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RUNNING HEAD: Exploring how social networks contribute to African immigrants' ability to procure a sustainable livelihood in New York City

Exploring how social networks contribute to African immigrants' ability to procure a sustainable livelihood in New York City

Richmond Opoku Donyina

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Master of Arts in Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, U.S.A.

May 2017

Advisor: Dr. Bruce Dayton

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Date: 04/06/2019

Abstract

This research explores the effects of social networks on the ways that African immigrants in New York City secure, and sustain their livelihoods. Through lines of inquiry including social capital, livelihood resources, and economic activities, this research explores possible livelihood outcomes of Africans immigrants in New York City in relation to their social networks.

By exploring themes through case studies of immigrants from different countries on the African continent, this research illustrates how becoming embedded in social networks in ones' geographical jurisdiction widens an individual's social capital, which in turn contributes to the probability of that individual in securing and holding a job and experiencing less significant economic shocks.

There is a high possibility that when a person moved from their country of origin to a new geographical area, their social ties, ethnic linguistic and cultural traits, as well as the opportunity for early labor market will be diminish. Many African immigrants immigrate and end up in areas that are friendly to their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traits, which is often areas with other minority groups. The interviews and focus group discussion provided an opportunity for participants to express themselves about how social networks have contributed to their means of living in New York City, how they were able to adopt to the new culture as new comers in the United States, and how they managed to secured and maintained their livelihood in New York City.

Keywords: Social Networks, Sustainable Livelihood, Social Capital, Africa, Immigrants

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this paper to my father, Mr. Ben Opoku Donyina, and my dear mother, Victoria Korankye, for their financial, emotional, social support and prayers during my basic and tertiary education in Ghana and the United States.

I want to acknowledge the support of the following people in supporting me here in the United States: Ms. Kathleen Rucker (Brooklyn International High School Principal), Mr. Stephen Baffoe, Ms. Cecilia Johnson, Mr. Emmanuel K. Agyekum, Mr. Bruce Dayton (Advisor at SIT Graduate Institute), and my lovely wife Alison Opoku Donyina. All I can say right now is thank you for being my personal counselors and motivators in reaching this far.

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Introduction

This research explores the effects of social networks on the way that African immigrants secure and sustain their livelihood in New York City, one of the biggest cities in the United States of America. By using case studies, I hope to illustrate that becoming embedded in social networks in ones' geographical jurisdiction widens an individual's social capital, which in turn contributes to the probability of that individual in securing and holding a job and experiencing less significant economic shocks. By using indicators such as social capital, livelihood resources, and economic activities, this research explores possible livelihood outcomes of Africans immigrants in New York City in relation to their social networks. The completion of these case studies will highlight examples of how building community social ties with family, friends, and organization can essentially contribute to successful economic and social development for African immigrants in urban areas like New York City.

As a new African immigrant, this research is of personal interest and literature describing specific outcomes of social networks for these groups are also lacking. According to U.S. immigration figures, since 1990 more Africans have voluntary arrived in the United State than the total 1807 slaves trafficking in the United State (Roberts, 2005). Roberts argues that New York State draws most of the immigrants, and of those many come from Nigeria and Ghana, which are among the top 20 sources of immigrants to New York City.

Host societies of immigrants often profit and benefit when immigrants are unorganized, insecure and deprived of political rights (Freeman, 2015). However, social networks can support immigrant success. Human social networks can be defined as the network of individuals such as friends, acquaintances, and coworkers connected by interpersonal relationships. For a person to be part of a specific social network, that fellow must be willing to practice mutual respect, and

appreciate and understand interdependence of humanity. Social network analysis has also received growing attention in various academic fields studying social relations among individuals and institutions.

Research Questions

This research seeks to explore the following questions for African immigrants in New York City who come from different countries and have different educational backgrounds:

- How do Human Social Networks help African Immigrants to secure a Sustainable Livelihood in New York City?
- What types of social networks do African Immigrants in New York City become part of?
- What do African immigrants in these communities report on the benefits of membership in these networks?
- To what extent do these social networks lead to economic benefits in terms of livelihood sustainability?

Literature Review

By exploring the literature about African immigration to New York City, including the challenges they face, as well as social networks, this research is framed within themes revealed from the current literature.

History of African Immigrants Coming to NYC

New York City's workforce is made up of 43 percent of immigrants and more than 150 nationalities can be found in NYC (DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2015). Northern, Central and South Bronx neighborhoods are made up with people of similar background and promote social contact and employment opportunities for its community members. During the 1940s, around thirty-two thousand immigrants entered US annually with approximately 21% of those immigrants settling

in New York City (Cordero-Guzman, 2005). This number increased significantly in the 1960s to an average of 57,557 per year, then doubled to 112,598 annually by the 1980s. However, because of changes to immigration and welfare laws in 1996, legal immigration to New York City decreased to around 89,000 (Cordero-Guzman, 2005).

As at 1970, two-thirds of New York City's immigrants were from Europe, but as of 2013, it had reduced to 15 percent, and the largest groups of the immigrant population in the city came from Latin America, Asians and immigrants from the Caribbean (DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2015). More recently, according to immigration figures since 1990, more Africans have immigrated to the US than the total who disembarked in chains before the US outlawed international slaves trafficking in 1807 as slaves (Roberts, 2005). Roberts argued that New York State draws the most African immigrants; in fact, Nigeria and Ghana are listed among the top twenty sources of immigrants to New York City in the present era (Roberts, 2005). Bohanan and Curtin (1995) highlighted that the median date for the arrival of America's African ancestors started early, about 1780, through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, while the 1890s represent the median for immigrants of European ancestry (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006). However, the first movement of African-born immigrants to the United States (not related to slavery) dates back in the 1970s and included mostly refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia, and intensified in the 1990s (Roberts, 2005).

Roberts cited the 1970 census figures with the proportion of blacks at about 1.7 million residents in the United States that describe their ancestry as sub-Saharan, and those with legal documentation were arriving at the rate of about 50,000 per year. Some scholars estimated that on the eve of the 1970 Census, the non -English population comprising largely of black Africans accounted for three percent of the total population at the time (Fogleman, 1992; Rumbaut, 1994; Spiller, 1911). Presently, those born in Africa are estimated at about four percent of New York

City's immigrant population (Campbell, 2014). Within the Northern, Central and South Bronx, after English and Spanish, the third most widely spoken languages are easily identifiable African languages (Campbell, 2014).

Immigration is not a new phenomenon for Africans; in the olden days, people migrated with the motives of searching for better and new land and pastures, for trade and conquest. For example, the estimated population in Mali is around 8-9 million but about three million Malians are in other countries most notably Cote D'Ivoire, Gabon, Zaire, South African, France, with growing numbers entering the USA and European countries (McDowell & De Haan, 1997). Movement of people have been intensified as a result of liberalization, macro-economic reforms, decentralization and food security.

Immigrants have different motivating factors to their decision to relocate. Scholars McDowell and De Haan, (1997) cited Todaro's argument, which depicts that immigrants act as individuals and thus, before immigrants migrate, they take into consideration the expected probability of employment at the host country; "which implied that a personal cost benefit analysis took place in the prospective migrant's mind" (Todaro 1969, Harris & Torado 1970). Other scholars also argue otherwise. According to Stark (1991), as cited by McDowell & De Haan, (1997). It is not exclusively the individual that decides about movement to another country, but rather the decisions are made within the context of the family and the household. For many Africans who have migrated, issues such as instability, lack of economic opportunity, fair of prosecution among others are some of the reasons that have mobilized people to immigrate.

Challenges facing African immigrants in NYC

One's environment is a major factor in the personal development of an individual, and where a person is raised can determine the social and economic factors that he/she will be exposed to.

Physical context can affect opportunities for sustainable livelihood. In New York City, many immigrants live in areas where social infrastructure, better education, and opportunities are inadequate. When people moved from their country of origin to a new destination, there is a likelihood that their ethnic linguistic and cultural traits, as well as the opportunity for early labor market will be minimize (Portes, 1996). Many African immigrants immigrate and end up in areas that are friendly to their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traits, which is often areas with other minority groups.

Because of residential segregation between the rich and the poor in New York City, minorities, which includes Africans, experience difficulties that have long-term impacts on educational attainment and find future labor markets challenging. Most of these minority groups are left in the central business district or the inner-city. Zhou (1997) highlighted Davis' (1993) research that found that poor African-Americans who moved from the inner-city neighborhood to other neighborhoods did better in school and in the labor market than those left behind. With the unequal educational and economic activities on the part of the minority, it limits changes in their life and traps them in ghettos, which leads to class division and further reduces their chances for upward mobility (Zhou,1997). With little information about job opportunities and connections, certification requirements and inadequate skills to function effectively at work as newcomers in NYC, most African immigrants end up taking on the more menial works abandoned by the native-born Americans with greater economic opportunities, which in effect has direct impact on their livelihoods in New York City.

Livelihood and why it matters

Livelihood becomes “sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide a permanent livelihood opportunity

for the next generation and contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term” (Knutson, 2006). Sustainable livelihood creation translates into the creation of livelihoods that empower individuals to earn enough money to provide for basic amenities such as food, clothing and shelter. In determining whether person has a sustainable livelihood, it is important to note if the livelihood can recover from stresses and shocks.

To understand livelihood sustainability, Scoones (1998) argued that having employment for a certain period of time within the year predicts factors such as income/production as an aspect of livelihood. Scoones found working 200 days a year appear to be used as a minimum level to create a livelihood. A person without sustainable livelihood will be like a fish out of water in any jurisdiction. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach which is a method of analyzing and changing the lives of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage puts people at the center of development work and it attempts to understand socio-economic development and resource management from human perspective. This approach recognize that everyone has abilities and assets that can be developed to help improve their lives.

Apart from the geopolitical and other factors that force people to move from their country of birth to different geographical area, the essential reason for sustained immigration has been the labor needs of the U.S. economy (Portes, 1996). In assessing livelihood, poverty reduction is a key measure. Previously, railroad construction, mining and heavy manufacturing were growth sectors that attracted immigrant workers but in the current era now agriculture, urban personnel and business services play similar role (Portes, 1996). Johny, Wichmann, and Swallow (2017) argued that households located near urban centers, mines, or plantations tend to have greater

opportunities to earn income in those sectors, while households located near towns, highways, or market centers may have greater opportunities to market raw or processed food.

Livelihood building strategies that can be adopted by government, individuals, organizations and philanthropist include paid and unpaid work, accumulation and investments, borrowing, food production, income enterprise, community managing, cooperation and changing in consumption patterns, sharing and social networking. The concept of a livelihood system suggests an integrated household economy with individual members who participate in market or nonmarket economic activities. According to MacFayden and Corcoran (2002), people in Africa and Asia's livelihoods are typically not made up of one activity. As such, many African immigrants in the New York City choose to diversify their income sources and absorb seasonal labor shortages or leverage limited financial capital.

Benefits and cost of Social Networks

When people invest in building personal relationships and networks within their environment, it connects them to individuals who they might not directly related to but rather enhances their connection and social capital or trust in that environment. Social capital can be gained at the individual or macro level. The more you know people the more likelihood of getting help from them when the need arise. The definition of social capital as an asset is embedded in the relationship of individuals, community, networks or societies (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1990; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Walker et al., 1997). Unlike other types of capital such as human, physical and financial capital, social capital cannot be traded in the open market but can change when rewards, relationships change or cease to exist. Granovetter's (1973, 1985) as cited in Leana III, & Van Buren (1999) argued that individuals can easily develop their social capital by pursuing numerous and strategically positioned "weak ties" with others. According to Leana III,

& Van Buren (1999) the benefit of social capital can be group into two: public goods facets, or the alternative approach as a private goods. Some definitions of social capital are as characteristics of a social unit, rather than that of an individual actor and those who focus on individual accrued social asset such as prestige, educational credentials, and social clubs (e.g., Belliveau et al.,1996; Useem & Karabel, 1986). Tilly (1978) & Oberschall (1973) argument was cited by Marwell, Oliver, & Prahl, (1988) which explained why mobilization is more likely to be effective when the members of the beneficiary population are linked by social ties than when there is high heterogeneity in resources and interest. Simply put, social networks matter most when decisions are interdependent.

According to Borgatti (1998), a network can be defined as a set of actors such as persons or a set of ties that connect pairs of actors, example friendship ties. Potts, et al (2008) proposed the extent to which both demand and supply operate in the market when customers share similar goals, norms and beliefs. He defined social network in relation to the market as a connected group of individuals that make production and consumption decisions based on the actions(signals) of other members on the social network. They defined social as the ability of one agent to connect to and interpret information generated by other agents, and to communicate in turn while network means that these are specific connections and not an abstract aggregate group such as a nation, a people, or the like.

The positive effects of being part of a social network that has benefits on livelihood sustainability implies that a larger share of resources should be devoted to strengthening those network (Johny, Wichmann, & Swallow, 2017). The level of connection an individual has at their work place, neighborhood and in the community has a significant effect on that person. In any organization or community, the quality of relationships in turn impact on how that

organization or community function. Dutton & Heaphy (2003) argued that the connection quality of individuals is either life-giving or life-depleting, thus “ like a healthy blood vessel that connects parts of our body, which means a high -quality connection between two people allows the transfer of vital nutrients; it is flexible, strong and resilient” (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, p.1). People can easily connect as a result of a short time encounter and can be develop and change over a long time period. Hallowell (1999) as cited by Dutton & Heaphy, (2003) highlighted that a few minutes conversation can make all the difference in the World if both parties participate actively. Thus, parties involve need to set aside what they are doing, bring their attention to bear which will also make the person feel the energy and respond in kind naturally.

How Social Networks in urban areas have or have not become part of the lives and experience of African immigrants

As globalization is widening and civilization is increasing, most 21st century immigrants have networks, activities, and pattern of life that encompass both their home and host societies. Their lives, the connection and integration of immigrants in their new homes cut across national boundaries and combine two societies into a single social field. This is what Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, (1992) has classified as a new concept know as transnationalism thus, when an immigrant builds social fields that link together their country of origin and their host country. These new types of immigrants can also be classified as trans-immigrants. Those that fall within the trans immigrants concept strive to maintain multiple relations, families, economic, social, organizational, religious and political that cross borders (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). These people develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc-Szanton, n.d.). Most African immigrants in the New York City have formal and informal associations or meet occasionally as members who are from a particular country diaspora to discuss the situation/happenings in their

country of origin. Many African leaders have been in the western world for quite a long time and have been involved in both local, domestic and international politics, as well as associations of both host country and country of origin. For example, the first president of the Republic of Ghana, Osagyefo Doctor Kwame Nkrumah, received his B.A and M.A degrees from Lincoln Theological Seminary and the University of Pennsylvania in the U.S. respectively. While pursuing his twelve years abroad education, he also developed his political philosophy, organized other diasporic pan-Africanists before returning to then British colony, Gold Coast (now modern-day Ghana), to begin his political career as an advocate of independence. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah then became the first prime minister and president of Ghana, having led Ghana to independence from Britain in 1957. Jomo Kenyatta was another leader in Africa that had international exposure. In 1929, he travelled to London and studied at Moscow's Communist University of the Toilers of the East. He also did some courses at University College London and London School of Economics. After he returned to Kenya in 1946, he was able to lobby for independence from British colonial rule. Even in the present day, country representatives usually get in touch with their citizens in diaspora by visiting various associations and meetings. These government officials try to motivate and urge the diaspora community to embark on transnational activities by investing their foreign earning into their home country economy.

Having said that, some of the prevailing challenges that immigrants in NYC encounter as non-native of one of the biggest cities in the United States include long-term joblessness, the weakening of social networks at home, breaking of social ties due to distance, difficulty of traditional form of insurance and public assistance to check or neutralize hardship and isolation this is what many African groups or associations strive to reduce.

These challenges are subjective as it depends on the immigrant's citizenship status, length of time in the United States, English fluency of that immigrant and other factors. There is enormous difference between the behavior of people living in cities, towns and country. Most African immigrants' way of life radically changes in relation to their tribal customs. Most of them adopt the social situation that exist in the location they found themselves. Historically, in Africa, there is a feeling of belonging, identity and support from community members. People in Africa have their way of responding to disaster and emergency. Understanding the process of inclusion and exclusion in diversified geographical areas can highlight the positive and negative impact on mental and physical health. Having social interaction with people who share similar belief and norms, sharing limited resources together and children from similar background playing together enhance the important element of community life in Africa. These values carry over into the diaspora for immigrants abroad. Social Networks that recruit members based on certain characteristic can foster division and negative mental health states for those who may be excluded from the benefits of community membership and resources (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2007). Most African immigrants intend to live close to their nationals while in abroad because the housing search process often relies heavily on information and help from friends and relatives. When someone becomes lonely for long time or feels excluded from his community for a while, it might foster anxiety, depression and feeling of isolation. This in turn can produces a willingness to break laws and if possible, engage in violent behavior (Jankowski, 1991; MaCall, 1995; Shakur & Scott, 1994).

How Social Networks may enhance livelihood sustainability

Social capital, which can be enhanced through formation and participating in social network, describes circumstances in which individuals can use membership in groups and networks to secure benefit Sobel, (2002). Individuals can transform social capital accrued through social networks and connections into conventional economic gains. These can be realized through whom they know or connections with common group members. However, in the United States, these connections are declining. According to Putnam (1995, 2000), Americans are now less likely to join community organizations and visit friends than they once were. Thus, in percentage wise, the population living alone has almost doubled in recent decades 13% in 1960 to 25% in 1997 (U.S Bureau of the Census, 1998). Sobel (2002) argued that the decline in the level of participation in the United States has the possibility of threatened the quality of democracy and the quality of life in the States. When there is less togetherness in the neighborhoods, it might have implications on trust that people earned in that particular location.

Devereux (2001) highlighted alternative intervention adopted by households in rural areas to address livelihood insecurity. These according to him was grouped into three thus, private ('coping strategies' and community support mechanisms), public (social protection) and market-based (insurance)

In Africa when there is drought, food shortage or food price inflation, households are affected differently depending on the household access to alternative income source, relative wealth and support from friends, family members and social networks. The table below indicates livelihood risks of some individuals.

Table 1: Livelihood Risk of individuals

Nature of Risk	People at Risk
Crop Production Risks (drought, Pests, & others)	Smallholders with little income diversification & limited access to improved technology (e.g. HYVs) Landless farm laborer
Agricultural trade risks (disruption of exports or imports)	Smallholders who specialize in an export crop Small-scale Pastoralists Poor households that depend on imported food
Food price risks (large, sudden price rises)	Poor, net food-purchasing households, including deficit food producers in rural areas
Employment risks	Wage-earning households & informal sector employees (in- peri-urban areas &, when there is a sudden crop Production failure, in rural areas)
Health risk (e.g. infectious diseases resulting in labor-productivity decline)	Entire communities, but especially households that cannot afford preventives or curative care, & vulnerable members of these households
Political and policy failure risks	Households in war zones & areas of civil unrest Households in low-potential areas not connected to growth centers via infrastructure
Demographic risks (individual risks affecting groups)	Women, especially those without education Female-headed households Children at weaning age The aged

Source: Von Braun et al. (1992: 17) as cited by Devereux, (2001).

Though the above table highlights risks that often affect rural populations, many of the above identified issues cross over into what is experienced by the urban poor, even here in the United States.

Methodology

The research includes a desk review of existing documents, federal and state Census data of New York City, as well as a focus group and semi structured interviews with African immigrants working or schooling in the New York City.

The selection of participants includes adults from Africa who are over 18 years and reside within the five boroughs in New York City for at least six months. The sample of the study involved both male and female, first generation African immigrants who have second generation children and are currently residing in one of the five boroughs in New York City and either working in the formal or informal sector of the economy such as, government officials, for profit or nonprofit organization workers, business owners, entrepreneurs, students and manual laborers. Since most of New Yorkers' livelihoods are not based on natural resources as compared to the livelihood of rural folks in Africa, my attention was not on the environmental resource base sustainability to livelihood but rather the service, industry, and other formal and informal sectors of the New York City economy. It was a fact that some of the participants might have come from rural and sub urban areas in Africa but now living in the biggest city in the States, there is a high potential of livelihood change. In all, six semi structured interviews were conducted and a focus group discussion. The interview and focus group discussion participants were all currently living or had previously stayed in one of the five boroughs in New York City for more than a year. Participants were selected through my professional contacts during my practicum at the Department of Education in New York City, and my personal networks in my locality in the city. I approached these individuals with the request to participate in the study based on my knowledge of their backgrounds. I also utilized snowball recruiting strategies through recommendations from friends, relatives and colleagues working with other departments who knew people who they thought would be interested to participate in the study.

With the intention to make the research represent all the geographical regions in African continent, this research included people originally from the Southern, Northern, Eastern and Western parts of Africa but currently living in New York City. One participant who was

Sudanese represented Eastern African immigrants in NYC. Four participants represented the West African region, and they hailed from Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal. I was able to recruit two Namibians to represent Southern Africa, but unfortunately one withdrew from the interview as a result of tight work schedule. Out of these six interviewees, I was able to interview only one female, who was also a leader for a women's group in Brooklyn. To address this inequality and make the research reflect on all gender outlook, I decided to organize a focus group discussion with a women's association in Brooklyn. This focus group discussion was made up of five participants who have been in the States for more than a decade and were either business owners or a housewife. From the six interviews that I conducted, two were social network/association leaders who have been involve in the operations of community work and mobilization of Africans in the city for a mutual goal. The interviews were conducted via phone calls or in person and the focus group discussion provided an opportunity for participants to express themselves about how social network has contributed to their means of living in New York City, how they were able to adopt to the new culture as new comers in the State and how they managed to secured and maintained their livelihood in New York City.

With the hectic New York City lifestyle, the busy schedule of potential participants and the researcher, I intended to target five participants and conduct a semi-structured interview which lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour. I also recruited five participants to attend a forty-five-minute focus group discussion and share personal stories on whether they are part of any social network in New York City and if because of being part of social network has influenced their livelihood sustainability or their living standard in New York City. My data collection method was qualitative data.

Themes that I expected to emerge from the literature review, interviews and focus group discussion was created. Most of my participants agreed to be recorded during the interview and after that I transcribed it for my findings and the analysis. After transcription of the interview, I intended to upload it to a quantitative analysis software such as NVivo or Dedoose to recode themes across the interviews but did not pursue that since my research participants were few and themes were easily identified during the transcriptions. Based on the literature that I reviewed on social networks, livelihood sustainability, challenges of immigrants and my preposition that being embedded in social networks has the potentials to enhance livelihood sustainability and reduce its stress and shocks, I identify some themes prior to conducting interviews and focus groups, and added to these inductively during the analysis of the data. These themes and topics, which I coded by hand in Word, included social networks, sustainable livelihood, benefits and costs of social networks, immigrants' livelihoods and shocks and challenges experienced by immigrants in New York City.

After the analysis of the data, the study depicted how African immigrants appreciate the importance of social network in New York City and how it has help in shaping their livelihood, adopting to the new culture, and their logic of being part of a community as Africans in one of the biggest cities in the World. I am hopeful that this study will be helpful for new comers who are from Africa but have decided to settle in New York City since the findings and the conclusion highlight some of the influential African communities and organizations that are available and promoting social network/capital for African immigrants in New York City.

There were some limitations in relation to time, selection of participants from various regions of Africa that will make the study reflect in the way African continent foresee social networking and cost involved in getting in touch with participants. Considering participants busy schedule

with limited available time to effectively participate in the study, I decided not to use one or two boroughs in New York City but open the study area to cover the whole New York City for easy recruitment of research participants and identify committed African communities in NYC. This led to high transportation cost for the study but enhanced the research findings and widened my social network as a new comer and also as an African immigrant in New York City. Using one or two boroughs for the study might have limit my ability to also identify most of the committed African community and organization operating to foster African immigrants' social capital and social network in New York City.

Having said that, another limitation that emerged was my ability as a new comer in New York City to identify all the vibrant African groups and organizations that are vigorously operating to promote social network and livelihood of African Immigrants in New York City considering the time frame and the total population of Africans in New York City. It is a fact that not involving all this groups and communities operating here in New York exclude some organizations and individuals who are championing the good course of Africans.

Research Findings and Analysis

This research was to explore the effects of social networks on the way African immigrants secure, and sustain their livelihood in New York City, the biggest city in the USA. With my preposition that becoming embedded in social networks in one's geographical jurisdiction widens an individual's social capital, which in turn contributes to the probability of that individual in securing and holding a job and less significant economic shocks. Using indicators such as social capital, livelihood resources, and economic activities, I intended to research possible effects with livelihood outcome of new comers of Africans in the New York City in relation to their social networks. With the purpose of the project as to highlight how social

networking helps African immigrants to secure a sustainable livelihood in York City, the primary research question for the project was: “How do social networks contribute to African immigrants’ ability to procure a sustainable livelihood?”

The project sought to compare the experience of different African immigrants living in New York City (Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, Staten Island and Manhattan). The research was designed to ascertain the economic, social, political and cultural contribution of social networking towards the procurement of African immigrant’s livelihood in New York City and their neighborhood. Through participatory involvement, participants were able to depict whether they are part of any social network in New York City and also tell their story about how their involvement in various communities has positively or negatively enhanced their means of living, cultural beliefs, and norms and sociopolitical contributions in New York City and their home country.

Most of my participants in this research have been in the States for more than a decade while others were also new in the States. This was a way to know how participants lives has been change for a certain period of time and commitment of individuals in patronizing and participating in various social networks in New York City. Below were the topics that I delved into during the semi structured interviews and focus group discussion.

Social Networks and Sustainable Livelihoods

In knowing whether participants join social network because they have secure livelihood or they think it will help enhance they livelihood, one participant by name Kaita, who have been in the United States since 1992, a retail shop owner in Brooklyn, which basically sells African products in Bushwick area, that serves most of the African population living in Brooklyn and also a leader of an African women Association in the area said during her interview that,

“You cannot be on welfare as an African immigrant and it is the responsibilities of parents to show their kids the path to know why they are not supposed to be on welfare”. Base on this perception in mind, Kaita and other family and friends started an organization called Al-Firdaous Association to empower their members and children especially the girls within the age of 18 years. This she believes will enhance the transition of their culture to their future generation, organize program for members to sit, eat their local dish together for community building and support one another during weddings and baby showers. Members of this association also pay \$10 to \$20 monthly dues and make contributions during Ramadan to send food items to some poor families back home in Africa. The women association is hoping to own a big center where they can organize baby showers, weddings, meetings and weekly educational program for their kids and members learning English as a second language by their monthly contributions and donations.

A Sudanese immigrant who is a Muslim and came to the United States through diversity lottery in 2017 recounted his story about social networks. I was surprised to hear the eagerness and the preparedness of Salam to be part of the leaders and enhance the operations of the Sudanese Association in New York City. From Salam view point, most Sudanese appreciate and support Social Network, but he thinks about 40-45 percent of Sudan immigrants in the New York State don't really care about what the current Sudanese Association is doing. “Yes, about 40-45 percent of our people don't care they just go to work, go home and sleep”. From his projection, Sudan immigrant's population in the New York City area is around 2000 -3000 but people who usually participate in their program will be around 1200. From his story, there is not direct coloration between the association and procurement of livelihood of its members but added that one of his friends from the same country advise him to apply for the work he is currently doing.

The first question I asked Aminou a Togolese and a refugee settler who has been in the United States for about 14 years was that from his perspective, do African immigrants in the New York City appreciate and support Social Networks? The answer he gave was “Absolutely.” According to him, the Bronx where he has been staying since coming to New York City, is made up of huge African community and some of his childhood friends are also in the Bronx area. From his view point living in the Bronx make him feel close to home which also make it possible for him to have positive encounters with people who share similar norms, beliefs, culture and aspirations in New York City.

Mega, a Senegalese immigrant, was another participant who believes in Social Networks. He is a Greyhound bus driver and came to the states since 1998 with a tourist visa and with the intention of securing a better life. Mega believe being part of community always help some people in need because” unity is always better than just living as an individual.”

Most organizations or social networks that I engaged during my research are usually formed to support members during emergency situations, to help members to socialize and also enhance their local cultural adoption but Mega believes that joining social networks can help members in securing jobs since some of these organizations such as workforce one and others mainly assists members in finding a job. For example, Pulaar speaking association is non-profit, social and cultural organization created in 1990 after a Senegalese was shot in Brooklyn in 1989. This organization was formed as a result of difficulties they went through in dealing with the registration of death and certificate, transportation of the body to the decease country and the cost they incurred during the funeral rite prompted them to form the association. The president of the association Mr. Aliou noted that there is an election for leaders every two years and to qualify to be a member, a registration fee of \$20 and \$5 monthly fees/dues must be paid by

members. The organization is having its own building that is serving as their headquarters and recreational center for its members in Brooklyn. The president of this Association noted that in New York state there are three branches of the association, one in New York City, Buffalo and Syracuse. At the office I saw pictures of past and current presidents of the organization and some members were also present at the center chatting, eating together, and drinking their local drink after they close from their various work. There is an ordinary assembly meeting and General Assembly meeting for members of Pulaar speaking association. The Ordinary Assembly meeting happens first Sunday of every month while the General Assembly meeting is a yearly meeting. There are delegates in each branch/ chapter and during the monthly meeting they present members monthly dues to the headquarters.

Benefit and Cost of Social Networks

The benefits of being part of social networks fall under the themes of financial, social, political, and cultural. During the focus group discussion with Al-Firdaous women group, one participant highlighted that they get to know different people, learn from them and can get help through those people but when members are not honest and good people that believes and foster the realization of the organizational goal, it makes the organization ineffective. In my interview with Rim a Namibian, who came to New York City in 2001, he recalls his difficulties in adjusting to the new culture and completing his college education. He also highlighted some of the support he received from family members during difficult times. "I did not know anything from scratch so coming here to meet a familiar face that already know the area, knows the culture, knows where to go, where not to go, what to say, what not to say was a relief, it made my moves seamless or smooth". Rim added that it is very important to connect to the family once a while, "going to your uncle, cousin, or brother house and you having all the Africans and speaking your

language, drinking and eating your favorite meals from back home almost pull you out of the New York City hectic lifestyle, it just pull you back to your childhood lifestyle and you just forget about everything for a moment which is one of those well needed thing as immigrant”.

In analyzing Rim interview, he chooses family as his social network in the States and not a registered member of any association but usually get help from the family in emergency situation. There is a family WhatsApp’s platform where members from Rim family share information and in terms of livelihood support, he remembers during his college time getting summer jobs from his uncle’s organization and made a lot of money considering his education background and compering to his colleagues who were working at McDonald.

Salam believes that being around people with similar background make it easy to connect since issues like stereotype and some bad believes among few ignorant host country populaces that all Muslims are terrorist is fractional. There is also a deliberate attempt by parents to involves their kids into the Sudanese association which is fostering understanding, appreciation, connection and awareness of their local culture in abroad. The political opportunities that was emerging as at the time I was conducting the interview with a Sudanese immigrant was the mobilization of foreign support by the Sudanese Association to facilitate the current regime change in Sudan through a peacefully demonstrate at the United Nations office in New York City on 24th December 2018 and another one in front of the White house in Washington DC on 1st January 2019. These he believes will draw the attention of the World and the international communities to support the current regime change in Sudan. There is a weekend school that was establish by almost all the association I interviewed, thus, Pulaar, Al-Firdaous and Sudanese Association to educate their kids about their culture, religion and other life skills that they believed are important to their generation. Some members of these associations usually volunteer during the

weekend to teach their kids their home language, religious beliefs and life skills. The monthly dues which range from \$10 to \$20 is used to buy books, supplies, cultural exhibition and the running of these schools.

Aminou noted that some Africans he personally known reported that they learned how to transfer money back home through their involvement in African organizations promoting social network in New York City. In relation to political advantage, Aminou highlighted that there is Togolese diaspora association in all the 50 States and members in all the 50 States strive to mobilize themselves and contribute resources for the development of Togoland. As one body they advocate for the betterment of their Nationals. Apart from the above, one intriguing point Aminou raised was financial support from close friends. This to him is called “Susu.” Thus, the “Susu” is made up of 10 close friends from Togo who have been in contact for a while since moving to New York City. Each member contributes \$500 every month and there is a rotational saving of that total amount, thus, one person receives the total amount at the end of each month. This to him is one of the strategies he and his friends have adopted to embark on tangible investment here in the States or back home.

The president of Pulaar speaking association also added that there is no clear path of employment for members, but members benefit when there is emergency situation, like when a member is sick and finds it difficult to pay for the medical bills, when there is a need to assist family members of decease, at times Pulaar speaking association pay the transportation cost of a members that will accompany the corpse to the decease country. Other benefits he mentions was their annual African cultural festival which members use to display their culture and tradition.

Immigrant livelihoods

In determining whether participants have change their livelihood since moving to New York City, Kaita admitted that she came to the United States as a visitor and later change her status and started to push her career as a hair dresser which was more profitable than what she is currently doing but decided to change that profession so that she can have time for her family. With her previous experience as someone who used to help her parents in managing their provision store way back home, she thought that having an African market in the Brooklyn area which will serve the African community will be helpful and also get more time for her family/kids. “I was having about 10 apprentice and was making more money than what I am doing now but less time for my kids during the time I was owning my hair dressing shop. I am now taking care of my children while doing my business”. She again added that she has never go places asking for help since she came to the United States.

To know participants views on how they determine when someone is having a sustainable livelihood, Kaita defined, a person with a sustainable livelihood in New York City as “someone who lives in his or her own house, work or willing to work, don’t see him or her do nonsense, schooling and take good care of his or her self. She added with an advice that to be better in life in New York City, is either you are working or schooling.”

Aminou also defined a person with sustainable livelihood as “one with a job, regular income, people to connect with and ability to get more information. From his view, information is key to succeed in the USA and having people to educate you about how America works and maintaining your regular income as an immigrant can be your safety net. A person having a sustainable livelihood, according to Rim, is someone on their own for at least one to two years, have a job that is indispensable, e.g. nurse, working for gov’t institutions, cable company etc.

and not always going to friends and family members for assistance. Salam introduced annual income and argued that for him to classify a person as having a sustainable livelihood in New York City, that fellow must be working with the city or any well-organized institution, thus as a worker in the department of housing, health, education, or in any government /private agency and receive at least \$75,000 annually. He said he will also consider if that person is having a house, his/her own car and open line.

Shocks and Challenges experienced by African Immigrants

Africans unlike other immigrants from Asia, Europe and the Caribbean, continues to face financial, cultural, assimilation, language, social and other challenges in their host countries. These immigrational challenges can emerge in many forms thus, payment of rent/mortgages, school fees, medical bills, insurance, loneliness, neglect, little social support, pressure from immigrant family members and the zeal and expectation of an immigrant to achieve his/her personal investment plans either in abroad or home country. Having a family member, friends, coworkers, associations/organizations that can assist in difficult times/emergency situations is crucial for anyone specifically as an immigrant. Participants in this study mentioned some of their daily challenges, stress and shocks they encounter as entrepreneur, teacher, construction worker, bus driver, NGO officer, leaders of African groups/associations and other factors that contribute to the effects of their livelihood and hinders their anticipated realization of attaining a Sustainable livelihood.

To know the shocks and challenges of participants in this study, I asked them about their personal experience of livelihood stress and shock. Since all participants have different occupations and means of living in New York City, their personal livelihood stress and shocks differs. Kaita mentions high importation cost as one of her major livelihood challenges since

most of the products in her shop comes from Africa. She also indicated that the current retail shop profit is lower compare to her previous hair dressing job. From Kaita's view point some institutions like food and drugs agency monitor and evaluate their operations and when something goes wrong, they are fine by this agency. Easy access to financial capital was some of the safety net that need to be improved to minimize livelihood stress and shocks of some entrepreneurs who want to move from retail marketing to a whole sale marketing which she think will yield more profit and also bring more containers from African instead of one yearly.

Most of the time, there is high anticipation of African immigrants to integrate well with African Americans when they first moved to US, but Rim noted that he had not been able to fit into the black community and felt closer to the white Americans than the blacks. From Rim's perspective "it seems that the black Americans community are not interested in Africans' culture, but the whites are more adventurous. Africans have the mentality of helping and are not shy to ask for help compering to Americans who will not be comforting asking and will feel reluctant to help you." With Salam long-term goal of becoming an educational policy maker in the City, getting admission and successfully enrolling into his preferred university choice has being a challenge. Finding a job was another challenge he mentioned. After working with one advertising company for about 3 months, a friend who knows that he has passion for teaching recommended a teaching vacancy for him to apply. He added that there is high bureaucracy and complications in getting employment at the New York City Department of Education and currently working with a private school.

Aminou who is also an NGO worker admitted that when there is global funding challenge for NGOs it affects employees in that sector and with the current competition between for profit and nonprofit companies it also affects the job sustainability or security of workers and applicants.

From his narrative, it was clear example that, his short-term movement from New York to DC was due to occupational push. There was a term that was coined by Aminou “Survival jobs.” This according to him are jobs that are within the minimum wage bracket. Example of this jobs includes cashiers in the store, security assistant, McDonald and Walmart workers among others. As fresh immigrant in New York, he worked in this sector for almost four years before getting assistance from organizations like Upward Global and catholic charity who helped him in knowing how to update his resume, cover letter, and how to prepare for an interview. This was what Mega called “sowash” thus, immigrant sometime have to go with the flow because he knew a lot of friends who have bachelor’s degree but are working as manual labors.

According to Maga, the stress and shocks from his driving work in New York City is traffic and winter. He also mentioned language barrier as another challenge for most immigrants from the francophone countries or non-English speaking countries and the need for government and other institutions to organize a free language classes for such immigrants. From his interview, when there is high traffic it affects their work because movement becomes difficult so the time that would have being used for more trips will be used for only one. When the Weather is bad or there is severe snow, passengers don’t usually travel and at the long run it affects their daily sales and income. The strategy he has adopted to reduce the immediate stress and shock in such period is to save more during the good season or summer time and use some of this saving to cater for the bills during winter time.

Conclusion

From my encounter with participants, it became clear that almost all the African social networks operating in the city do not provide a direct pathway for members to secure a job but foster local cultural transmission here in the US, support their members in crisis situations, and also

empower members. Having said that, some participants also claimed that they got their current jobs as a result of recommendation from friends or natives. Since participants hail from different countries, there was a slightly different meaning attached to the term sustainable livelihood. Most participants pointed out that having a house, a car, and a permanent employment indicate livelihood sustainability while others put more emphasis on the total annual income.

Feeling secure and safe by knowing that you have a group of people to attend to in difficult times and having a place to meet people with similar background, beliefs and culture was one of the main reasons why most Africans I interviewed joined social networks. Members of these networks also get motivated during their meetings which help them to accomplish their set goals in a foreign land. More than half of the interviewees admitted that when they are involved in the activities of their association, there is high possibility for them to maintain and pass on their culture to their children and they will know where they came from and what is expected from them as immigrants.

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Appendix

The following protocol was utilized for the interviews and focus group discussion:

A series of same open-ended question will be asked for all the participants. The interviewer and the interviewee will then discuss the answers further with follow up questions for verification and explanation before moving to other questions.

- A) What social networks do African Immigrants in New York City become part of?
- B) What do African immigrants in these communities' report on the benefits of membership in these networks?
- C) To what extent do these social networks lead to economic benefits in terms of livelihood sustainability
- D) What measures do African Immigrants put in place to sustain their livelihood in New York City?
- E) Do African immigrants appreciate/accept human social networking as a way to enhance their social capital?
- F) How do you determine when someone is having sustainable livelihood in your area?
- G) What are your livelihood resources/Capital that is used most in New York City?
- H) What key institutions in NYC contributes towards the achievement of your sustainable livelihoods?
- I) What has been your personal experience of livelihood stress and shock in New York City?
- J) What are the practical, operational, policy implications and strategies of adopting and coping with livelihood stress and shocks in New York City?
- K) What is your source(s) of income (livelihood)?
- L) Have you change your source of income (livelihood) since coming to the USA? Why?
- M) How do you cope with Stress and shocks that hinder your livelihood?
- N) How many activities make up your livelihood in Brooklyn?
- O) What are some of the ways your capabilities can be enhanced to be able to exploit diverse resources and opportunities?
- P) From your own experience, how can the capabilities, assets and access of the poorer, minority and women be improved?

- Q) What are some of the safety net that need to be improving to minimize external stress and shocks of your family livelihood?
- R) Do you join social Network because you have secure livelihood, or you think it will help enhance your livelihood?
- S) Who are the influential actors in your livelihood system?
- T) Which are the key institutions contributing towards the achievement of your sustainable livelihoods in York?
- U) How do you interact with this institution?

General information

- 1) What is the size of your household?
- 2) Are you the head of the household?
- 3) When did you migrated to the United State?
- 4) Educational background 1) Basic Education ____ 2) Secondary Education ____ 3) Tertiary Edu _____
- 5) Where did you attained your basic, secondary and Tertiary Education?
- 6) Gender-
 - Male
 - Female