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The survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants in the rural areas of Limpopo Province

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Abstract. Survival interactional strategies are important for migrants towards sustainable livelihoods. The purpose of the study was to describe the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants in the selected areas of South Africa. This research was qualitative and used descriptive design to zoom into the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants. Researchers used purposive and convenient sampling techniques to sample the migrants' youth. Data was collected through telephonic individual interviews to comply with COVID-19 national regulations and analyzed thematically. The study considered research ethics and trustworthiness as a research quality criteria. Findings showed that there is a need for effective social networks, sense of togetherness, entrepreneurial network, emotional support and economic support which are not easily realized by people from foreign countries as some of the South African policies are unfavorable to immigrants. Without those mentioned above, the immigrants face challenges when engaged with established relationship with people in the same business, support from spouses and fellow countrymen, functional reciprocal referral system, credit sales of goods, and teamwork as survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the immigrants. The survival interactional strategies are not easily realized by immigrants as some of the South African Policies and realities are unfavorable to the conditions of the people from the foreign countries. Social workers are thus, required to provide awareness on human diversity, and the impacts of xenophobic attacks to the South African community. Social work practitioners should also be mandated to develop and run an awareness programme on the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants.

Keywords. survival interactional strategies, sustainable livelihoods, migrants, rural areas, entrepreneurship

Introduction

The historical perspectives of African migration patterns date to the context of colonial ties with trends of social interactional patterns due to rapid social and economic changes. After the widespread of violence and xenophobic attacks, South Africa is now clearly one of most hostile destinations in the world for African migrants (Claassen, 2017). Due xenophobic attack targeting foreigners which took place in May 2008, where people were killed. Another wave of violence and xenophobic attack occurred in April 2015, leading to an outcry across Africa and

the recall of the Nigerian ambassador. The wave of xenophobic attacks leaves migrants in fear and feel unwelcomed in the country. The foreign nationals are called with negative names by being labelled as “*Makwerekwere*” which negatively affects them to distance themselves socially and affected emotionally. As the survival strategy, migrants in the country establish a web of kinship that form an important part of their lives to address the challenges they are faced with. Accordingly, this calls for the adoption of effective survival interactional strategies (social networks, kinship, marriage, which yields into sense of togetherness and emotional support) which are crucial in the sustainable livelihood strategies of migrants.

The realization of these survival strategies results in successful entrepreneurial networks and economic support which are not easily realized by people from foreign countries as derailed by structural and socio-economic obstacles. The subsidies, social grants and Broad-Based-Black Economic Empowerment policies in some situations exclude migrants which leaves them with no choice but to resort to survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods either in established relationship with people in the same business, support from spouses and fellow countrymen, functional reciprocal referral system, credit sales of goods, and teamwork. Hlatshwayo and Wotela, (2017) contends that the survival strategies of migrants are based on social capital which enables them to discover economic opportunities and seek employment premised in social relationships. It is with no doubt that migrants use diverse procedures of social capital to achieve economic means which relies on family at the point of entry to access shelter and employment opportunities. However, the migrants access friendships and networks within the employment circles to assist the other foreign nationals to access employment and business opportunities. The motive behind undertaking this study was to describe the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants in the rural areas of Limpopo Province.

Literature review

Network theory was used to zoom into survival interactional strategies of migrants. The rational for choosing this theory was due to its ability to provide lens to look at availability of social networks and institutions at the proximity of migrants (De Haas, 2010). The network is a contemporary concept linked to the concept of social capital to enable social network amongst the migrants when in other countries (Wimalaratana, 2016). Arango (2000) defines network of migrants as a “set of interpersonal ties that connects migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home who convey information, provide financial backups, and facilitate employment opportunities and accommodation in various supportive ways”. There is a distinction between the ‘information’ and ‘social support’ value of social networks made in migration on information capital and cooperation capital made in the theoretical network literature (Jackson, 2018). The network theory argues that the utility an individual receives from a social network depends on the topological structure of the network (Blumenstock, Chi, & Tan, 2019). Information capital, which reflects the network’s ability to efficiently transmit information, is associated with expansive subnetworks where an individual is linked to many others via short network paths, whereas cooperation capital is usually motivated by repeated game models of network interaction, where interconnected networks best support social reinforcement and sanctioning (Jackson, 2018).

The social networks reduce the costs and risks of movement of people, and increase the expected net returns of migration which also positively contributed to enhance opportunities for migrants in their decision-making process. Social network amongst the migrants is a mechanism

which reproduce their own socio-cultural practices abroad, forming an extended national market, penetrating the development of migrant businesses in both origin and host countries (Wimalaratana, 2016). The network amongst the migrants includes social capital, ideas and skills to toward the advancement of sustainable livelihoods and economic development amongst the migrants. The reality is that there are various survival strategies that the migrants adopt to hedge against the risk of socio-economic shocks (Kapindu, 2011). The social network of the migrants are not an obvious and easily noticeable practice as there are challenges of discrimination and violence perpetuated to the people of foreign nations. Kapindu (2011) is of the view that a well-developed informal social protection networks largely based on nationality and kinship are in existence amongst the migrants to enhance interaction in sustaining the livelihoods. For many migrants, there are movement established by migrants in South Africa to serve as a social protection measure to protect against existing and future socio-economic risks and vulnerabilities. Even though social networks are in place to serve as a vehicle ease livelihoods in foreign countries, migrants are still subjected to various experiences, realities and challenges daily. The social protection network is a strategy used in various countries to address social exclusion directed at the migrants by the citizens of the host country. There is a need to close a gap on difficulties and challenges that renders social networks, sense of togetherness, entrepreneurial network, emotional support and economic support ineffective and not easily realized by people from foreign countries. There is no clear policy and programme rendered by social engineers such as social workers on survival interactional strategies amongst the immigrants to enhance the livelihoods of the people from foreign nations. The gap which is also to be closed is to have a policy and programme in place that focus social networks, sense of togetherness, entrepreneurial network, emotional support and economic support amongst the immigrants. Therefore, the non-existence of policy and programme spearheaded by social workers in South African to deal with unfavorable conditions amongst the migrants hinders progress on enhancing the survival interactional strategies towards sustainable livelihoods. The migrants face challenges when engaged with running spaza shops, door-to-door business, doing business on credits, doing domestic work and piece jobs as all those requires survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods.

Consequently, there is a need for having measures to protect the migrants socially, emotionally and economically as they are vulnerable to attacks by citizens through xenophobic attacks and discrimination. Mpedi (2008) states that ‘social protection embraces social security and entails “policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people’s exposure to risks, enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption/loss of income”’. Kabeer (2006) describes social protection as referring to ‘the full range of interventions undertaken by public, private and voluntary organisations and informal networks to support individuals, households and communities in their efforts to prevent, manage and overcome risks and vulnerabilities’. Sabates-Wheeler and Waite (2003) define social protection as describing all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised, with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups. The social protection seeks to provide the basic means for all people living in the country to effectively participate and advance in social and economic life, and in turn to contribute to social and economic development.

Blumenstock, *et al.*, (2019) indicate that the average migrant derives more utility from ‘interconnected’ networks that provide social support than from ‘expansive’ networks that

efficiently transmit information. Blumenstock, *et al.*, (2019) contends that the social networks amongst the migrants play a prominent role as migrants learn about opportunities and conditions in potential destinations, shapes their ability and desire to migrate as one of the most important economic decisions an individual can make. The social networks provide migrants with access to information, for instance about jobs and conditions in the destination act as a safety net for migrants by providing material or social support (Dolfin & Genicot, 2010, Munshi, 2014, Comola & Mendola, 2015). The migrant entrepreneurs become relationally, socially, and structurally embedded by often relying on bridging agents to access indigenous networks with leverage resources to create opportunities in the host country's markets (Lassalle, Johnson, Nicholson & Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2020). The entrepreneurial networks help us make sense of the framework of relationships within which specific beneficial outcomes can be achieved with strong ties provide the main foundation for the new venture, expand to a wider pool of contacts, access to diverse benefits for the venture, and entrepreneur transferring management of many strong ties to others within the business (Dodd & Keles, 2010). The immigrants experience more emotional problems with stressors associated with various contributory risk factors, instance, socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination, xenophobic attacks and to mental health problems, such as depression (Browne, Kumar, Puente-Duran, Georgiades, Leckie, & Jenkins, 2017). There are migration stressors that place immigrants at risk such as political upheaval, exposure to violence, and poverty which requires migrants to have emotional support measures to be in place to enhance their livelihoods.

Research Methodology

This research was qualitative design to zoom into the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants. The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to present in-depth explanations of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The research approach utilized becomes increasingly recognized and valued, as it is imperative that it is conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results of the study. The approach was accepted as trustworthy to demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The descriptive research design in this study was used to assist researchers to describe verbal narratives and variables of interest derived from interviews (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013; Bothma, Greef, Mulaudzi, & Wright, 2010). Babbie, *et al.*, (2013) state that a study population is the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalised. The population of this study comprised of migrants in the selected Provinces of South Africa. The study used the purposive sampling method which helped the researchers to use his judgement regarding the characteristics of the representative sample with subjective considerations of the researcher (Bless, *et al.*, 2013). The convenient sampling technique was also used where only participants who were available and ready to participate formed part of the study (Gray, 2009). The researchers opted for telephonic individual interviews as a method of data collection. Data analysis was conducted thematically to make sense of the views shared by migrant youth by following the process of Creswell (2009), such as to organise and prepare data, develop a general sense of the data, code the data, describe and identify themes, represent findings, and interpret data.

Thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs by providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King,

2004). Braun and Clarke (2006); and King (2004) indicated that thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. Thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report (King, 2004). The study was undertaken by considering the research ethics. The quality criteria utilized was trustworthiness to enable researchers to persuade readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Nowell, *et al.*, 2017). The use of trustworthiness looked at how the findings of the study are to be credible, transferred, confirmed and dependable. Credibility in this study was used to determine and addresses the fit between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of perceptions by making interpretation of findings (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Transferability enabled the researchers to generalize of results descriptions to transfer knowledge through publishing. While for dependability, researchers ensured the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). As for confirmability, the researchers established interpretations and findings by demonstrating how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The survival interactional strategies are not well supported by intervention programmes of different disciplines including social work in the South African context to promote sustainable livelihoods of the migrants. The immigrants are not well specifically incorporated in the South African Welfare Policies on survival interactional strategies that enhance sustainable livelihoods. In this regards, the migrants are isolated, easily manipulated and that the socio-economic realities are unfavorable to the conditions of the people from the foreign countries due to unclear policies as well as improper management of their affairs in the country.

Findings

The core findings of the study comprise the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants in the selected areas of South Africa. The purpose of the study materialized through identifying the nature of social interaction patterns that enhance the survival means of migrants; assessing how entrepreneurial network increase sustainable economic viability of migrants; and to determine how social networks provides emotional support amongst the migrants. In presenting the study findings, social networks, sense of togetherness, entrepreneurial network, emotional support and economic support are embedded within the themes such as established relationship with people in the same business, support from spouses and fellow countrymen, functional reciprocal referral system, credit sales of goods, and teamwork as survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the immigrants. The following five themes were presented in the findings of the study:

Theme 1: Established relationship with people in the same business

Migrants' youth leave their place of origin for better life in South Africa. Given scarcity of jobs in South Africa, migrants find themselves in shambles as they cannot secure decent jobs. In response to that, they find themselves participating in illegal activities as to sustain their livelihood. In light of that, in this study it emerged that migrants' youth resolve to illegal mining for their livelihood. The migrants who are engaged in illegal mining have established a relationship with people in the illegal same business as a way of maintaining confidentiality and privacy in the web of illegal mining connections of business dealings. One of the participant echoed that:

"I do illegal mining to survive and support myself with my fellow next of kin"

In corroboration, another participant stated that:

“The means to survive requires a sense of network for the illegal mining products to get a deal within our chain or web of dealership, be it with South African citizens or other migrants”

Social survival strategies are premised on relations anchored around ethnicity, culture, nationality, and language as social capital is used to enable to create a link that allow people to discover opportunities as well as employment based in social relationships with other migrants (Hlatshwayo & Wotela, 2018). There is no doubt that foreign nationals utilize different forms of social capital to achieve different means to sustain themselves in other countries. The migrants treat each other as next of kin to survive and support each other to create a web of dealership in enhancing opportunities, be it legal or illegal endeavors.

Theme 2: Support from spouses and fellow countrymen

Migrants in sustaining their livelihoods, get support from spouses and fellow countrymen through enhancing survival interactional strategies. The migrants run businesses in townships and rural areas. In running businesses, the migrants’ spouses are in support to enhance survival interactional strategies and sustainable livelihoods. There are social networks and sense of togetherness amongst the migrants as there are migrants responsible for supplying all the shops with stock. The migrants subjected to criminal activities are given emotional, social and economic support by fellow migrants. One of the participant indicated that:

“I run a Spaza shop with my spouse from my own country in which our marital agreement is to work on shifts to make sure that the spaza shop continues operating even when one is not in the shop”

The other participant in collaborating the said above indicated that:

“In Migrants web of business network of running shops, there are other migrants who are logistically responsible for supplying migrants’ shops with stock by driving bakkies to deliver to the local respective shops”

Another participant outlined that:

“In the midst of running shops, migrants sometimes come across problems such as robbery and theft that requires emotional support from fellow migrants.”

In collaborating support amongst the migrants, one of the participant said:

“Migrants give each other financial support to cover the loss suffered by a fellow migrant who was robbed”

Migration occurs within a migration system in terms of how people are linked by economic, and social factors of migration flows (Ikuteyijo, 2020). The conditions generating movement are understood as the dynamics of relations between two or more people, rather than a set of objective indicators. Ikuteyijo, (2020) contends that the social networks include both social as well as symbolic ties which could either be strong or weak in which the contents of such ties include transaction obligations and reciprocity. It also entails the control of information among the group as well as access to the resources of others (Brown & Bean, 2006). Migrants mostly marry spouses of their own countries to enhance survival interactional strategies to strengthen network by doing business together in other countries to sustain their families. The social and economic support happens in different contexts amongst the migrants to survive which involves

a chain of obligations such as transport logistics, crossing the border, business operations, emotional support and financial support scheme in times of desperation.

Theme 3: Functional reciprocal referral system

The migrants in business operations have a reciprocal referral system in place as a survival interactional strategy to enhance sustainable livelihoods. There are migrants moving around the rural communities to sell different home-made products. In such businesses, a sense of social network with fellow migrants is a business model attached with functional reciprocal referral system. One of the participant indicated that:

"I survive with moving around the rural communities selling home/local made sofa and meal trays which requires a sense of social network with the fellow migrants by making referrals to each other when our customers need products that we don't sell. For instance, if some customers want to buy flowers, we must refer them to the fellow migrant selling flowers to deliver to the customers"

Oyeani (2000) provides that the immigrants use a spider-web doctrine which enables them to keep money in the nest of migrants as a means of network to enhance their economic endeavors. Therefore, migrants keep business within themselves through social network to assist each other by making referrals. This on the other hand, means that migrants buy from each other as a way of helping each other to survive.

Theme 4: Credit sales of goods

Due to poverty and scarcity of financial resources people in local communities' resort to credits to sustain families. In most of the families in rural areas there is in no enough budget to make cash purchases. Therefore, this affects local businesses in making cash transactions from the local customers which ends with migrants making credit sales. The migrants make credit sales of goods without interests when payments take place by the local customers which shows a sense of togetherness with the customers. One of the participants indicated that:

"I am sometimes forced to sell products of my spaza on credit to survive as my local customers ask for such favours where some pays and others do not pay".

In collaboration, the other participant outlined that:

"I mostly go around the nearby rural communities to sell my table products on credit and collect the money on agreed dates with customers where payment agreements or deadlines are not complied with sometimes"

Credit sales enables customers to a sale in which the amount owed will be paid later in which purchases made by customers who do not render payment in full, in cash, at the time of purchase. Section 1 of the National Credit Act 34 of 2005 as a deferral of payment of money owed to a person, or a promise to defer such a payment; promise to advance or pay money to or at the direction of another person. The Act is applicable to all citizens who lives in South Africa including the migrants which might have positive or negative impacts in conducting business on credits due to factors raised in this statute, especially the registration of credit firm or business.

Theme 5: Teamwork

Migrants resort to teamwork as a way of a survival interactional strategy. The teams formed to work with fellow migrants promote the sense of togetherness amongst the migrants in

undertaking duties in various settings. In enhancing the social network system amongst the migrants' teamwork is one of the factors enhancing survival interactional strategies in other countries. One participant indicated that:

"I look after cattle/cows for seven families to survive in which each family pay its price depending on the size or number of their livestock, which more convenient for me to merge the livestock to make more money to survive. I do this with my fellow migrant who have his livestock from different families which requires a sense of togetherness as migrants to build the relationship"

The reliance on family or brotherhood is the point of entry to access shelter and employment opportunities whereas people from foreign countries access friendships and networks within the employment circles to access other employment opportunities for migrants (Hlatshwayo & Wotela, 2018). The migrants treat each other as brothers or sisters in other countries to deal with negative utterances directed towards them by the citizens of the country. The roving instinct, in which is intrinsic to human nature is the need to search for food, pasture and resources, but also to conquer and possess (King, 2012).

Discussion

The social networks, sense of togetherness, entrepreneurial network, emotional support and economic support are important factors that serve as survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the immigrants. The social networks play a vital role for young migrants to learn about opportunities and conditions in potential destinations, be it at home or host countries, as the structure of social networks shape migrants ability and desire to leave home to other countries (Blumenstock, *et al.*, 2019). Many migrants moving to South Africa is a social protection measure to protect against existing or future socio-economic risks and vulnerabilities in their native state (Kapindu, 2011). Migrants establish relationships with people in the same business in foreign countries. In foreign countries migrants get support from spouses and fellow countrymen as a way of sustain livelihoods through survival interactional strategies. Migrants respond strongly to the interlinkages of their friend and kinship networks that consistently drawn to networks that are interconnected and embedded as well as consistent with risk sharing and favor exchange play an important role in the migration decision (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2016, Morten, 2019). The functional reciprocal referral system to fellow migrant youth is in place in the web of connections amongst the migrants in host countries.

The migrants in local communities conduct credit sales of goods, and form teams as a survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods. The prevalence of extreme poverty in most African countries functions as a major push factor for youth migration (Ikuteyijo, 2020). In the interests of sustainable livelihoods migrants are subjected to unfavourable conditions of violence, isolation and xenophobic attacks which push immigrants to have survival interactional strategies as a measure to address challenges in foreign countries. Therefore, due to high rate of unemployment in African countries citizens migrate to other countries to seek for economic opportunities. In 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2016) revealed that the overall unemployment rate had risen to 13.9%, with the youth unemployment rate having risen to 25% from 24% in 2015 which have led to an increasing number of youths in certain categories leaving Nigeria for other countries perceived to hold greater promise. Migration requires economic support in an endeavor to settle in foreign countries that serve as a survival interactional strategy toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the immigrants. There is a need for economic support preparation before going to and when in

foreign countries, be it from migrant youth parents and from fellow migrants already settled in a specific host country. The economic support as one of the aspects of survival interactional strategies amongst migrant youth requires network to effectively sustain migrants' livelihood in foreign countries.

Limitations and study way forward

This study does not cover all problematic aspects of the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants. The limitations of the study are based on the premise of the gaps towards a comprehensive policy framework in social work that covers survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants. There is also a gap of a developed social work intervention model on addressing the challenges attached to the survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants in South Africa. The study recommends that a social welfare policy and social work intervention model should be developed on survival interactional strategies toward sustainable livelihoods amongst the migrants to respond to the issues faced by people from foreign countries in South Africa. Therefore, research is inquisitive in such a way that specifically the arguments raised in this study are not comprehensive to cover all facets of migration in general as there are different contexts in which migration manifests.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that migrants utilize different forms of survival interactional strategies such as social networks, emotional support, kinship, sense of togetherness and economic support to sustain themselves in other countries. The social and economic support happens in different contexts amongst the migrants to survive which involves a chain of obligations such as transport logistics, crossing the border, business operations, emotional support and financial support scheme in times of desperation. Thus, migrants keep business within themselves through social network to assist each other by making business referrals and buy from each other as a way of helping each other to survive.

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