

**Harnessing Home-Grown Alternatives for Economic Sustainability
in Nigeria:
The Book of Ruth**

Olawale Oladunni Peter
OOU Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State
peter.olawale@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Abstract

The unfavourable socio-economic condition that many Nigerians face results in different decisions and actions to mitigate or escape the pains inflicted by the situation. While some have taken to crime of all sorts, some engage in fraudulence. However, some have sought solution to this economic ill in migration (especially) to foreign countries in search of greener pastures. Among scholarly works on the book of Ruth, little or nothing has been said about the success story of Naomi and Ruth's return to advance a home-grown economic sustainability in Nigeria. Using narrative criticism, this paper argues that solutions to the socio-economic challenges of Nigeria can be home-grown. Thus, the paper focuses on migration in the book of Ruth; decries unguided migration and advocates that both the government and the people of Nigeria should invest their energy on harnessing the environmental and natural resources with which the country is greatly endowed in order to rejuvenate the economy. The paper also asserts that commitment, hard work, dedication, kind heartedness, concern for others, foresight and recognition of God's supremacy are active ingredients for economic development. However, the paper does not call for a complete abolition of migration where and when necessary.

Keywords: Home-grown alternative, Book of Ruth, Economic sustenance, Migration

Introduction

African countries fall under the category of those variously described as developing countries, low income countries, middle-income countries, emerging countries or emerging economy, least developed countries (LDCs) or third world countries.¹ World Bank for instance, using analytical classification, classifies countries on the basis of gross national income per capita as high, lower-middle, and low income countries.² These terms of classification have to do with levels of development which can be measured on income, economic growth, indebtedness standard of living and geography. Economic and human factors stand as the main yardsticks for measuring development. As such, developing countries, according to the United Nation is a country having a relatively low living standard, undeveloped industrial base, and Human Development Index (HDI) that is between moderate and low. The index is a comparative measurement of indices such as literacy, education, poverty, life expectancy, and other sundry factors.³

HDI, developed by Mahbub ul Haq and further promoted by Amartya Sen and Paul Streeten, has been in use since 1990s by the United Nations Development Programme in its annual Human Development Report.⁴ It tracks a wide range of indicators, which include Adult Literacy Rate, Life Expectancy, Income per capita (per person), and Income inequality. (note deleted)

¹ Although some of these terms are becoming obsolete, giving way to new terms. There is also no generally agreed-upon definition or demarcation of these terms. They sometimes overlap and are used interchangeably by different organisations (especially financial or development institutions such as UN, IMF, World Bank). See Lyng Nielsen, *Classifications of Countries Based on Their Level of Development: How it is Done and How it Could be Done* (Washington DC: International Monetary Fund IMF, 2011). The article is an analysis of how the UNDP, the World Bank, and the IMF classify countries on the basis of their level of development.

² Nielsen, 11-14.

³ Educational Pathway International “What is a Developing Country?”
<https://www.educationalpathwaysinternational.org/what-is-a-developing-country/>

⁴ Desmond McNeill, “Human Development’: The Power of the Idea.” *Journal of Human Development* 8, no. 1 (2007): 5-6. doi: 10.1080/14649880601101366

As a developing country, Nigeria's economy is in bad state as indicated by poor living condition of many citizens, poor working conditions and emoluments,⁵ increasing inflation,⁶ high unemployment rate with unabated insecurity,⁷ infrastructure deficit and dilapidation. Repeated collapse of national electricity grid is a good case in point here.⁸

The catastrophic economy of Nigeria is further shown by the government's massive borrowing with no commensurate development. Between January and March 2022, the Federal Government of Nigeria incurred ₦950 billion new domestic borrowing and still plans to take additional ₦1.6 trillion domestic borrowing, with another ₦2.57 trillion from foreign creditors.⁹

While economic hardship is not peculiar to Nigeria, the irony is that Nigeria is greatly blessed with human and natural resources that can make her economic giant in the comity of nations. An analyst describes Nigeria as a country where we have everything and lack everything.¹⁰ He describes

⁵ This is expressed by series of events such as protracted struggles between government and NLC on the issues of #30,000 minimum wage and poor or non-implementation of it in some states. Recurrent industrial actions by various worker unions to press for better emoluments and/or payment of owed arrears (E.g Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors in 2020 and 2021, ASUU strikes. Jimoh Oloredo for instance notes that ASUU has gone on strike 16 times between 1999 and 2022; Jimoh Oloredo, "Nigeria: Where We Have Everything but Lack Everything," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 15, 2022, 11.

⁶ See for instance, Nike Popoola, and Sami Olatunji, "Amid Fuel Crisis, Nigeria's Inflation Hits 15.70% in February." *The Punch*, March 16, 2022, 21.

⁷ Almost on daily basis are there reports of insecurity on the media. A few examples from the front pages of some newspaper will suffice: "Terrorists Kidnap 46 in Kaduna Community" *Vanguard*, March 18, 2022, Bandits Kill 43 in Kaduna, Zamfara as Gov. el-Rufai Declares 24hrs Curfew in 2 LGs. *Vanguard* March 22, 2022; "Kebbi Bandits Invade Niger, Kill DPO, Two Police Men, Four Vigilantes." *The Punch*, March 16, 2022, "Gunmen Attack NDLEA Office in Ebonyi, Kill Officer, Patient." *Nigerian Tribune*, March 16, 2022

⁸ Following a collapse in March 2022, The Punch editorial, notes it to be the second time within forty-eight hours. It was also the third in 2022 and the sixth within a year. It collapsed seven times by September 2022 alone! "Nigeria's Unending Electricity Woes" *The Punch*, March 17, 2022, 14.

⁹ Sami Olatunji, "FG Incurs ₦950bn New Domestic Borrowing in Q1 2022 DMD." *The Punch*, March 21, 2022, 29.

¹⁰ Oloredo, Jimoh. "Nigeria: Where We Have Everything but Lack Everything. 11.

as baffling, how we are naturally endowed with crude oil deposited in our land but we cannot refine it because our facilities for refining have gone moribund and redundant; how we have sea and edible aquatic natural deposit but due to lack of zeal and vision we do not take economic advantage of them; and how our population, which should have been strength for economic drive now constitutes a threat.¹¹ (Sentence deleted)

Between 2016 and 2021 Nigeria experienced economic recession at least twice. Premium Times,¹² for instance, confirms the figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics sometimes in 2016 as evidence of the current economic misery. A former governor and minister describes the situation as worse than civil war.¹³ Figures are often reeled out on inflation, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capital income and many other economic indices. Sometimes, these figures show the worrisome state of economy. Some other time, they show improvement in economy. While these statistical figures reveal the economic state of the nation, many Nigerians who do not understand economics technical jargons see them as mere terminologies that mean little or nothing. Sometimes also, economists have challenges with the use of GDP as tool of measuring economy as rising GDP does not equate better living standard¹⁴

The fact of the matter is that as far as many Nigerians are concerned, Nigeria is in perpetual economic crises. The daily reality of an average Nigerian is the untold hardship people face in the prices of transportation, food, house rent, clothing, and other basic necessities. The stark reality is the deplorable living condition, unemployment, underemployment, and

¹¹ Olorede, 11.

¹² “Nigerian economy is officially in recession, government confirms.” *Premium Times*, Accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/209605-nigerian-economy-officially-recession-govt-confirms.html>

¹³ Seun Opejobi, “Nigeria’s current economic situation worse than that of Biafra civil war – Aregbesola.” *Daily Post*, July 18, 2016, Accessed February 15, 2017, <http://dailypost.ng/2016/07/18/nigerias-current-economic-situation-worse-biafra-civil-war-aregbesola/>

¹⁴ Toun Ogunbiyi, “Nigeria is out of recession but Nigerians are still in recession” *Business Day*, December 6, 2021, <http://www.businessday.ng/news/nigeria-is-out-of-recession-but-nigerians-are-still-in-recession/>

insecurity. Someone may not understand 5000 megawatts but they understand that they now pay more for less electricity they use. Someone may not understand 17% or 15% inflation rise or fall but they understand that a distance that used to cost ₦10 transportation fare now costs ₦100, and that feeding the family is now more difficult than before. Medium and small-scale businesses are folding up, hunger is palpable and yet members of the political class are living in sheer opulence. Thus, bad economy is no question of figure but matter of daily reality of an average Nigerian.

Objective

The primary objective of this study is to encourage the government and people of Nigeria to take advantage of the rich natural and human resources of the country to better its economy. Rather than seeking greener pasture abroad by the citizen, and relying on foreign aids and economic policies by the government; the country's natural resources should be adequately harnessed. Some specific objectives include building capacity, encouraging commitment, hard-work, dedication, foresight, selflessness and recognition of God's supremacy

Materials and Methods

This research is descriptive in its approach. It uses the tools of narrative criticism to interpret the text of Ruth with a view to evolving economic sustainability through home-grown undertakings. Since narrative criticism is an outgrowth of literary criticism, texts on the book of Ruth, commentaries, lexicon, articles in journals, and national dailies are the sources of data for this work.

Migration As a Challenge to Nigeria's Economic Sustainability an economic Illusion

Over many years, government and the people of Nigeria have sought different means to check the economic challenge. But one major issue that affects Nigeria is what could be referred to as "illusion of better place out there." This concept has to do with the feelings of both the government and the people of Nigeria. Unusually, it feels that foreign land, or things of foreign origin are always better than native land or home-grown things. This is exhibited in various ways such as migration (especially traveling

abroad to the western countries in search of greener pasture), dependence on foreign experts, excessive dependence on foreign aids, borrowings, and rating internal economy based on foreign views.

Painfully and worthy of note is the fact that many talented Nigerian students, artisans, professionals and technocrats have left the country and are using their God-given skills and intelligence to develop the economy of their host countries. This in turn, has left many economic opportunities uncultivated in Nigeria, hence, the socio-economic as well as financial state precarious. Similarly, Nigerian governments are fond of awarding contracts to foreign companies and foreign experts. Though there are trained personnel in the same field, they are never trusted enough to be capable of handling such projects. Many time foreigners of lower qualifications than Nigerians boss over Nigerians or use them as labourer in construction sites all because of the belief that ‘they are better than us.’

Worst still, Nigerians prefer imported products because they are believed to be better than indigenous. This mindset, perhaps, is the reason for which Nigeria refineries are left moribund and her crude oil refined abroad to be imported back at exorbitant prices. Sometimes, it is laughable and equally lamentable that some elite Nigerian would travel abroad for treatment and be treated abroad by Nigerians they never trusted while in Nigeria. This *illusion of better place out there* is so pervasive that Nigeria, like most other black nations, is always waiting to be told what is right or wrong about her economy by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the likes.

Certainly, this servitude mentality is a major factor for Nigeria economic failure. A reorientation to the reversal of this mindset will go a long way in revamping the economy. Therefore, migration in the book of Ruth provides adequate cue for this reorientation.

Migration

Migration is simply the movement of people from one area of a country (or from one country) to another area of the same country (or to another country) for the purpose of establishing a new residence. Although the

definition of migration varies from different perspectives,¹⁵ there is a consensus that it involves the movement of people across a recognised political boundary to establish permanent or semi-permanent residence. The period of residence also varies, but most experts believe that six months of residence in a new location is enough to categorise one as a migrant.¹⁶

According to the United Nations, an international migrant is any person who changes his or her country of usual residence. Thus, international migration includes movement of many kinds, such as people leaving their countries of origin for economic reasons, to join their families abroad or as refugees. By the same token, an internal migrant includes an internally displaced person, a trader who relocated his or her business to another part of the country or a transferred civil servant. Migration is a complex and multidimensional process which involves different motivations, with far-reaching consequences to the individual and the places of origin and destination.

Internal Migration Survey of Nigeria conducted by the National Population Commission (NPopC) defines a migrant as anybody who has lived in another local government area (LGA) for at least six months in the past 10 years, and a return migrant as a person who has moved from the current LGA of residence in the past 10 years to live in another LGA for at least six months before returning to the LGA.¹⁷ Both emigration (moving to other countries) and rural-urban migration are in view in this study

Emigration

¹⁵ Because we have migration of animals and some other forms of migration. Other forms of migration means To pass usually periodically from one region or climate to another for feeding or breeding; or To change position or location in an organism or substance (e.g *filarial worms migrate within the human body*)

¹⁶ Uche C. Isiugo-Abanihe, *Migration in Nigeria: A Country Profile 2014* (International Organization for Migration, 2016), 11.

¹⁷ Uche C. Isiugo-Abanihe, *Migration in Nigeria: A Country Profile 2014*, 12.

The number of Nigerians living outside Nigeria has risen greatly between 1990 and 2013, from 465,932 to 1,030,322. In 2013, nearly two thirds of emigrants were residing in more developed regions. For instance, in 1990 only 33.8 per cent of Nigerian migrants lived in more developed regions. By 2000, this had increased to 52 per cent, and further 56.7 per cent in 2010.¹⁸ That increasingly more Nigerians find their way to more developed regions is a function of employment-driven nature of Nigerian emigration. Also, Nigerian emigration to the West is highly selective of the educated, skilled and professionals who are more likely to be attracted by the economic opportunities of more developed regions. Nigerians also migrate to less developed countries of Africa and Asia; however, the diminishing numbers of Nigerians in the less developed regions is related to reduced economic realities and social upheavals in many countries. In 2013, 35.6 per cent of Nigerian emigrants lived in African countries; 34.2 per cent in Europe, and 26.4 per cent in North America; the rest lived in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania.¹⁹

Evidently the most preferred European destination of Nigerian emigrants is the United Kingdom but Canada is the most popular destination for Nigerian migrants, followed by the US reported as in an online Guardian paper.²⁰ Other popular destinations, according to this source include Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, as well as South Africa. It is stated further that Canadian immigration policies which appears favourable constitutes a key pull factor that attracts prospective Nigeria migrants. On the other hand, the Nigeria -UK tie owing to colonization may also be responsible for the UK such that today, large Nigerian communities are across the UK. Also in the US, a surge in Nigerian-American immigrants is reported to have occurred: 25,000 in 1980 and [348,000 in 2017](#) with an

¹⁸ Isiugo-Abanihe, 2.

¹⁹ Isiugo-Abanihe, 2.

²⁰ The [Editor](#). "Where is the Nigerian Diaspora? Meet some of the Nigerians who fly two flags" *Vanguard* September 16, 2021, <https://guardian.ng/features/where-is-the-nigerian-diaspora-meet-some-of-the-nigerians-who-fly-two-flags/>

estimated [374,311](#) Nigerian-born people in 2018. The reports concludes that Nigeria is responsible for the most migrants to the US out of all African countries.²¹ US seems to offer opportunities with respect to employment, education, and politics. This may account for high population of Nigerian immigrants there too.

Rural-Urban Migration

In the event of the unchecked rural-urban migration, the unfavorable economic conditions facing both the rural and urban habitats have, no doubt, completely degenerated to the extent of weakening the basic foundations of the economy. The trends, challenge, and impacts of rural-urban migration have remained object of great debates for some decades. Those moving from rural to urban areas constitute certain classes, categories and strata of the society that are basically plagued with certain social and economic problems in which poverty is a major one. In consequence, rural-urban inequality, resulting in the phenomenal rural-urban migration, has become the prevailing accepted view in conceptualising the problems and trends of development policy and strategy in Nigeria. In the face of dissipating hope and enthusiasm within the socio-economic and political environment, the unfavorable economic conditions facing both the rural and urban habitats have, definitely, degenerated and tumbledown to the extent of weakening the basic foundations of the economy.

Isah Abbass argues that the background to the crisis in Nigeria's rural areas and the socio-economic and political impacts of the crisis dates, back to the colonial era.²² This was when colonialism exploited the resources of rural areas thus increasing the levels of rural poverty and also changing the entire structure of the rural economy. In the argument of Jamal and Weeks, they point out that before the discovery and production of petroleum, Nigeria was a state characteried by a relatively narrow rural-urban gap, and therefore urban bias during that period was hardly a topical

²¹ The [Editor](#). "Where is the Nigerian Diaspora? Meet some of the Nigerians who fly two flags"

²² Isah M. Abbass, "Trends of Rural-Urban Migration in Nigeria." *European Scientific Journal*, 8, no.3 (2012): 97-125.

issue of debate. However, when crude oil was discovered and petroleum became the main pedestal of the economy, urban oriented economy swiftly characterised the political economy and the public policy orientation.²³ This resulted rural exodus.

Considering Abbass submission that Nigeria is predominantly rural with less than a quarter Nigerians living in towns or urban centres,²⁴ it is lamentable that the nature of rural crisis in Nigeria has reached such an extent and degree that even the peasants have failed to produce enough food for themselves, let alone produce in excess for exportation. Consequently, food shortages, lower productivity, lower income and increased poverty became the lot of the rural Nigeria within a very short period of time. While these may be due, in part, to the peasants' limited or complete lack of access to fertilizer for crops, and other infrastructural facilities; the high marketing costs, labor shortages due to the rural-urban drift among other things, have produced further impetus to new rural crisis.²⁵ Therefore, the foregoing makes it apparent that migration; both emigration and rural-urban shifts, have contributed in no small measure to decay of Nigeria economy.

Impact of Migration

Expectedly, migration has a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic effects. In general, it involves transfer of know-how and skills, financial assets (including remittances), and movement of people from one location to another. On the individual level, migration also has consequences for people's origin and citizenship. Its impact is also felt by the family and household economy and development as a whole. But it must also be pointed out that migration has not only negative implication but also a lot of positive ones. This includes a wide range of development issues such as governance and legal protection, employment and social protection, health services and education, tertiary education, knowledge and skills development and so on.

²³ V. Jamal, and J. Weeks, *Africa Misunderstood*. (Macmillan, 1983), 118.

²⁴ Abbass, 99.

²⁵ Isah M. Abbass, "Trends of Rural-Urban Migration in Nigeria." 99.

Certainly, there will be debate on which of the two implications of migration (the negative and positive) outweighs the other. But given the enormous untapped natural resources in Nigeria, it can safely be concluded that migration has impacted Nigeria more negatively than positively. Therefore, migration, whether internal or international, has a profound effect on economic development judging by the followings:

- Brain drain occurs when significant numbers of highly skilled nationals leave their countries of origin to seek employment or establish businesses abroad. It has a negative effect on the economies of developing countries, because the skills of remaining nationals are not sufficient to grow industries, academia and other sectors of the economy.
- Brain waste occurs when skilled migrants engage in menial occupations abroad, resulting in deskilling.
- Loss of man power leading to uncultivated opportunities in agriculture which Nigeria needs to urgently return to.
- The belief in ‘better offers abroad’ militates against exploration, exploitation and cultivation of our natural resources.
- Loss of some cultural values which are germane to collective economic prosperity. E.g. individualistic living in the western world is alien to communal living in Africa which makes socio-economic problem of an individual the problem of all; and reduces the gaps in social class of higher, middle and lower class people.

Narrative Analysis of The Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth in broad view

The book begins with the phrase *wayeyhi* (And it came to pass...) the normal way to begin historical narratives in Hebrew²⁶ and ends with genealogy of king David’s ancestry (1:1; 4:17-22). This indicates that the book is historical with verifiable events. Eben Scheffler notes that histories

²⁶ Charles Oxley, ‘Ruth’ in *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 340.

usually focus on the public figures.²⁷ But Ruth differs slightly as it deals with an ordinary Israelite family.

Ruth narrative is set in an agrarian society, where people moved easily between Judah and Moab. It is written in classical Hebrew prose. The view that 'it is political propaganda', whether for David or against Ezra, does not do justice to this gentle and humane story. The message is simply that people who act with fidelity, dedication, industriousness and compassion are ultimately blessed by God, even if they have to endure difficult circumstances for a while. When read on its own terms and without respect to a hypothesised context, the shrewd and artistic fashion of the book of Ruth is of literary quality. The story also portrays the careful negotiation between vulnerable women and a man of substance in the community, a negotiation that has to do with honour and shame, but that is also self-conscious about economic issues in the exchange.²⁸

Ruth has four chapters. In chapter one, a man from Bethlehem goes to live in Moab in the days of the judges. His sons marry Moabite women. Some years afterwards, the man and his sons die. The chapter ends with the return of two destitute widows to Bethlehem and the lament of Naomi that although she went away full the Lord has brought her back empty.

In chapter two, another character (Boaz) who has a crucial role in the story is introduced. Ruth proposes to support the family (both her and her mother-in-law) for a while by gathering ears of grain left by the reapers.²⁹ When she comes to the field of Boaz by providence, he notices her and protects her because of her fidelity to her mother-in-law. He gave her food, and instructs the reapers to let her glean even among the standing sheaves. Only at the end of the day does Naomi tell Ruth of her relationship to Boaz, and suggests that her meeting Boaz is a sign of the Lord's providential care.

²⁷ Eben Scheffler, *Politics in Ancient Israel* (Pretoria: Biblia Publishers, 2001), 14.

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, and Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament; The Canon and Christian Imagination 2nd ed.*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2012), 355.

²⁹ Biblical law requires the reapers to leave something for the poor and the alien: Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22.

The third chapter is the climax of the narrative. Naomi realises that the best hope for long-term security is to have Boaz marry Ruth. Her plan for bringing this about, however, is remarkable as some have viewed it as seduction.³⁰ But whichever side one takes, Naomi's method proves successful. The last chapter brings the readers to the city gate where the marriage between Boaz and Ruth was solemnised and the story reaches its happy conclusion. The union produces a son and the emptiness of which Naomi complained at the end of chapter 1 is being filled.

Migration in the Book of Ruth

The opening of the book of Ruth reveals a crisis, in the anarchistic period of the judges, which saw an Israelite family migrating to a foreign land. Beginning with a familiar theme-famine, Canaan is hit by famine. This reminds the reader of the era of the patriarchs during which the patriarchs' sojourn in Canaan (Gen. 12:10-20; 26: ff; 41:57-42:1 cf. 46:1). In this case it is Elimelech and his family: wife, and two sons Mahlon and Kilion. When their home land, Bethlehem in Judah, is struck by famine, they opt for migration to Moab in search of greener pasture and succor. They migrate to the fields of Moab (1:2).

An irony in this passage demands attention. They leave Bethlehem (house of bread) during a famine. This hints to the reader that they made a tragic mistake.³¹ They leave the house of bread in the middle of a famine to go to the *field* הַשָּׂדֶה of Moab. A house denotes a warm environment, as opposed to a field, that lies open and unprotected.

It is befuddling and ironic that Bethlehem which literally means house of food would suffer famine, or that Israelites would face such problem in the Promised Land. Viewing the narrative from theological point of view, it may be concluded that this is caused by sin (particularly apostasies

³⁰ John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 531.

³¹ R. B. Shuchat, "The use of symbolism and hidden messages in the book of Ruth." *Jewish Bible quarterly*, vol. 30, (2002): 1-8.
http://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/302/302_Ruth2.pdf

which characterise the period of the judges). It can also be Yahweh's way of testing the people His covenant in matter of trust (how can there be famine in a land promised to be flowing with milk and honey). The patriarchs experienced similar thing in their early days of sojourn in Canaan. But from a critical reading of Israelite history of settlement in Canaan, a different reason may be construed. Israelite at the time of settling in Canaan could not dislodge many Canaanite city-states that were located in the fertile plains. So, at the time of conquest, Israel first settled in mountainous places (Judg. 1:19, 21, 34) which were not fertile as the plains.³² Thus, Israel must be at the struggling phase to get the fertile plains at this historical period. Then, most of the Israelites being semi-nomads, might not have adapted to land cultivation and this is expected to present with some difficulties at the beginning.

At any rate, Elimelech chooses to migrate to Moab. His choice most probably is predicated on the fact that the low-lying region of that Transjordan was fertile and could be good both for pastoral and cultivation purposes (Gen. 13). His decision however proved fatal. He dies in Moab. Their two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth but both sons die too. So, it is only Naomi and her two daughters-in-law are remaining. This is a great misfortune for the family because they have no source of income. Unlike in Israel, Moab may not have support system for widows and orphans. Apart from the grief, which would naturally come after the loss of her husband and children, Naomi still faces uncertainties about her care in old age. Confronted with these hardships and having learnt that the famine in Judah has ceased, Naomi decides to return to her native home. She tries persuading her daughters-in-law to stay behind and remarry. While Orpah agrees, Ruth gives one of the most beautiful declarations that the Bible ever records in response; "Wherever you go, I will go: and where you lodge, I will lodge: your people shall be my people and your God my God" (1:16).

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem and it happens to be at the beginning of the harvest of barley. In (1:6), God visits His people and gives them

³² Eben Scheffler, *Politics in Ancient Israel*, 46.

bread. Naomi, together with Ruth, returns to Bethlehem hoping for, and finding, provision through Ruth's work of gleaning in the field, through Boaz's generous gifts, through Boaz's redemption of Ruth and Naomi's field, and finally through Obed, the son who holds the hope for future provision. The book begins with a famine but ends with abundance. It is also instructive that Ruth's marriage proposal occurs on a grain threshing floor. Not only does she return to Naomi after the marriage proposal with a promise of redemption but also with tangible evidence of provision. The use of the harvest cycle is also prevalent in Ruth. While the family tragedy is surrounded by famine, Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem when the famine has abated at the beginning of the barley harvest, giving a hint to the reader about the hope they have.³³ Elimelech migrates to Moab in search of "provision" where he loses his life and two sons. Naomi, the only survivor of the migrant team, comes back and with the support of Ruth, finds provision in the land they left!

Homegrown Economic Sustainability from the Book of Ruth

From the text of Ruth, Elimelech, in search of better livelihood, migrates to Moab. But the same land deserted relishes in abundance years later by the time his wife returns. This shows that the land is not without opportunities. Those who choose to stay back like Boaz and explore the land become men of substance while he dies in strange land. In similar vein, Nigeria as a 'land' is not the problem but the people's attitude towards cultivating the opportunities in the land. We will elucidate from some passages in the book of Ruth, how home-coming of Naomi (together with Ruth) proves beneficial and economically rewarding though the prosperity later enjoyed was worked for. The point of emphasis here is that the land of Bethlehem she earlier leaves with her family is not lacking in "prosperity" but there is the need to explore this through painstaking effort and commitment.

When she heard in Moab that Yahweh had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepare to return home from the field of Moab. (1:6)

³³ *A Literary Analysis of the Book of Ruth*. Accessed February 4, 2017 from <https://bible.org/article/literary-analysis-book-ruth>

First of all, we should note that in the days of the judges, Israel was under theocratic government. The charismatic leaders (judges) only surfaced in times of emergencies. There was no central government to champion economic course. Thus, government was largely Yahweh's affair. Yahweh promises a land flowing with milk and honey and Moses' emissaries prove this to be true (Num. 13:27). Here, Yahweh visits (פָּקַד) His people. The choice of פָּקַד which means to visit, muster, or 'pay attention to'³⁴ instead of יָצַד which means to help, aid, protect or (provide succour)³⁵ may suggest that Yahweh visits so as to muster the people to action. He moves them to take advantage of the land for their economic benefit. It may as well imply that He pays attention to their plight and then blesses their handiworks. Those who eventually take up the charge and work hard later discover how much is deposited 'in' the land. God, therefore, acts here acts in the capacity of government to provide basic infrastructural facilities needed to help the people explore the potentials of the land. In this lies a wakeup call on Nigerian government to make available the enabling environments which will attract people to stay back and harness the resources in the land for economic development.

In addition, the verse also underscores the importance of dependence on God in all plans for economic development. Since God created all things, ultimately, He is the provider of all things. There must have been in His superior wisdom, a design for economic prosperity of nations. Therefore, government and the people should recognise God factor in all economic plans.

*And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "let me go to the field and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." (2:2)
So, Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. (2:17)*

³⁴ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon* (Hendrickson publishers, 2004), 823.

³⁵ Brown, Driver and Briggs, 740.

In ancient Israel, one of the support systems for the widows is gleaning after the reapers (Lev 19:9; 23:22; Duet 24:19). Ruth takes advantage of this upon returning to Bethlehem. Ruth (perhaps coming to Bethlehem for the first time) finds that the land once deserted by her husband and parents-in-law is really house of food. Apparently, her view of the situation is not as hopeless as that of Naomi. The first point of lesson is that foreign principle or policy on economy should not always be adopted at the expense of local or traditional ones. Ruth, a foreigner is taught the economic norm of the land and it paid off. Therefore, not all IMF or World Bank economic policy should be adopted without consideration of some of our peculiarities. Another notable point in the passage is commitment, industriousness and painstakingness in the bid to better one's economy. Boaz's foremen are touched by Ruth's hard work (2:7). The whole turn of event is as a result of this singular action of Ruth which is noticed both by Boaz and his men.

An interesting plot of the narrative is that Ruth works behind *male reapers* (הַקְצָרִים) (2:3) instead of young girl (נַעֲרָה)³⁶ (2:8). This might be because she wants to get as much grain as possible. She chooses to directly work behind the men that cut the ripened standing grain rather than working behind women binding sheaves. Customarily, Ruth should have gleaned after the maiden workers. Violating this custom in all likelihood was due (in part) to ignorance but mostly to her industriousness and commitment. Boaz noticing her apparent ignorance of the custom granted her opportunity to continue gleaning in his field by telling her to “stay here with my servant girl” (2:8). Verse 9 emphasises it more: “watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls.” Ruth did not get it still. When she got home, she told her mother-in-law “He even said to me stay with my workers (הַקְצָרִים- male reapers) (2:21). Naomi realises her error and politely corrected her: “it will be good for you my daughter to go with his girls” (2:22).³⁷ After the first day, Ruth's plenteous

³⁶Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon*, 655. Further Shuchat, says Even though קצרים can include masculine and feminine, it's obvious from what proceeds that this is the meaning. R. B. Shuchat, “The use of symbolism and hidden messages in the book of Ruth.”

³⁷ Shuchat, 6-7

harvest surprised Naomi that she exclaims “where did you glean today?” if what a gleaner brings home on a day startles Naomi, then we can imagine what land owners must have gathered from the land once deserted on account of famine. This shows that hard work, commitment, and dedication, all of which Ruth embodies, are the bedrock of economic liberation.

In contrast, Nigerians’ attitude to work should adopt dedication and hard work exemplified by Ruth. Most civil servants operate with the mentality of *akii sise oba laagun* (one does not need to sweat over public service). Thus, lateness to work, leaving office before closing time and engaging in personal business in public office are all common destructive agents to the national economy.

Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. (2:18b)

Here is another passage providing pointer to one more factor that can enhance economy. Ruth’s action in bringing some food for her mother-in-law shows her concern for others. This virtue of concern for others is seriously lacking among many leaders in Nigeria. Corruption is believed to be one of (if not the chief) cause of the present economic anguish of the country. But corruption is an offshoot of greed. Just to mention an example of an occurrence, about ₦80 billion was traced to a former accountant General of the federation. This is just an example among many financial misappropriation, embezzlement and brazen fraudulent acts especially by those in government, corporate institutions, government agencies and other positions of authority. From this passage of the narrative, greed and self-centredness which provide context for corruption and financial misappropriation to thrive is roundly condemned.

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing (a man of substance or/and a man of valour) whose name was Boaz (2:1)

The above verse provides yet another factor that enhances a personal or national economic growth. This is seen in the personality and action of

Boaz. Boaz is introduced as a man of character and compassion. He goes to great lengths to help Ruth in her efforts. He instructs her to stay in his fields and to work with his maidens under the watchful eye of his men (2:8–9). He also tells her to partake of the water drawn for his workers, an important commodity to ease her desert-imposed thirst (2:9). He further invites her to partake of the meal he provides for his workers (cf. 2:14). Kerry Muhlestein describes the importance of the food she gets.³⁸ When Ruth receives such a meal, it must have served as a great physical and emotional boost. Moreover, Boaz secretly charges his workers to leave extra grain for Ruth (cf. 2:16). Thus, without her knowledge, her workload is made lighter and her production ability increased. All of Boaz's efforts prove extremely beneficial to Ruth.

The rich man Boaz, demonstrates decorum and good interpersonal relationship.³⁹ The combination of his warm personality, regard for due process, and propriety make for a good business manager. These may account for his accomplishment. What can be learnt from Boaz's life is good relationship with worker which gives emotional strength to his workers. Furthermore, his due process nature is likely to make accountability important in his business. Then his good relationship with worker means wages and incentives would be adequately taken care of. All these are amply needed in the socio-economic space of Nigeria in order to grow the economy.

One day, Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for..." (3:1)

In due course, Naomi wakes up from her slumber possibly through the actions of Ruth and Boaz. She eventually sees need to do something other than resigning to despair. Her decision is worth noting. Her decision is to provide (תַּנְחֵם). This is translated home, rest, or security in various Bible

³⁸ Muhlestein, Kerry. "Ruth, Redemption, Covenant, and Christ, in *the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*." *The 38th Annual BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center*, (Brigham Young University, 2009), <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/gospel-jesus-christ-old-testament/11-ruth-redemption-covenant-and-christ>

³⁹ The way he greets his workers, telling Ruth of a nearer *go'el* and inviting the elders to handle the redemption case 2:4; 3:12; 4:1ff; are demonstration of this.

versions. But the meaning of the word is ‘quiet’ implying figuratively, a place of rest or home a cognate of this word is translated ‘quiet waters’ in (Psalm 23:2).⁴⁰ Here we see Naomi desiring a permanent home for Ruth to rest from toils of years of her widowhood where she can be made well (רַחֵם). This passage reveals Naomi’s foresight. Harvest will soon be over and no matter how much they make now, they will soon be in need again. Thus, her action is a plan ahead and “savings for the rainy day.” This reminds the reader of Joseph’s economic plan in Egypt where abundant savings were made in the years of plenty. That is foresight.

Further, the passage stimulates exploration of opportunities for economic self-reliance. A marriage to Boaz will not only revolutionise the financial state of Naomi and Ruth, but it also holds the possibility of continued financial ease for both of them. So, Naomi calls attention to exploring that opportunity. Most of Nigeria natural resources have not been explored, and sometimes they are being illegally mined. There are many untapped opportunities in agriculture, technology, local manufacturing, and mineral deposits. Even most of the by-products of petroleum refining process are said to be lost to the refining nations. So, Nigeria has to learn to explore all economic opportunities with clear foresight.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The paper advocates an inward search of solution to Nigeria’s socio-economic challenges in agreement with Dada’s submission that ‘the problems that face Africa are symptoms of a more profound problem, the solution to which cannot come from outside in any form.’⁴¹ Using Ruth narrative, it argues that instead of looking for aid from outside, Nigerians should look inward.

The book of Ruth demonstrates that the deserted land of Bethlehem on account of famine is the same land of bountiful harvest by the time the migrant returns. As such, the problem is not with the land, but essentially

⁴⁰ Williams L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 201.

⁴¹ Adekinle O. Dada, “Harnessing Traditional Yoruba Communal Values and Ideals for Self-reliance and Development.” *Orita: Ibadan journal of religious studies* xli, no. ii (2009), 42.

the people's attitude. Therefore, attitudinal change to work leading to dedication, commitment, hard-work selflessness, accountability and altruism are recommended in order to revamping and boost Nigeria economy. Ironically, most emigrants survive through hours of hard labour in menial jobs. If the measure of effort and dedication given to jobs abroad is given in Nigeria, the economy would be better and living condition of average Nigerians would improve considerably.

The narrative of migration in the book of Ruth engenders a call on both the government and the people of Nigeria. It calls for harnessing the environmental and natural resources in agriculture, mining, human capacity and skills, to build sustainable economy. The paper also asserts that certain virtues such as commitment, hard-work, dedication, foresight, selflessness and recognition of God's supremacy, are active ingredients for the economic rejuvenation.

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