

# Measuring plights of migrant Tuareg groups in Kano city, Nigeria

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## **Abstract:**

Impacts of climate change such as famine, poverty and other social conflicts in the West African arid and hyper-arid regions propel trans-border migration of Tuareg people to Kano. This paper identifies and explains the patterns migration and associated vulnerabilities of the migrant Tuareg community in respect of human rights, violence, healthcare, poverty, literacy etc. The methods adopted for data generation included field observations, FGD, personal communications and interviews based on purposive sampling technique. The conclusions of the paper portray the status of Tuareg migrant community in Kano as being short of attaining the MDGs. The paper also established that the age-long drought adaptation strategies of the Tuareg people was upset via the proliferation of colonial policies that weakened the Trans-Saharan trade which used to sustain the delicacy of the region. It is recommended that the Trans-Saharan trade and a tailor-made disaster response policy be considered for the region. Key Words: - Kano; Tuareg; vulnerability; migration; climate-change.

## **1.1 Introduction**

The West African Sahel region is enveloped in series of ecological crises and other social risks that force many people to flee areas where the situation reaches crisis proportions. King and Wang (2007:2) being neo-Malthusians suggest that Niger is demographically entrapped because its population exceeds its carrying capacity. Similarly, Osman-Elasha (2007:7) relates that conflict over control of natural resources like that experienced in Niger in 2005 could slow achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Niger has always struggled to cope with droughts and desertification but trends in climate change and variability have made the country now to battle with floods too (Dembowski 2007:431). The situation makes several people at risk; among the most vulnerable groups of people in Niger are shepherds, nomads, farmers and fishermen (Vag 2008:4). The nomadic Tuareg and Fulani peoples who travel hundreds of miles in search of pasture, the food crisis prove a critical blow for them as they already struggle with shrinking pastureland (Oxfam International, 2005). It is also stated that in Niger, children aged two or less born in drought year were 72% more likely to be stunted in their growth as a result of malnutrition (Human Development Report, 2008:17). The above situation can precipitate into environmental migration. Konseiga (2005:5) suggests that in the migratory system of West Africa, Niger falls mainly under the aegis of migrants-sending countries. From all of the above mentioned stressors, we may deduct that ecological degradation is the cause and effect of famine, food insecurity, conflicts, severe poverty and the general underdevelopment of Niger. On the other hand, Kano State in Northern Nigeria is one of the traditional destinations

of some of the Tuareg and their stay in Kano may not be free of problems as literature and fieldwork may indicate. By and large research on the migration of the people of Niger into Nigeria receives low attention from the Nigerian academics (Adamu 2008:2). This paper investigates threats and vulnerabilities of the migrant Nigerienne Tuareg in Kano city and its environs and their linkage with environment. To achieve that the following objectives will be followed:

- To examine the factors that push migrant Tuareg from their home country to Kano and to identify their migration dynamics.
- To assess the migrant Tuareg relations with host community and the relevant institutions in the state.
- To identify the plights of the migrant Tuareg at Kano especially as they relate to development, survival and protection issues.

## **1.2 Tuareg: Between Environment and Migration**

The Tuareg also called Kel Tamasheq are inhabitants of the Sahara desert and its fringes. They are found living across Northern Mali, southern Algeria, Niger and northern Burkina Faso. They are predominantly archetypal nomadic pastoralists, herding different combinations of goats, sheep, cattle and camels (Randall 2001:2). Tuareg as an ethnic group is socially and physically heterogeneous. Their social classes bracket the *imushar* - religious scholars, *imghad*, lower status groups, *inhaden* – the blacksmith caste, and *iklan* - slaves and ex-slaves. Though they all speak the same language, the Tuareg are generally a mix up of blacks and whites. The Hausas of Northern Nigeria and southern Niger refer to Tuareg as *Buzu* (plural- *Buzaye* or *Bugaje*). Sahara and Sahel ecozones being the primordial delicate habitats where the pastoral and sedenterised Tuareg make their living have hardly failed to sustain their occupants in the past because of the inherent sustainability of their livelihoods.

However, in spite of its abiding delicacy, some civilizations have flourished in the Sahara and radiated intense cultural, economic, scientific and artistic activities. For instance, in what indicates a heritage of scholarship in the Tuaregland, Last (2007:7) reveals that even the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century founder of the Sokoto Caliphate namely Uthman dan Fodio travelled to Tafadek, north of Agades in the Aïr Mountains in search of Islamic literature. Concerning the economic activities, Shea (2003:107) sheds light on the prosperity and socioeconomic vibrant linkages that used to exist between the hyper-arid and semi-arid towns like Kano, Agades and the rest. The author reports that a typical caravan from Kano that crossed Sahara consisted about 13,000 camels laden Tuareg played a crucial role in the trans-Saharan trade, beside their salt and potash business in Agades and Bilma, they also served as camels and donkeys drivers just as they were engaged as guides in all the caravan routes in Hausaland. The ecology of desert side economy is socially organized, far from “subsistence” or “tribal,” interrupted by risks of war raiding, and drought. Lovejoy (2005) relates that, trans-Saharan trade was driven by production for exchange, whether in livestock, grain, salt or other commodities, including transport services, access to wells, and enslaved people.

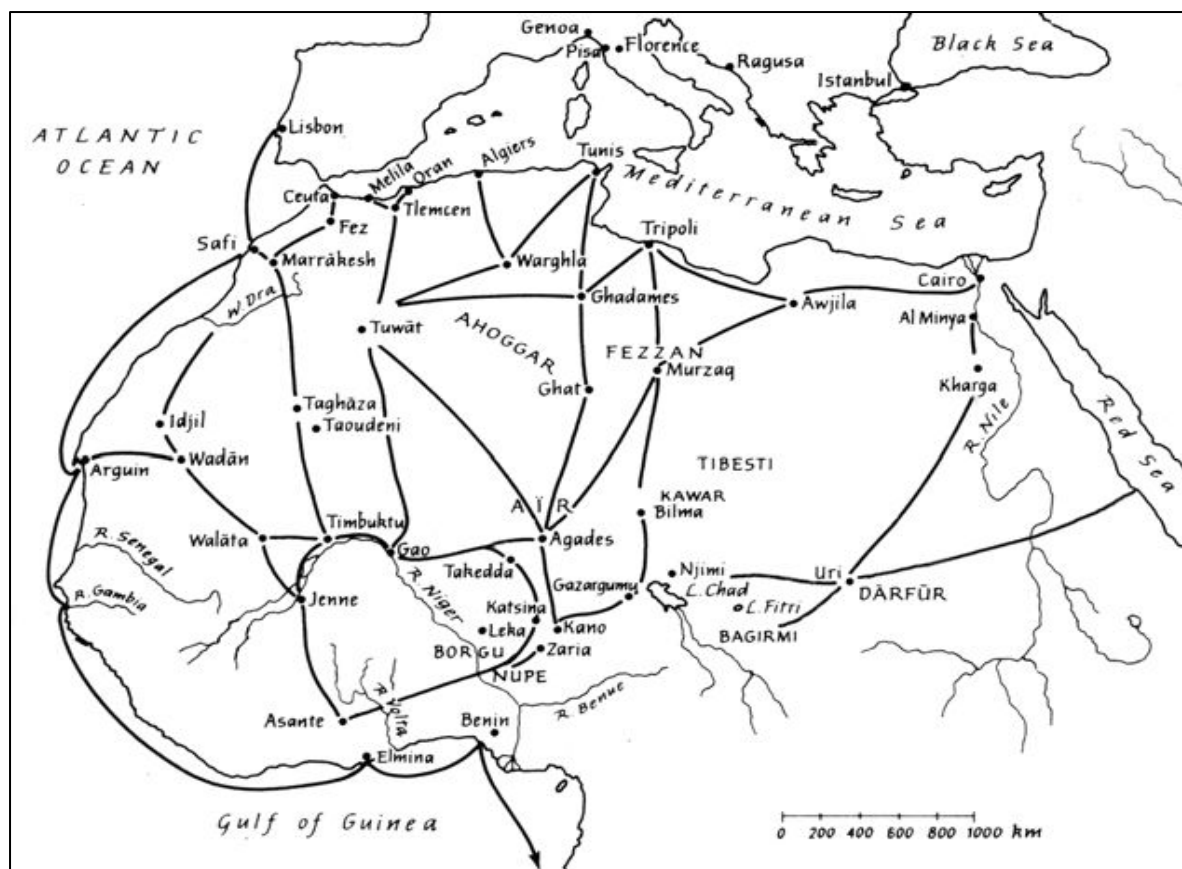


Figure 1: Map of Trans-Saharan Trade.

Similarly, Mortimore and Adams (1999:1) disclose that the West African Sahelian region used to produce enormous groundnuts, cotton, millet, sorghum, cowpeas and meat for exports and growing urban population. It is interesting to note that the trans-Saharan trade led to emergence of several camping areas from Kano to Tripoli which later metamorphosed into full pledged towns like Zinder and Tanout (Adamu1999:90). See figure 1.

Studies indicate that the 20<sup>th</sup> century had several bouts of intense droughts which include those of: 1898-1916, 1930-31, 1940-41, 1947-49 through those of 1968-1988 which recorded minimal rainfall in 1971, 73, 81, 82 and 87 (Jacques & Le Treut 2006:8). Desertification and reorientation and redirection of the active trade routes towards the Atlantic is what worsens the situation (Ibid.). This sort of view was earlier made by Aroson (1976) who blames some French colonial policies that destabilised Tuareg lifestyles through destruction of their traditional political economy; intensification of agriculture through the freeing of Tuareg slaves; creation of a national boundary with Nigeria which blighted the Tuareg trade routes; while the onset of the Sahelian drought induced higher losses. Conflicts, poverty, loss of livelihood assets and disintegration of social support networks coupled with low coping capacity lead to disastrous impacts on poor people in Niger (Osman-Elasha 2005:20).

### **1.3 Tuareg and Responses to Environmental Changes**

Gemenne *et al* (2006:9) identify migration as a coping strategy for food insecurity among Sahelian population especially herders. At the wake of 1983-85 droughts, shortage of food forced people to move southwards. In this case, migration had ceased to be a coping strategy but an ecological crisis that affected entire families instead of being age and sex selective. Herders and their families had no other choice. The situation of environmental migration of the Tuareg to places like Kano is not a very long established academic tradition. Mortimore (1982:54) indicates that Tuareg that enter Nigeria from Niger to seek jobs as night guards started to come with their women and children only during the drought years of the 1970s. In the same fashion, Mortimore (1989:107) reports that Tuareg have the highest number among the groups of people that migrated to Kano as response to droughts of 1973/74. The distribution of the migrant Tuareg in Kano is said to be fluid because they were found in every part of the city. The same source remarks that the Tuareg engage in some forms of occupations and also practice begging. Within the Sahel, farmers have used quick growing varieties of cereals against rain consuming ones; they tender their livestock away from the desert, and with aid of small dams and wells they grow economic crops yet, these adaptation processes are not cost free for the people (Toulmin 2005:13).

The ecological degradation in the Tuaregland is grave and growing and therefore the Nigereinne government has responded by submitting its National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) and has gone to formulate its National Communications on mitigations (Niasse 2007:27-28). In spite of this effort, it is rather unfortunate that Niger and 13 other countries that submitted their NAPA do not mention migration or population relocation as possible policy response (IOM 2008:38). Other major setbacks to the management of human suffering and environmental degradation in the region include poor articulation, collaboration and coordination of the activities of various institutions that claimed to be formed for the purpose of reversing desertification (Chasek & Corell 2002). Still the efforts of the international community cannot be dismissed if one considers the bulk efforts of the various international governmental and non-governmental organisations that give aid to places traumatised by droughts and famines. Series of interventions made by such relief organisations have tremendously helped in arresting the situation from further worsening (Oxfam International 2006; Li 2005). In contrary, communities displaced by natural and artificial disasters in advanced countries are not so disadvantaged because they are equipped with disaster forecast systems, recovery and or pre-disaster reconstruction programmes and strategies (Hunter 2007; Lori 2007).

Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu as quoted in Human Development Report (2008:26) remarks that the climate change crisis has only resulted in 'adaptation apartheid' because the world's poor are harmed by a problem that is not of their making. Based on such arguments, the international community is advised to address root causes of migration and be optimistic on the potentials of migrants (Wieczorek-Zeul 2006:145). But even in the West African sub-region, governments have made satisfactory efforts through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) towards creating a borderless region and facilitating migration and refugee

issues (Adepoju 2005), yet a word on environmental migrants is quite invisible in the ECOWAS integration deals.

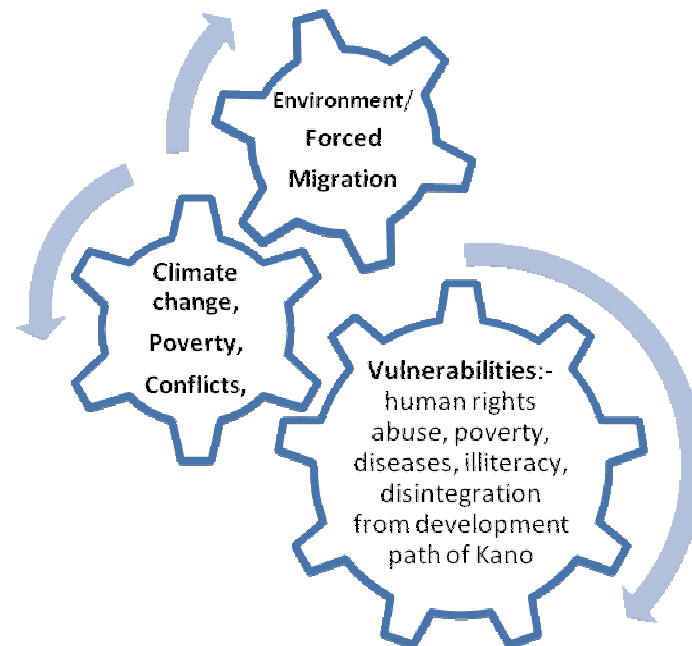


Figure 2: An interlock of Tuareg's migration cause and effect

## 2.1 Kano: Fine and Fiery Destination of the Migrant Tuareg?

The study area for this research is Kano city and its environs, which is the capital of Kano State, the most populous of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Being one of the principal destinations of the Tuareg migrants, it is important to highlight the major pull factors as well as some of the standing ecological threats in this environment especially those relating to climate change. Figure 2 above indicates that climate change and migration propel serious development challenges to societies. To begin with, the Tuareg are associated with Kano community for centuries before colonial period. As entrepreneurs Tuareg settled at various wards within the ancient city of Kano, they are so much integrated that toponyms of some wards in the city bear their tribal inclination. For example, Agadasawa ward is derived from Agades one of the major Tuareg towns (Barau 2006:12). Similarly, Adamu (1999:222-225) lists other pre-colonial settlements of the Tuareg people within the ancient city of Kano to include: Adakawa, Dogon-Nama, Durumin Arbabi, Madigawa, Mararraba, Sabon Sara, Fagge and Zango among others.

In the opinion of Ado-Kurawa (2007:361), the main pull factor of Kano is that, it is the leading commercial Muslim city in African savannas with greatest economic opportunities for labourers and Qur'anic teachers and learners. Kano is such economic hub that Parker (2006:31) considers as an area of dominant influence over markets in adjacent areas. Still on the pull factors of Kano, Harris (1998:5) is concerned with an entrenched culture of sustainability in land use that prevails within the Kano close-settled zone which is characterized by adaptation of farming practices that favour mixture and diversification of crops, livestock, and tree crops.

Nevertheless, Kano as a semi arid region is not itself insulated from evident and potential ecological risks. Kano is most susceptible to climate change and its effects because of its population growth (about 3.1%) and rapid urbanisation [about 7%] (IOM 2008:25). Nigerian Meteorological Agency (2008) records that for Kano, the year 2007 came with series of climatic change problems which affected many sectors of the economy like transportation, aviation and agricultural production; other climatic risks of the region include flooding, health problems like cracked lips, dry skins, bronchial problems and outbreak of some infantile diseases like meningitis. Barau (2008) suggests that institutions that monitor the climatic risks and adaptation strategies in Kano state are working far below expectations.

### **3.0 Research Methods**

Multiple methods were employed in carrying out this research, the research tools and other methods are stated below.

#### **3.1 Research Participants and Sampling**

The research participants were exclusively drawn from the Tuareg migrant community that are settled and earn a living within Kano city and its environs. Participants that numbered fifty (50) were selected based on their places of work and settlements. This means a purposive sampling was used. Tuareg ladies were also picked from various points of their intra city movements based on purposive sampling. However, some 50 resident indigenes of Kano were randomly selected for interviews mainly from places different from where the participating Tuareg were selected.

#### **3.2 Focus Group Discussions**

A focus group discussion (FGD) was moderated by the author, the discussion centred on the vulnerability issues surrounding migration of the Tuareg to Kano. The FGD helped in the identification of the interviews checklist and in the general research design. The FGD drew six persons two of whom were Tuareg and four indigenes of Kano.

#### **3.3 Interviews**

A checklist was developed for the two sets of interviews (for: Tuareg and indigenes). The parameters selected for testing migrant Tuareg include: population characteristics, literacy, livelihood options, legality of stay, migration dynamics, spatial distribution, gender and vulnerabilities. The other set of interview for the indigenes focused on the public perceptions and attitude disposition toward the migrant Tuareg community.

#### **3.4 Personal Communications**

Personal communications were held with some officials of some institutions with a view to finding their programmes and or provisions on the migrant Tuareg in Kano. The Consulate General of Niger Republic in Kano and the Public Relations Officer, Kano State Command of the Nigerian Immigration Service gave their personal and official views.

### **3.5 Fieldwork**

In order to administer the interviews to participants an observatory outing was undertaken to various sites especially the Tuareg places of work and the key Tuareg settlements in Kano. The fieldwork availed the researcher the opportunity to observe the conditions of the Tuareg in Kano. The said observations were undertaken at randomly selected residential houses and business premises. The major settlements of the Tuareg community in Kano are found at: Kawo, Kurnar Asabe and Unguwa Uku. However, the field observation was carried at Kawo which becomes the sample for the fieldwork.

### **4.0 Results and Discussions**

This section outlines the findings of the research based on integration of all forms of data gathered. As a qualitative research simple percentages were used in explaining the data and words rather than tables and models are used to explain the points the explanation come as follows:

#### **4.1. Population Characteristics of the Migrant Tuareg**

The average age of the migrant Tuareg in Kano twenty six (26), this reveals that youths predominate the Tuareg migrant population in Kano. More than ninety percent (90%) of the respondents are male and only about ten percent (10%) are female. More than 65% of the migrant Tuareg are either single or have their wives and children at home. But, only about 35% of the Tuareg interviewed said they moved into Kano along with their wives and children. Those staying with their wives have an average family size of four and their children are aged between 0-12 years on average. One major feature of the migrant Tuareg in Kano is high level of illiteracy, 97% of the participants offered that they did not attend *ecole* (school in French) and only 3% claimed that they dropped out of *ecole* soon after they were enrolled in their villages. However, only 18% of the respondents claimed to know how to read and write Arabic and Islamic knowledge. Only 43% of the sum claim to send their children to *madrassah* (Islamic schools) located within their settlements. This situation highlights the high level of illiteracy among the Tuareg migrant community in Kano.

#### **4.2 Livelihood Options**

More than 65% of the male Tuareg in Kano are engaged as guards at residents of businessmen, top civil servants, politicians; they also do the same at some private offices and workshops. About six percent of the male Tuareg sale China-tea and four percent of them are blacksmiths and rope weavers, six percent of them sale date-palm fruit while about 10% earn a living through begging on the roads, mosques, filling stations and motor parks. Some of the Tuareg are marabouts that sell traditional and spiritual charms, amulets and concoctions. On the other hand, about 65% of the Tuareg women are full housewives that depend exclusively on the earnings of their husbands. Yet, about 5% of the women sell traditional medicine particularly to the local women and about 30% of the Tuareg women beg along with their children across the city.

#### **4.3 Purpose of Migrating to Kano**

About 66% of the Tuareg respondents attributed their migration to Kano on the increasing decline of pastureland or decrease in the number of their stock due to droughts. While about 30% claimed that they come to Kano in order to alleviate poverty. In general, all the respondents were pastoralists and on that basis the link between poverty and environmental degradation as a push factor for migration could be established.

#### **4.4 Spatial Distribution of Tuareg in Kano**

Distribution of the Tuaregs in urban Kano is Mortimore (1989:107) as fluid. That statement has however changed at the moment. The migrant Tuareg now have settlements where they are found in hundreds. They are found living with their family members, friends and relations at slums around Kawo, Kurnar Asabe, and Unguwa Uku all located within urban Kano. In respect of their spatial distribution for livelihoods, the Tuareg guards work mainly at industrial estates at Sharada, and Bompai. They are also found doing the same job at the houses of government officials, businessmen and auto workshops that are located outside the old city. In contrast to late 1970s to early 1980s, now the Tuareg are rarely work as guards for houses within the ancient city of Kano. The Tuareg seen in the city are predominantly those who come in to beg or sell medicines. The ancient city is located at the distance of 6-7 kilometers from places where Tuareg settle or work. The proliferation of community vigilant groups, presence of more police posts within the city as well as inability of people to pay for the job are responsible for the halt in the need of Tuareg security services.

#### **4.5 Migration Dynamics and Legality of Residency**

Migration dynamics of the Tuareg in Kano could almost be described as circulation or nomadism without livestock. Beggars among the Tuareg travel back home after staying for maximum of two months or leave Kano for another Nigerian town. The married Tuareg guards travel back to home after staying for six months to one year. After staying at home for a period of two to three months they return to Kano. For the guards they have security of jobs as they always get another Tuareg to stand for them before their return. About 30% of the Tuareg have maintained such movements from Kano to their villages in Niger for the last twenty five years. It is also found out that a new generation of migrant Tuareg is evolving in Kano. This generation is composed of youths aged between 35 years and below. This generation is not integrated into the development needs of Kano State. About 65% of this generation draws its livelihoods from guarding private residential areas. They asserted that their parents induced them to keep up the job from which their mothers' dowries were paid.

In respect of legality of stay more than 70% of the Tuareg live in Kano with out 'resident permit' issued by the Nigeria Immigration Service. Apparently, this makes majority of them to live in constant fear and state of confusion. This is understood at the course of the conduct of the fieldwork. Barrister Nasiru Umar, the Public Relations Officer of the Kano State Command (in personal communication on 14/6/08) claimed that lack of sufficient facilities hinders their capacity to hunt for the Tuareg that lack resident permit.



He also adds that some people of Kano harbour illegal migrants at the event of search operations by his agency.

Issaka Sani Mohamadou Rabiou, the Consul-General of Niger Republic in Kano (in a personal communication on 15/6/08) agreed that many Tuareg live without resident permit and described the situation as illegal. He however adds that the consulate, the state government and security agencies operate at high level of collaboration in handling issues of such nature.

#### **4.6 Tuareg Relations with Indigenous Community and Security Agencies in Kano**

More than 80% of the Tuareg stated that they live cordially with the people of Kano. However, the strength of the relations is mainly cultural and socioeconomic as well. This is confirmed by more than 60% of the indigenes interviewed who relate that they have to accommodate the Tuareg since they are Muslims. They added that they sympathise with them over the environmental problems that expel them from their home country. A social commentator in Kano remarks that the Tuareg that work as guards are integrated into the Kano community. In justifying the integration, he explained that in the 1980s and 1990s the Nigerian Television Authority in Kano (NTA Kano) was showing on weekends a Hausa soap opera titled 'Ba'are' which means a Tuareg guard.

#### **4.7 Mapping Plights of the Migrant Tuareg in Kano:**

This segment outlines the major problems that migrant Tuareg are exposed to. Therefore, the scope of the plights to be mapped covered the problems they encounter at Kano and those on their way to Kano. The vulnerabilities are identified based on: development issues that cover education, poverty, and shelter; protection issues cover human rights abuses, economic exploitations, violence against women and children etc; while survival issues mainly cover healthcare delivery, nutrition

##### **4.7.1 Development Issues**

From 4.1 above, it is clear that the level of illiteracy is intolerably high among the migrant Tuareg. Perhaps that is why the best they can survive on is guarding or begging. As the world gets ready through the MDG no. 2 to achieve universal literacy this community is left behind. They lack French letters in Niger, the English letters of Nigeria as well as the Islamic Arabic letters which are common in the Islamic world. Poverty is another entangling problem for the Kano Tuareg community, it is found that a breadwinner Tuareg people employed as private guards take an average of 6,000 Naira in a month which is equivalent to about USD \$38 (August 2009 parallel market exchange rate). However, it is found out that such watchmen eke out on selling tea, consumables like sweets, cigarettes, and even petrol etc. The Tuareg watchmen and their family often live under makeshift and shaggy structures at the backyard of offices or in uncompleted structures within factories. Those that live at the Tuareg squalor settlements squat with friends and relations in small rented rooms located at the areas that lack water, electricity and other essentials.

##### **4.7.2 Protection Issues**

The Tuareg are subjects of economic exploitations by some corrupt law enforcement agents and traditional rulers. For instance, at their point of entry into Nigeria, the Tuareg

interviewed claimed that both Nigerian and Nigerienne immigration officials extort some money in order to allow them to leave Niger or enter Nigeria. Besides, many Tuareg alleged that some local traditional rulers (*barumomi*) from their villages in Niger followed them to their various stations in Kano in order to collect tax. However, the Consul General of Niger in Kano (in personal communications) stated that it was not with the knowledge of the government of Niger that such traditional rulers enter Nigeria to collect tax. The Tuareg also decried the way some house-owners maltreat them by eviction threats and indiscriminate rent hiking. Another problem that exposes the migrant Tuareg to rights abuse is the non payment or prolonged delay of payment by their employers. Oftentimes, the Tuareg have to leave and seek for alternative jobs. The Tuareg lack access to authorities that could reverse the injustice meted out on them.

#### **4.7.3 Survival Issues**

Most of the respondents reveal that they do not go to hospitals because they lack financial resources to cater for that. They mainly depend on traditional/natural medicines like herbs. From the general observations made the Tuareg live in very poor shelter and their women and children look malnourished. The Tuareg rarely cooperate with government in effective children immunisation programmes. Recently, the Kano State Commissioner for Health told Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) *Weekend File* on 21/6/08 that one of the obstacles to effective immunisation coverage in the state is the refusal of Nigerienne migrants to have their children immunised for folio and other killer diseases. In Kano city as indicated in 4.2 above, some female Tuareg roam the city to sell traditional medicines, some people call such Tuareg women: *muna magani*, *muna karuwa*, which means: we sell medicine, and we are prostitutes. Such Tuareg women and the girls that follow their mothers to beg across the city are quite vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and sexual harassments.

#### **5.0 Conclusions and Implications**

This paper explores the underlying factors that push Tuareg to migrate into Kano; it also explains the relations between the migrants and their host community; and the fundamental plights associated with the community of migrant Tuareg in Kano. This problem has multiple dimensions and need solution and attention of governments, regional organisations and development institutions.

From the review of relevant literature it is clear that colonisation of Africa is the major factor that destabilised the adaptation strategies of the Tuareg people. Countless opportunities available to the Tuareg were halted by colonial and neo-colonial economic policies. Tuareg and their neighbours used to live in harmony with their environment due to the fact that food and supplies were in constant exchange between North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and by extension several parts of the old Europe. Therefore cases of extreme poverty, hunger and starvation never reached critical levels similar to the recent experiences of the Sahel and Sahara regions. On this note, stakeholders and experts on climate change must look at the giant historic linkage to the present day challenges of starvation, hunger and drought in the Sahel and Sahara. If colonisation had not disrupted the trans-Saharan trade, rails and roads must have only replaced camels and mules, but poverty, hunger and starvation will not be the trademark of the

Sahel and Sahara. At least during the last 500 years droughts occurred severally but no massive Tuareg population exodus was recorded.

What is most important for development partners, regional development organisations is to focus on the affected peoples' vulnerabilities and opportunities to overcome poverty and environmental degradation through new means of adaptation. New adaptation strategies must include and involve the targeted population and the ideals of the MDGs. It is pertinent to add that droughts and desertification have longer impacts on the society, ecology and economy. Natural disasters in developed and transition economies have always received more media attention and relief packages from across the globe. But in African dry-lands emergency programmes are lacking and due to corruption and insensitivity the needed aid may not reach the needy on time.

The Tuareg in Kano lived at the mercy and cruelty of their host, benefactors and beneficiaries. The migrant Tuareg may be integrated into the society but they are not connected into the development process of their host society. Their stay can be enhanced when they live legally, and are integrated into the education, healthcare and the general welfare of the society. The contribution of the migrant Tuareg community to the economy of Kano and perhaps that of their home country is below the desired migration economics (remittances). In fact, the remittances of the migrant Tuareg community are not measurable.

## 6.0 Acknowledgements

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