	691	2.14	826	2.93	865	2.45
Cape Verde	1012	2.33	920	2.34	814	2.52	909	3.22	1083	3.07
Eritrea	828	1.91	948	2.41	641	1.99	326	1.16	383	1.09
Ethiopia	6086	14.03	5904	15.00	4205	13.04	4272	15.15	4061	11.52
Ghana	6606	15.22	5105	12.97	4458	13.82	3714	13.17	4344	12.32
Kenya	1666	3.84	1387	3.52	1696	5.26	1412	5.01	2210	6.27
Liberia	2206	5.09	2216	5.63	1617	5.01	1358	4.81	1575	4.47
Nigeria	10221	23.56	7038	17.89	7746	24.02	6769	24.00	7853	22.28
Senegal	641	1.48	435	1.11	373	1.16	370	1.31	555	1.57
Sierra Leone	1918	4.42	1884	4.79	955	2.96	976	3.46	1590	4.51
Somalia	2170	5.00	4005	10.18	2629	8.15	1710	6.06	2465	6.99
South Africa	2966	6.84	2093	5.32	1904	5.90	1580	5.60	2833	8.04
Sudan	2172	5.01	2030	5.16	1161	3.60	1354	4.80	1538	4.36
Tanzania	553	1.27	399	1.01	339	1.05	316	1.12	481	1.36
Uganda	422	0.97	400	1.02	355	1.10	250	0.89	423	1.20
Rest of Sub-Saharan Africa*	3110	7.17	3688	9.37	2664	8.26	2063	7.31	2988	8.48
Total Sub-Saharan Africa	43380	100	39350	100	32248	100	28205	100	35247	100

\* Included 36 countries.

X Not applicable

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

developing countries is declining (Massey, 1995). On the other hand, evidence from the developing countries indicates continued loss of highly skilled professionals to the developed countries (*West Africa*, May 27–June 2, 2002:20). As previously pointed out, investigations of the quality of immigrants from SSA are limited by lack of data on important variables such as education and income. Previous research points to the high quality of African emigrants despite the fact that current international migration flows of Sub-Saharan Africans involve both skilled and unskilled persons (Peil, 1995). Using the 5 percent sample public use micro data for 1990, Takyi (2002) finds that 48 percent of African immigrants in the U.S. have four or more years of college education, compared to the national average of 20.3 percent.

The INS data employed in this study provides information on occupational structure of immigrants and this is used as a measure of immigrant quality. The data for fiscal year 2000 is presented in Table 3. The figures in the table confirm the finding in the literature that Sub-Saharan African immigrants are of very high quality. Forty-four percent of the immigrants are classified as professional/executive compared to 42 percent for the total world migrant stock. Another 43 percent work in administrative fields compared to 31 percent for the world. Five percent of the immigrants have jobs in the Technical and Precision occupations. The country specific figures reflect the extent of the emigration of Sub-Saharan African highly skilled professionals. The evidence from Table 3 suggests variations among countries in terms of their immigrant professionals, from a high of 78 percent for South Africa to a low of 9 percent for Somalia. In addition to South Africa, several other countries have more than the world average of 42 percent of their immigrants in the professional occupations. Such countries include Tanzania (59 percent), Nigeria and Cameroon (55 percent each), Uganda (50 percent), Sudan (47 percent), and Kenya (46 percent). All these are poor countries at low levels of technological development that desperately need the training and experience of their skilled manpower for national planning and socio-economic development.

The statistics in Table 3 are significant and confirm a recent observation regarding SSA's brain drain that 'highly qualified professionals are migrating to the West when we don't have enough of them here. It is a problem because there is a huge deficit of manpower in developing countries' (*West Africa*, May 27–June 2, 2002: 20). The process of highly skilled migration is continuing precisely in an age when developing countries are increasingly being integrated into the global economy that is being driven by technological innovations in communications, transport and data management (World Bank, 2002). Sub-Saharan African countries obviously cannot cope with the new global economy and will invariably become the bypassed continent with their most productive, skilled and qualified nationals positively selected into the technologically progressive countries of the world.

An assessment of migrant selectivity requires data on demographic characteristics such as age and sex. The INS provides such data only for Nigerian immigrants and this is employed here as representative of SSA. The age and sex distribution of Nigerian immigrants are indicated in Table 4. About 65 percent of the immigrants are

Table 3: Immigrants in U.S. by major occupation group, world, Africa, and Sub-Saharan African Countries, 2000.

<i>Region &amp; country of birth</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Professional executive</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Administrative sales/service</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Precision/ technical</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Agriculture operator</i>	<i>%</i>
All countries	189357	79545	42.0	59313	31.3	9727	5.1	40869	21.6
All Africa	13893	6177	44.5	5832	42.0	722	5.2	1162	8.4
Cameroon	231	127	55.0	82	35.5	3	1.3	19	8.2
Cape Verde	175	17	9.7	88	50.3	-	-	70	40.0
Eritrea	68	19	27.9	37	54.4	1	1.5	11	16.2
Ethiopia	988	233	23.6	642	65.0	51	5.2	62	6.3
Ghana	1568	523	33.4	709	45.2	192	12.2	144	9.2
Kenya	675	310	45.9	317	47.0	12	1.8	36	5.3
Liberia	329	110	33.4	177	53.8	8	2.4	34	10.3
Nigeria	2755	1502	54.5	1070	38.8	66	2.4	117	4.2
Sierra Leone	475	158	33.3	264	55.6	22	4.6	31	6.5
Somalia	534	46	8.6	243	45.5	46	8.6	199	37.3
South Africa	893	694	77.7	165	18.5	15	1.7	19	2.1
Sudan	557	264	47.4	253	45.4	13	2.3	27	4.8
Tanzania	158	94	59.5	53	33.5	5	3.2	6	3.8
Uganda	148	74	50.0	60	40.5	6	4.1	8	5.4
Rest of Sub- Saharan Africa*	912	435	47.7	351	38.5	68	7.5	58	6.4
Total Sub- Saharan Africa	10,466	4,606	44.0	4,511	43.1	508	4.9	841	8.0

\* Includes 36 countries.

- Represents zero.

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Table 4: Sub-Saharan African Immigrants in the U.S. in 2000, by age and sex: The example of Nigerian immigrants.

	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 5 years	182	2.3	182	2.3	364	4.6
5–14 years	415	5.3	418	5.3	833	10.6
15–24	621	7.9	638	8.1	1,262	16.1
25–64	2,573	32.8	2,483	31.6	5,062	64.5
>65	96	1.2	193	2.5	289	3.7
Unknown age	23	0.3	20	0.3	43	0.5
Unknown sex	0	0	9	0.1	0	0.0
Total	3,910	49.8	3,934	50.1	7,853	100.0

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

concentrated in the age range 25–64 years. An interesting feature of Table 4 is the close match between the sexes; that is about an equal number of male (49.8 percent) and female (50.1 percent) immigrants.

Similar to the foregoing discussion on demographic characteristics, the INS provides data on spatial distribution of Sub-Saharan African immigrants only for Nigeria. 42 percent of the immigrants reside in the Northeast (where New York alone has 14 percent). Thirty-one percent find location in the South (Texas alone has 13 percent), while 15 percent and 12 percent are located in the Midwest and the West respectively. The findings here, using the 2000 INS data, confirm evidence in previous studies that most African immigrants are found in New York, Texas, Chicago and California (Takyi, 2002; Takougang, 1995). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the spatial distribution of Nigerian immigrants is quite representative of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in general.

The factors of family, friends and kinship ties account for this spatial concentration of Sub-Saharan African immigrants. Another important factor in the choice of residential location is availability of employment opportunities in the booming cities of the New York, Texas and California. Finally, some authors have pointed to favorable racial climate as a factor that influences where immigrants from SSA decide to live (Takougang, 1995). Most Sub-Saharan African immigrants are attracted to cities where blacks are elected as mayors, e.g., Chicago, Denver and New York.

## EMIGRATION PRESSURES

The foregoing sections have revealed the increasing flows of recent Sub-Saharan African immigrants to the U.S. Even females who in traditional Sub-Saharan African

societies were less mobile than males, have now joined the international migration stream. The question is how might one explain the recent flows of Sub-Saharan African immigrants? Attention now turns to a discussion of the various factors that can be adduced to explain why Sub-Saharan African immigrants are found in the U.S. in increasingly large numbers. The discussion revolves around what has been appropriately described as emigration pressures, which operate through several 'systems' (Findley et al., 1994). The three main systems emphasized here are economic, educational, and political.

### *The Economic System*

Previous studies show that international migration is first and foremost motivated by a desire for migrants to better themselves economically (*The Economist*, November 2, 2002). In the Sub-Saharan African context, it has been argued that a compelling push factor in the decision to emigrate is the pervasive negative economic circumstances that followed political independence in the 1960s. The dominant economic system functions to service international capital by emphasizing export of primary products, mainly in agriculture and mining and import of manufactured goods. Most Sub-Saharan African economies suffered economic recession in the 1970s and early 1980s; the GDP fell to 0.4 percent and then stagnated, although population was growing at 3 percent per annum (Akwawua, 2001; Danaher, 1994). This near collapse of Sub-Saharan African economies explains the introduction of the now well known IMF and World Bank sponsored Structural Adjustment Programs in several countries.

It is unfortunate that the Structural Adjustment Programs rather than alleviating the economic problems of Sub-Saharan African countries worsened the situation. The result has been continuing economic deterioration, some countries, such as Ghana, having been declared Highly Indebted Poor Countries. Out of the 44 countries in the world that are classified as severely indebted by the World Bank, as many as 24 are in SSA (World Bank, 1999/2000). According to the United Nations an estimated 400 million persons in SSA are below the poverty line (United Nations Development Programme, 1992). Coupled with these worsening economic and harsh poverty conditions is rising unemployment, especially in the urban areas, where rural folks migrate in search of non-existent jobs. According to one estimate, the urban unemployment rate in Zambia increased to as high as 60 percent between 1985 and 1990 (Adepoju, 1995).

The lack of ingenuity on the part of Sub-Saharan African governments to solve the economic problems has resulted in overblown cities with masses of unemployed youth and attendant crime, violence and armed robbery. Most of the youth take to street trading, selling petty things from boxes of matches to bars of soap, a demonstration of the human will to survive at whatever cost. Previously, the majority of unemployed were mostly the less educated, the high school graduates and low-skilled youth. However, as Adepoju (1995) has observed, since the 1970s a noticeable trend

is the creeping up of the educational ladder of the tide of unemployment with large numbers of university graduates joining the queue of unemployed.

This economic milieu, it has been argued, is the most powerful 'emigration pressure' (*The Economist*, November 2, 2002), so powerful that 'African emigrants are found in large numbers in many industrialized countries, i.e., as taxi drivers, restaurateurs, factory workers, sportsmen, entertainers and professionals' (Peil, 1995:345). As with international migration in general, in discussing African emigration one runs into the problem of lack of empirical data to support one's analysis. For instance, it is widely known that several highly qualified Africans work overseas in jobs far below their educational qualifications, giving empirical validity to the concept of mismatch between education and employment. Herein lies a neglected component of the much-debated notion of 'brain-drain', that is, the underutilization of the potentialities of many Sub-Saharan African graduates overseas at a time when their countries lack those particular skills.

### *The Educational System*

Previous research has identified education as an important determinant of the propensity to migrate (Peil, 1995) as well as influencing the current direction of immigrant flows to the U.S., where educational opportunities abound. One explanation for directly linking education and migration in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular is that education, that is, European colonial type, results in radical modification of traditional African values, norms and beliefs as well as broadening people's horizons, increasing their aspiration levels, and providing them with certain specific skills. All of these make a person think that he or she is unfit for the traditional African rural culture where even their newly acquired skills may not be applicable. Yearning for change the educated resort to both internal and international migration. In the case of internal migration, it is argued that the policy of concentrating modern socio-economic infrastructure such as educational facilities in the cities means that those who want to avail themselves of higher education must of necessity move to the urban areas. Also those who wish to rise up the socio-economic ladder must similarly migrate to the urban centers where modern sector jobs can be obtained (Akwawua, 1996). With the collapse of the economies of SSA countries, and the destabilization of the social and economic infrastructure such as the destruction of educational institutions, immigration to overseas countries became prominent among those wanting to pursue higher education.

However, as pointed out by Peil (1995:349) emigration for higher education goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with Ghanaians and Nigerians for example, preferring British and United States universities, respectively. Most migrations for educational purposes during the pre-colonial and colonial times resulted in return migrations to SSA where the highly educated took up positions in the expanding civil service and government sector jobs and as leaders of the emerging nationalists movements.

Soon after the attainment of political independence in the 1960s, several countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya introduced measures to expand education. Free education was introduced at the secondary and tertiary levels and this created a pool of educated and skilled cadres. The type of education that these graduates received was geared towards the production of bureaucratic middle level personnel who had a preference for European lifestyle and products. Most graduates of the system therefore shunned their own culture and preferred to live in the cities, which have a disproportionate share of modern social and economic infrastructure. With such ingrained European norms, it is not surprising that as soon as the educated elite are not able to satisfy their European needs locally, they emigrate. Also the colonial educational curriculum emphasized literary skills in the arts and humanities and de-emphasized training in the sciences and vocations. Thus those wanting more technical and scientific education immigrated to the U.S., which has become a world leader in technological education.

Additionally, the onset of military dictatorships and the destabilization of the political process in the 1970s saw a rapid demise of existing local educational institutions. The closure of universities was a constant feature of military regimes such as that of Rawlings of Ghana; educational subsidies were removed and the poorly paid teachers became extremely disenchanted. Students, teachers and professors, frustrated by the unworkable and decaying educational system, joined the emigrant stream. According to some estimates, between 1975 and 1981, Ghana lost 14,000 qualified teachers, including 3,000 university graduates (Peil, 1995). Wealthy parents sent their wards to be educated abroad while other students obtained scholarships to leave. The availability of scholarships in the U.S. serves to pull immigrants. Thus the recent Sub-Saharan African immigrants are not only economic migrants but include also 'educational migrants'. It is an open secret that African politicians educate their wards in universities overseas. For example, the former military despot of Ghana, Rawlings, after closing down the country's universities for extended periods, sent his daughter to study in a British university. In a survey of African immigrants, Kanya (1997) finds that 85 percent of the sample immigrated to the U.S. for educational reasons.

Some scholars argue that emigration from SSA must be explained also by the over-production of graduates during the immediate post-independence era (Peil, 1995). The rapid expansion of the educational system was not matched by a corresponding industrial expansion. The argument therefore is that a relative surplus of highly educated people emerged that could not be absorbed by the domestic labor market and such persons sought employment overseas. This viewpoint is true for as pointed out previously, because of the deteriorating economic conditions and increasing unemployment, what one finds is a growing pool of university graduates without jobs. As Morton (1994:8) points out in the case of the Sudan 'as much as two-thirds of the country's educated force has already emigrated. Education in Sudan runs a great risk of merely providing the key to the door marked Exit'. As already pointed out, the data for this analysis shows that a large proportion (44 percent) of recent SSA immigration stream to the U.S. includes professionals and skilled personnel (Table 3).



*The Political System*

In addition to economic and educational pressures to emigrate, there is also the factor of aversion to the prevailing political instability, or fear of victimization by the government. A large number of Sub-Saharan African immigrants are refugees, political migrants or displaced persons. The period of economic collapse in the 1970s and 1980s that saw massive emigration was also a period of intense political instability in several countries of SSA. In fact soon after political independence in the 1960s, the elite and nationalists who had denounced the colonial powers for exploiting Africa, began to sow the seeds of political instability, economic exploitation and political oppression of the people (Agyeman-Dua, 1987). After independence African leaders who promised freedom and prosperity for the people, became intolerant, stubborn and brutally repressive (Ayittey, 1998). Until the 1990s no independent country was able to replace its leaders in a free and fair election. And after the 1990s most leaders (e.g., Rawlings of Ghana; Babangida of Nigeria) reluctantly resorted to multi-party politics only after the IMF, World Bank and Western donor countries insisted that aid would be given by the application of the principle of 'good governance' (World Bank, 1989).

Thus after the 1960s, Sub-Saharan Africans began to see a curtailment of their political rights and to experience absurd systems of government in the form of one party states with 'presidents for life' and military dictatorships. Abhorring political pluralism, these leaders engaged in brutal suppression of freedom of speech, arrest, detention and torture and killing of journalists and political opponents. The curtailment of personal freedoms as well as press freedoms had severe consequences for human rights violations. It became fashionable for brutal and repressive military regimes such as Abacha of Nigeria, Idi Amin of Uganda, Colonel Bokassa of Central African Republic, Rawlings of Ghana, to name a few, to destroy all the political gains of the post-independence era. Students, academics, workers and journalists branded, as radicals became the objects of repression and were either forced to go underground or to emigrate (Adepoju, 1995).

In several instances, emigration was the preferred alternative to torture and murder. For example, over 80,000 Ugandans were murdered under Idi Amin, Obote, and Okello, between 1970 and 1980 and in the process, generated mass emigration, refugee movements and population displacements (Ayittey, 1998; Adepoju, 1995). During the same period, millions of Ethiopians fled their own country because of the disappearance of political opponents, secret executions and assassinations under a totalitarian military regime. Such repressive, terror regimes existed in several other countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Somalia, Togo, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Liberia. It is therefore clear that there is a direct link between political oppression and emigration since the period of increasing immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans to the United States coincided with the period when political instability was at its apogee.

Related to the politics of repression in SSA is the lack of accountability, which promotes social vices like embezzlement and corruption. And there is no doubt that

the poor economic performance in SSA is due not only to political instability but also to mismanagement, bribery and political corruption. According to one estimate, between 1980 and 1988 SSA received \$83 billion in aid (Ayittey, 1998) yet that could not spur economic growth because much of the aid was misappropriated and siphoned off into private pockets and foreign banks. Corruption is so endemic in Sub-Saharan African countries and well known that it is unnecessary to give a chronicle of them here. A few examples will suffice. In September 1989 the Nigerian government discovered that over \$4 billion of its foreign debt was 'fraudulent and spurious' (Ayittey, 1998). Before that so-called discovery, it was publicly claimed that one politician, Omaru Dikko, stole over 2.8 billion of oil money and fled Nigeria for Britain. In 1986 the U.S. General Accounting Office found that \$16.5 million in food assistance funds had been embezzled by Liberian authorities (Ayittey, 1998).

It is generally accepted that corruption is a universal phenomenon in SSA and it is considered more serious in poor countries because the illegal wealth does not go back into internal production. Rather the military and political elite who have the means of stealing state funds, prefer to stash away their ill-gotten wealth in foreign banks or use them on wasteful imports and conspicuous consumption. All the ill-gotten wealth of the late president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (then Zaire) amounting to over \$10 billion was kept in banks in Switzerland, France and Belgium (Ayittey, 1998). It is important to stress that like all Sub-Saharan African countries, the DRC is noted for lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, portable drinking water, health care facilities, educational institutions and, most unfortunate of all, periodic outbreaks of epidemic diseases such as Ebola.

That Sub-Saharan African leaders and elite including the military keep their illegally acquired moneys in bank accounts in foreign countries is not disputed. For example, the Nigerian Omaru Dikko's \$2.8 billion is stashed in a bank in London, as are the stolen oil moneys of former Nigerian military despots and elites. In Ghana Rawlings, who came to power through the barrel of a gun, promising to uproot corruption, acquiesced and became corrupt. Most ministers of his long reign (from 1981 to 2000) engaged in open corruption causing a lamentation from a journalist: 'Almost all P/NDC top people are alleged to have put up mansions, each costing hundreds of millions of cedis (local currency in Ghana). And almost all of them ... do their shopping in North America and Europe.... More than 400 billion cedis (about \$230 million) have been dumped in a bank in Angola. The P/NDC government is conveniently keeping quiet over it' (Ayittey, 1998:151). As pointed out in Ayittey (1998, 179) one Nigerian banker guesses that Nigerian [kleptocrats] have at least \$25 billion in foreign banks and in Kenya, many people in government have the biggest accounts in foreign banks.<sup>5</sup> It has been reported by *West Africa* magazine that the present Nigerian government has retrieved \$1 billion (stashed away in foreign banks) from the family of the late brutal military despot Sani Abacha (*West Africa*, 8–14 April 2002:3). The problem here is that by singling out the late Abacha, similar military despots and other millionaire military officers have been declared untouchables.

Corruption could be said to be a major contributory factor to lack of economic progress in SSA. It also has a demoralizing effect on the masses because in these poor countries sacrifices are required for the sake of economic development, but the people cannot be expected to sacrifice when they see inefficiency and waste that are associated with political corruption. Moreover, the stolen wealth is not utilized for job creation, through for example, investment in factories or other local ventures that could stimulate development, but rather is kept in foreign countries (capital flight). It is therefore no wonder that corruption and associated embezzlement of public funds is at the root of interethnic strife and civil wars plaguing Sub-Saharan African countries. Corruption often translates into ethnic discrimination with positions of power being allocated to loyal tribes-people, where political leaders surround themselves with close family and friends, often resulting in rule by minority (which is often mediocre and inefficient) and interethnic conflicts. For example, in Uganda, Obote and his Langi minority tribe dominated both the political and military spheres at the expense of the Bantu majority. In Togo, Eyadema who seized power in a coup has held the presidency for 34 years largely because the military is composed mostly of people from his own tribe and especially from his home village (Adepoju, 1995).

During the fiscal years 1991–2000 several countries in SSA experienced civil wars, ethnic conflicts, genocides and wanton destruction of human lives all of which have compounded the unstable political system. The root causes of the civil wars and mayhem in Angola, Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Liberia, Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Togo can be traced to ethnic conflicts (Adepoju, 1995). These civil unrests confound the unstable political situation, destroy the already fragile economies and contribute to famine and starvation in some countries such as Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Sudan and more recently Zimbabwe, resulting in population displacements and huge refugee problems, estimated at 12 million in 2000 (Martin and Widgren, 2002). Since the aggregate data shows that Sub-Saharan African immigration flows to the U.S. increased during the fiscal years 1991–2000, it is reasonable to assume that the prevailing malfunctioning political system is partly to blame for the increase. It is also logical to conclude that there will be no end to the trend in immigration without a measure of political stability in those countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

In absolute terms the number of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in the U.S. is relatively small in comparison to those from major sending regions such as Asia and Latin America. It has been shown however that the rate of immigration from SSA to the U.S. is increasing and even surpassed the rate of the flow from South America in fiscal year 2000. The increasing rate is not accidental. Some of the underlying factors influencing the process are a direct result of U.S. immigration legislation, especially the 1965 Act that placed emphasis on family reunification. Already settled immigrants were able to sponsor family members to emigrate from the poverty and oppression in SSA.

In SSA, as in other developing countries, family ties are important in the migration decision-making process and, immigrants remit money to relatives in their home countries on a constant basis. Current literature on international migration and official governmental policy appear to magnify the role of remittances and to see migration as positive for sending regions. For example, the Ghana High Commissioner to the UK, Isaac Osei, recently emphasized the important role of emigration to the Ghanaian economy because according to him the volume of remittances received in the country rivals the value of exports. He claims that whereas remittances total \$400 million annually (which is almost equal to cocoa exports) the value of its major export product, gold is \$720 million (*West Africa*, May 27–June 2, 2002:20). It has been argued rightly that remittances account for considerable improvement in the incomes of rural households as well as boosting the economy of the country through increasing the purchasing power of recipients (Akwawua, 2001).

Some scholars rightly argue that further studies are needed on the effects of emigration on sending countries before conclusive statements can be made (Peil, 1995). It is however important to recognize that nations are built, and their economies developed, not by emigrants and their remittances but by immigrants. The rapid socio-economic development and technological innovations underway in countries such as Canada, Australia and especially the U.S. are cases in point. It is not expedient for Sub-Saharan African countries to use emigration as a development strategy on the assumption that it relieves population pressure or decreases unemployment problems. What is often neglected in discussions of migration impacts is that areas of outmigration or emigration are historically known to be areas of economic depression and no amount of emigration has been able to solve the depressed economic conditions. Ireland and the Philippines have sent out large numbers of emigrants and have received large amounts of remittances but compared to the countries that receive their emigrants, in particular the U.S., they are still relatively poor countries.

It is pertinent to mention that the positive view of immigration to the U.S. and emigration from SSA in general, especially the role of remittances ignores the underlying pressures on emigration. A critical question in this regard is: Why are Sub-Saharan African nationals leaving (migrants) or fleeing (refugees) their home countries at such unprecedented rate? It is a historical fact that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the massive European emigration to North America was prompted not only by economic depression in Europe but also by the lack of religious and political freedom. Similarly, the analysis in this article shows that recent immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans to the U.S. can be explained by the factors of economic decline, political oppression, lack of personal freedom, secret assassinations, corruption and unnecessary and preventable civil wars.

It was shown that the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs implemented in the 1980s and the massive infusion of foreign aid into SSA have not helped revitalize the economies of those countries. As pointed out by several scholars, Sub-Saharan African countries were better off in the 1950s, that is, during the colonial period, than they are today (Adepoju, 1995). The political leadership

does not have any solutions to the economic mess in which they are engulfed. Rather they compound the economic problems with corruption, political oppression, civil wars, population displacements and refugee crisis. At the same time, the educational institutions continue to produce graduates who eventually enter the domestic labor market, which cannot absorb them. It follows therefore that emigration will continue into the unforeseeable future.

Since emigration is not a viable option for national development, it is imperative for Sub-Saharan African countries to adopt measures to stem the tide. It must not be forgotten that emigrants represent a loss of human capital both skilled and unskilled. And SSA is noted for such a loss as exemplified by the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. With the incidence of HIV and AIDS epidemic ravaging Sub-Saharan African countries the current rate of immigration to the U.S. and other countries, if unchecked, will have serious demographic consequences. Both HIV and emigration are highly selective of population in the reproductive age groups. Since several countries have already started to overhaul the colonial educational curriculum to ensure an emphasis on vocational and technical training and the sciences, only three policy measures are suggested here.

The first is that in order to prop up the ailing economies, effort must be made to recover the billions of dollars stolen by Sub-Saharan African leaders and stashed in foreign banks. This could be done with the help of the international community, the IMF and World Bank and the United Nations Organization. It was pointed out that in the 1990s the dismantling of military dictatorships and return to constitutional rule in Ghana, for example, was due to pressure from the IMF and World Bank. A similar principle can be applied here, that is, any Sub-Saharan African government applying for foreign aid must first ensure that all monies illegally kept in foreign banks are returned and second prove also that no government functionary has stolen wealth in a foreign country. It is argued that such a policy initiative is better than the call for reparations for the slave trade because it is African leaders who have pauperized their countries and, more important, "In Nigeria, it has been estimated that the assets of Nigerians transferred into Western Europe and North America is of the order of \$120-\$160 billion" (Ayittey, 1998:304).

Second, well-placed Sub-Saharan African immigrants, especially those who are associated with international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Labor Organization and the World Bank (sadly enough SSA is not devoid of such persons), must use their good offices to impress upon the political leadership that the current political instability, civil wars, refugee crisis, and famine all of which fuel emigration are a disgrace to the sub-continent. They must understand that the resources that are wasted on struggles for power, interethnic strife, self-aggrandizement and self-perpetuation could be more productively used to generate employment opportunities or to feed starving people that are wasting away all over SSA. How can poor and powerless rural people stop military oppression and political instability that is a major cause of population displacement? The people cannot and so they resort to emigration. But how long can they continue to use

emigration as a 'household economic survival strategy' or as a 'personal upward social mobility strategy' in a world in which there is increasing agitation for control of international migration? Herein lies the negative implications of Sub-Saharan African immigration to the U.S. and other developed countries in general. The several highly placed Sub-Saharan African immigrants as well as blacks in the U.S. and in international organizations cannot (or do not want to?) influence positive changes in their bypassed sub-continent.

Finally, policies aimed at the return and re-integration of Sub-Saharan African highly educated immigrants into their home countries must tap into non-traditional areas. It is known that such policies, e.g., as pursued by the International Organization for Migration, target only new, recent graduates. This leaves out a large pool of dissatisfied graduates with mismatches between education and employment as well as those unemployed and are eager to return but do not have the resources. Support could be given to such immigrants in order to encourage them to return. Immigration to the developed countries must be seen as a double-edged sword: it is dehumanizing to the large number of unsuccessful immigrants and if they are highly qualified then their talents and skills are lost to their uncaring home governments.

## NOTES

1. A breakdown of the figures for Latin America is as follows: Central America (34.5 percent), Caribbean (9.8 percent) and South America (6.6 percent).
2. The U.S. INS compiles data for North America and South America separately.
3. For a notable exception, see Logan (1987).
4. The World Bank has replaced the GNP with the GNI (World Bank, 2002).
5. For more examples of gross corruption see Ayittey (1998;140–1, 178–82, and 197–200).

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