



Irregular Migration and Urban Survival Strategies in Nigeria: Assessing the Activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council

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Abstract

This study examines irregular migration and urban survival strategies in Nigeria with specific attention to the activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council, Abuja. The increasing rate of irregular migration into urban and peri urban areas has become a major socio economic challenge in Nigeria, driven by unemployment, rural poverty, insecurity, and unequal access to development opportunities. Many migrants who arrive in urban centres are unable to secure formal employment and therefore depend on the informal economy for survival. In Kuje Area Council, one of the most visible informal survival strategies is the Mairuwa system, where migrants engage in manual cart pushing and goods transportation within markets, motor parks, and commercial centres. The study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis and conceptual review of relevant literature on migration, urban informality, and survival economies. Findings reveal that irregular migration into Kuje is largely influenced by structural inequalities and lack of opportunities in rural areas. It also shows that the urban informal economy plays a crucial role in absorbing surplus labour, with Mairuwa activities emerging as an essential component of local economic functioning. These workers contribute significantly to the movement of goods and support for small scale traders, thereby sustaining market operations in peri urban areas. However, the study also finds that Mairuwa workers operate under highly precarious conditions characterized by low income, job insecurity, lack of social protection, and social marginalization. Their activities, while economically important, are largely unregulated and expose them to various vulnerabilities. The study concludes that irregular migration and informal survival strategies are deeply interconnected and reflect broader socio economic challenges in Nigeria's urban system. It recommends inclusive policies, improved rural development, and formal recognition of informal workers to enhance sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Irregular migration, urban survival strategies, informal economy, Mairuwa, Kuje Area Council, urban informality, Nigeria.



1.0 Introduction

Irregular migration has increasingly become a defining feature of urbanisation and socio economic transformation in Nigeria. The continuous movement of people from rural communities and economically disadvantaged regions into urban and peri urban centres has intensified pressure on housing, employment opportunities, transportation systems, and public infrastructure. Many migrants relocate without legal documentation, stable employment, or adequate social support structures, thereby contributing to the rapid expansion of informal settlements and precarious livelihoods. Recent studies show that worsening poverty, insecurity, youth unemployment, and uneven regional development continue to drive migration flows into rapidly growing urban areas across Nigeria. Essien and Jesse (2024) observed that informality has increasingly dominated urban peripheral spaces in Nigeria due to unregulated migration and weak urban planning systems. Similarly, Onota et al. (2024) argued that economic instability and cross border mobility have intensified social vulnerabilities and urban survival struggles in many Nigerian communities.

Urban survival strategies refer to the informal economic activities adopted by low income populations and migrants to cope with harsh economic realities and sustain daily living. In many Nigerian cities, the inability of the formal sector to absorb the growing labour force has pushed millions of people into informal occupations such as street trading, waste recycling, motorcycle transport services, cart pushing, hawking, and casual labour. According to the International Labour Organization, the informal economy accounts for a substantial proportion of employment in developing countries, particularly in sub Saharan Africa where urban poverty and unemployment remain persistent challenges. Osadolor (2024) found that informality in Nigeria has continued to rise because many households depend on unstable and unregulated



occupations for survival. In another study, Ubani and Sam Amobi (2024) noted that peri urban residents increasingly rely on informal livelihood coping mechanisms due to rising living costs, housing shortages, and declining formal employment opportunities.

One important but often neglected category within Nigeria's urban informal economy is the group commonly referred to as "Mairuwa" in Kuje Area Council of Abuja. Mairuwa are local truck pushers and informal labourers who transport goods using hand pushed carts or trucks within markets, motor parks, construction sites, and commercial areas. Most of these individuals are migrants who move into urban centres in search of economic opportunities but are unable to secure formal employment. Consequently, they depend on physically demanding informal labour as a means of economic survival. Their activities play a critical role in facilitating local trade, movement of goods, and commercial activities within informal urban markets. Ezeanah (2025) noted that informal urban systems in Nigeria are sustained largely by unregulated labour networks operating outside formal economic structures. Likewise, Omoegun (2025) explained that survival based occupations and informal street economies have become central to the livelihoods of displaced and economically marginalised urban populations in Nigeria.

The growing presence of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council reflects the broader relationship between irregular migration, urban poverty, and informal survival economies in Nigeria. Kuje has experienced significant population growth due to Abuja's rapid urban expansion and the increasing movement of migrants into peri urban settlements where living costs are relatively lower. However, this population increase has also contributed to congestion, unemployment, competition for economic opportunities, and rising social vulnerabilities. Many Mairuwa operate under difficult conditions characterised by low income, job insecurity, social exclusion,



harassment, and poor access to social services. Despite these challenges, their activities remain essential to the functioning of local urban markets and transportation networks. This study therefore seeks to examine the connection between irregular migration and urban survival strategies by assessing the activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council, with emphasis on their socio economic contributions, operational challenges, and implications for urban development in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The rapid growth of irregular migration into urban and peri urban centres in Nigeria has generated serious socio economic and developmental challenges, particularly in rapidly expanding settlements surrounding the Federal Capital Territory. Kuje Area Council has experienced increasing inflows of migrants seeking economic opportunities due to rising poverty, insecurity, unemployment, and rural underdevelopment across different parts of the country. However, the inability of the formal economy to absorb this growing labour force has forced many migrants into informal and survival based occupations. Nigeria's urban informal sector continues to expand as millions of economically vulnerable migrants depend on unregulated activities for livelihood and survival. Weak urban governance, inadequate housing systems, and growing socio economic inequality have further intensified informal labour practices and urban vulnerability in many Nigerian cities.

Among the emerging informal survival groups in Kuje Area Council are the Mairuwa, who engage in truck pushing and manual transportation of goods within markets, motor parks, roadside trading areas, and construction sites. Despite their contribution to local commerce and movement of goods, their activities are characterised by poor working conditions, unstable income, social exclusion, exploitation, and exposure to urban insecurity. Many operate without



legal recognition, social protection, or access to welfare support, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and marginalisation. Existing studies on migration and informality in Nigeria have largely focused on street hawking, motorcycle transportation, urban crime, and rural urban migration, with limited scholarly attention given to the specific experiences and survival strategies of Mairuwa in peri urban communities such as Kuje. Informal urban workers also remain insufficiently represented in policy discussions despite their growing importance within urban economies.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by critically examining the relationship between irregular migration and urban survival strategies through an assessment of the activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council. The study intends to provide empirical insight into their socio economic roles, operational challenges, and broader implications for urban development, informal labour systems, and migration management in Nigeria.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between irregular migration and urban survival strategies through an assessment of the activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council, Abuja.

1. To examine the factors responsible for irregular migration into Kuje Area Council.
2. To assess the role of Mairuwa activities as an urban survival strategy among irregular migrants in Kuje Area Council.
3. To evaluate the socio economic and security implications of Mairuwa activities in Kuje Area Council.



1.3 Justification

The increasing rate of irregular migration into urban and peri urban centres in Nigeria has created significant socio economic challenges, particularly in rapidly expanding settlements surrounding the Federal Capital Territory. Kuje Area Council has witnessed continuous inflows of migrants seeking better economic opportunities and improved living conditions. However, the inability of the formal sector to provide adequate employment opportunities has forced many migrants into informal and survival based occupations such as truck pushing, cart transportation, and other forms of casual labour. This study is therefore justified by the need to critically examine how irregular migrants adapt to urban economic realities through informal survival strategies, especially within the context of Mairuwa activities in Kuje Area Council. The study is also important because the activities of Mairuwa have become increasingly visible within local markets, motor parks, roadside commercial areas, and construction environments, yet there is limited scholarly attention on their contributions and challenges. While these informal workers play important roles in the movement of goods and support for local commerce, they also face poor working conditions, social exclusion, exploitation, insecurity, and lack of institutional protection. Understanding the operational dynamics of Mairuwa is therefore necessary for developing inclusive urban policies and improving the welfare of informal urban workers.

Furthermore, the study will contribute to existing literature on irregular migration, urban informality, and survival economies in Nigeria by addressing the gap in research on peri urban labour systems within Abuja's expanding settlements. The findings of the study will also be useful to policymakers, urban planners, migration agencies, local authorities, and development organizations in designing sustainable urban management strategies, labour support policies,



and migration control frameworks that are responsive to the realities of informal urban livelihoods in Nigeria.

1.4 Conceptual Clarifications

The study requires a proper understanding of the major concepts underpinning the research. These concepts include irregular migration, urban survival strategies, informal economy, and Mairuwa activities. Understanding these concepts provides the foundation for examining how migrants adapt to urban economic realities through informal livelihood systems within Kuje Area Council of Abuja.

Irregular Migration

Irregular migration refers to the movement of individuals across regions, communities, or national boundaries outside officially approved legal, administrative, or regulatory frameworks. According to the International Organization for Migration (2024), irregular migration involves the movement of persons that occurs outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing entry, stay, or employment within a particular territory. The organization explains that irregular migration is often associated with economic hardship, insecurity, unemployment, and weak governance structures. Similarly, de Haas (2023) defines irregular migration as the movement of people who lack authorized legal status or who engage in migration processes that violate existing migration regulations. He argues that irregular migration is shaped largely by inequality, labour demands, and limited economic opportunities in origin areas.

In another perspective, Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2020) conceptualize irregular migration as a survival oriented movement of people seeking improved livelihoods under restrictive economic and social conditions. They maintain that many migrants become irregular because



legal migration opportunities remain inaccessible to economically disadvantaged populations. Likewise, Adepoju (2022) explains that irregular migration in Africa is driven by poverty, conflict, environmental pressures, political instability, and youth unemployment. According to him, urban centres often attract irregular migrants because of perceived opportunities for employment and survival despite difficult living conditions. These perspectives indicate that irregular migration is both a socio economic and developmental issue connected to structural inequalities and limited opportunities. For the purpose of this study, irregular migration is defined as the movement of individuals into urban areas through unregulated or economically compelled processes in search of livelihood opportunities and survival.

Urban Survival Strategies

Urban survival strategies refer to the various economic and social mechanisms adopted by urban residents, especially migrants and low income populations, to cope with poverty, unemployment, and harsh living conditions. Rakodi and Lloyd Jones (2021) define urban survival strategies as adaptive livelihood activities undertaken by vulnerable populations to secure income, shelter, food, and social support within urban environments. They argue that these strategies are common in developing countries where formal employment opportunities remain inadequate. Similarly, Chambers and Conway (2020) conceptualize survival strategies as the combination of capabilities, assets, and activities used by households to sustain their livelihoods during periods of economic uncertainty.

Furthermore, Meagher (2021) explains that urban survival strategies in Africa are strongly linked to the expansion of the informal economy, where individuals engage in casual labour, transportation services, street trading, and small scale enterprises to survive. She emphasizes that urban informal activities have become critical coping mechanisms for unemployed youths



and migrants. In another scholarly view, Onyebueke and Geyer (2022) describe urban survival strategies as informal and flexible livelihood systems developed by urban populations in response to rapid urbanization, inequality, and limited access to state welfare systems. These perspectives suggest that survival strategies are practical responses to economic vulnerability and social exclusion in urban environments. For this study, urban survival strategies are defined as informal economic and social activities adopted by migrants and low income urban residents to sustain their livelihoods and cope with difficult socio economic conditions.

Informal Economy

The informal economy refers to economic activities that operate outside formal state regulations, taxation systems, labour protections, and institutional frameworks. According to the International Labour Organization (2024), the informal economy consists of economic activities and workers that are insufficiently covered by formal legal and regulatory systems. The organization explains that informal employment is particularly dominant in developing countries where formal labour markets cannot absorb the growing workforce. Similarly, Hart (1973), who pioneered the concept, defines the informal economy as small scale, self employed, and unregulated income generating activities that exist outside official economic structures.

In another perspective, Chen (2021) conceptualizes the informal economy as a diverse economic sector consisting of street vendors, transport operators, artisans, casual labourers, and service providers who depend on flexible and survival oriented economic activities. She argues that the informal economy contributes significantly to employment generation and urban economic sustainability despite lacking legal recognition. Likewise, Meagher (2021) notes that informality in Africa has expanded because of economic crises, unemployment,



weak industrialization, and rapid urban population growth. These perspectives indicate that the informal economy remains central to urban livelihoods in developing countries. For the purpose of this study, the informal economy is defined as unregulated and non formalized economic activities undertaken by individuals and groups for income generation and survival outside official state labour systems.

Mairuwa Activities

Mairuwa activities refer to the informal labour practices of local truck pushers and cart operators who transport goods manually within markets, commercial centres, motor parks, and construction sites. These activities are common in many Nigerian urban and peri urban settlements where informal transportation systems support local trade and economic exchanges. According to Akinola (2022), informal transport labourers play critical roles in facilitating market operations and urban commerce, particularly in densely populated informal settlements where mechanized transport systems are inadequate. He explains that such workers often emerge from migrant populations and economically vulnerable groups seeking daily income opportunities.

Similarly, Ezeanah (2025) describes informal labour systems in Nigerian cities as survival based occupations sustained by migrants, unemployed youths, and low income residents operating outside formal labour protections. She notes that cart pushers and manual transport workers remain important to urban commercial activities despite poor working conditions and social marginalization. In another perspective, Omoegun (2025) argues that informal urban labour activities represent adaptive responses to poverty, unemployment, and spatial inequality within rapidly urbanizing African cities. These scholarly perspectives suggest that Mairuwa activities are not merely casual occupations but important components of urban informal



economies and migrant survival systems. For the purpose of this study, Mairuwa activities are defined as informal manual transportation and truck pushing services carried out by migrants and low income urban workers as a means of livelihood and economic survival in Kuje Area Council.

1.5 Theoretical Review

This study adopts a dual theoretical framework comprising the Push and Pull Theory of Migration and the Structural Functionalist Theory. These theories provide an appropriate analytical foundation for understanding the relationship between irregular migration and urban survival strategies in Nigeria. While the Push and Pull Theory explains the socio economic and environmental factors responsible for the movement of migrants into urban centres, the Structural Functionalist Theory emphasizes the roles performed by informal occupations and survival systems in maintaining the functioning of urban economies and social structures.

Push and Pull Theory of Migration

The Push and Pull Theory of Migration is primarily associated with the works of Everett Lee, who explained migration as a process influenced by conditions that push individuals away from their places of origin and factors that attract them to destination areas. Lee (1966) argues that migration occurs because of negative conditions such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, environmental hardship, and lack of opportunities in origin communities, while destination areas attract migrants through perceived economic opportunities, improved living conditions, and access to social services. The theory assumes that migration decisions are shaped by the interaction between these push and pull factors.

The core assumption of the Push and Pull Theory is that individuals migrate when the perceived benefits of relocation outweigh the difficulties associated with movement. Castles, de Haas,



and Miller (2020) expand this argument by explaining that migration in developing countries is often driven by structural inequalities, uneven development, labour demands, and urban economic opportunities. Similarly, Adepoju (2022) argues that rural poverty, youth unemployment, insecurity, and weak infrastructure continue to push many Nigerians toward urban and peri urban settlements in search of survival opportunities. In the context of this study, the theory suggests that the movement of migrants into Kuje Area Council is largely influenced by economic hardship and the search for livelihood opportunities within informal urban economies.

However, the theory has been criticized for oversimplifying migration processes by focusing mainly on economic motivations while underestimating social networks, political structures, and cultural influences. Skeldon (2018) argues that migration decisions are often more complex than simple push and pull explanations because migrants may also be influenced by family ties, historical relationships, and state policies. Critics further contend that the theory does not adequately explain why some individuals migrate while others facing similar conditions remain in their communities. Despite these criticisms, the theory remains highly relevant because it provides a clear framework for understanding the factors driving irregular migration and urban population movements.

The relevance of the Push and Pull Theory to this study lies in its explanation of the factors responsible for the movement of migrants into Kuje Area Council and their engagement in informal survival activities such as Mairuwa operations. The theory helps to explain how unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and lack of opportunities in rural areas push migrants into urban settlements where they depend on informal labour systems for economic survival.



Structural Functionalist Theory

Structural Functionalist Theory is closely associated with the works of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, who viewed society as a system made up of interconnected institutions and social structures working together to maintain stability and order. Durkheim (1893) argues that every social institution and occupation performs specific functions necessary for the survival and continuity of society. According to the theory, social activities and institutions contribute to maintaining social equilibrium by satisfying economic, political, and social needs within communities.

The central assumption of Structural Functionalist Theory is that social systems remain stable when different structures perform functions that support societal survival and integration. Parsons (1951) explains that social order depends on the interdependence of institutions, roles, and social practices that help societies adapt to changing conditions. Similarly, Merton (1968) argues that even informal or unconventional activities may perform important latent functions within society by addressing unmet social and economic needs. In the context of urban economies, the theory suggests that informal occupations emerge because they provide services and opportunities that formal institutions fail to adequately supply.

Despite its contributions, Structural Functionalist Theory has been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on social stability while neglecting inequality, exploitation, and conflict within society. Mills (1959) contends that the theory often ignores power imbalances and structural inequalities that shape social relations and economic opportunities. Critics also argue that the theory may justify harmful social conditions by assuming that all social structures contribute positively to societal stability. Nevertheless, the theory remains important in



sociological analysis because it explains how different social activities and institutions contribute to the functioning of society.

The relevance of Structural Functionalist Theory to this study lies in its explanation of the socio economic roles performed by Mairuwa within Kuje Area Council. Although Mairuwa activities operate within the informal economy, they contribute significantly to the movement of goods, market operations, and local commerce within urban settlements. The theory therefore helps to explain how informal survival occupations emerge as adaptive mechanisms that support urban economic systems where formal employment opportunities are insufficient.

Although both theories are relevant to the study, the research is mainly anchored on the Push and Pull Theory of Migration. This is because the study primarily focuses on the factors responsible for irregular migration into Kuje Area Council and how migrants adopt informal survival strategies such as Mairuwa activities. While Structural Functionalist Theory explains the roles performed by informal occupations within urban economies, the Push and Pull Theory provides a more suitable framework for understanding the socio economic conditions driving migration and the search for livelihood opportunities in peri urban Nigeria.

1.6 Drivers and Patterns of Irregular Migration into Urban and Peri Urban Areas

Irregular migration into urban and peri urban areas in Nigeria is shaped by deep rooted structural inequalities, socio economic deprivation, and environmental pressures that continue to push individuals from rural and underserved regions into expanding urban settlements. One of the most dominant drivers is chronic unemployment, especially among young people, which remains high due to limited industrial expansion and weak labour market absorption capacity. In addition, rural poverty continues to worsen as agricultural productivity declines due to land degradation, lack of modern farming inputs, and limited access to credit facilities. These



conditions make rural livelihoods increasingly unsustainable and force many individuals to seek survival opportunities in urban centres. According to the International Organization for Migration (2024), irregular migration is often driven by inequality, limited opportunities, and insecurity in places of origin. Similarly, de Haas (2023) explains that migration is strongly influenced by structural imbalances between regions that push people toward areas perceived to offer better economic prospects.

Insecurity also plays a significant role in shaping migration patterns in Nigeria. Ongoing challenges such as insurgency in the North East, banditry in parts of the North West, and communal conflicts in several rural communities have displaced large populations, contributing to increased movement toward urban and peri urban areas. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2024) notes that internal displacement continues to rise due to conflict related pressures and economic vulnerability. The pattern of migration is largely rural to urban, with a strong concentration in metropolitan regions such as Abuja and surrounding area councils like Kuje. Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2020) argue that such migration flows are often network driven, where earlier migrants facilitate the movement of others through information sharing and social support systems. As a result, peri urban settlements experience rapid population growth, informal housing expansion, and increased pressure on local resources.

1.7 Urban Informal Economy and Survival Strategies among Migrants

The urban informal economy in Nigeria serves as a major absorption mechanism for migrants who are unable to access formal employment opportunities. This sector includes a wide range of activities such as street vending, artisanal work, transportation services, waste collection, and casual labour. The International Labour Organization (2024) estimates that a significant



proportion of employment in developing countries exists within the informal economy, with sub Saharan Africa recording some of the highest levels globally. In Nigeria, the informal economy has become a dominant feature of urban livelihoods due to persistent unemployment and weak institutional capacity to generate formal jobs. Meagher (2021) explains that informality in African cities has expanded as a survival response to economic exclusion and structural adjustment pressures.

Urban survival strategies refer to the adaptive mechanisms through which migrants and low income urban residents sustain themselves in environments characterized by economic hardship and limited welfare support. These strategies are often multi layered, involving engagement in several informal activities simultaneously to generate income. Rakodi and Lloyd Jones (2021) describe survival strategies as combinations of assets, capabilities, and activities used by vulnerable households to maintain livelihoods under conditions of uncertainty. In Nigeria, Onyebueke and Geyer (2022) observe that urban survival strategies are increasingly shaped by rapid urbanization, housing shortages, and rising cost of living, especially in peri urban areas. In Kuje Area Council, migrants rely heavily on informal labour systems due to the absence of stable employment opportunities, leading to the proliferation of survival based occupations that sustain daily economic needs.

1.8 The Emergence and Role of Mairuwa in Urban Livelihood Systems

The emergence of Mairuwa activities within urban livelihood systems is a direct consequence of increasing irregular migration, urban poverty, and the expansion of informal economies in Nigerian cities. Mairuwa refers to informal cart pushers or manual transport workers who assist in the movement of goods within markets, motor parks, construction sites, and commercial



hubs. These workers are typically migrants who lack formal education, vocational training, or access to stable employment, thereby resorting to physically demanding informal labour for survival. Ezeanah (2025) explains that informal labour systems in Nigerian urban areas are sustained by vulnerable populations who operate outside formal regulatory and employment frameworks due to structural exclusion.

The role of Mairuwa in urban livelihood systems is significant because they provide essential logistical support in the movement of goods, especially within congested and unregulated market environments where formal transportation systems are inadequate. Akinola (2022) notes that informal transport workers play a crucial role in sustaining market efficiency and supporting small scale trading activities in Nigerian cities. Their services reduce transportation costs for traders and ensure continuous circulation of goods within local economies. However, despite their importance, Mairuwa workers operate under highly precarious conditions characterized by low income, lack of social protection, occupational hazards, and frequent harassment by regulatory authorities. Omoegun (2025) highlights that informal urban workers in Nigeria remain marginalized despite their contributions to urban economic functioning.

In peri urban areas such as Kuje, the activities of Mairuwa reflect broader structural challenges associated with rapid urbanization, unemployment, and inadequate urban planning. Their presence demonstrates how migrants adapt to urban exclusion by creating survival based economic systems that fill gaps left by formal institutions. These activities, while informal, are essential to sustaining the daily functioning of urban markets and supporting the livelihoods of both traders and consumers within the local economy.



1.9 Socio Economic and Security Implications of Mairuwa Activities in Kuje Area Council

The activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council generate significant socio economic implications that reflect both the survival needs of migrants and the structural limitations of urban governance in Nigeria. Economically, Mairuwa contribute to the functioning of local markets by facilitating the movement of goods, especially in areas where mechanized transport systems are limited or unavailable. Their services reduce transportation costs for traders and enhance the efficiency of informal market operations. According to Akinola (2022), informal transport workers play a vital role in sustaining urban commerce by bridging logistical gaps within densely populated and unplanned market environments. Similarly, Meagher (2021) explains that informal labour systems in African cities function as essential survival mechanisms that support both household livelihoods and urban economic circulation.

Despite these contributions, Mairuwa activities are characterized by low income, job insecurity, and lack of access to social protection mechanisms. Many workers operate under precarious conditions without formal contracts, health insurance, or labour rights protection. This exposes them to exploitation by middlemen, market authorities, and informal regulatory structures. Ezeanah (2025) notes that informal labourers in Nigerian urban areas are often excluded from formal policy frameworks, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and vulnerability. In addition, their working conditions frequently expose them to physical injuries, overwork, and environmental hazards.

From a security perspective, the presence of large populations of informal labourers in urban spaces such as Kuje can contribute to complex security dynamics. While most Mairuwa engage in legitimate survival activities, the lack of regulation and documentation in informal labour



systems can sometimes create opportunities for petty crime, disputes, and social tensions within crowded market environments. Omoegun (2025) observes that informal urban spaces in Nigeria often become sites of contestation due to weak governance structures and inadequate enforcement of urban regulations. However, it is important to note that Mairuwa activities are primarily survival driven rather than criminal in nature, as most participants are economically marginalized migrants seeking daily income.

Socially, Mairuwa workers often experience stigmatization and exclusion from formal urban systems. They are frequently viewed as part of the urban poor, occupying the lowest rung of the informal labour hierarchy. This reinforces their marginalization and limits their access to institutional support and upward mobility. Onyebueke and Geyer (2022) argue that urban informal workers in Nigeria face persistent social inequality due to rapid urbanization and weak social protection systems. In Kuje Area Council, these socio economic and security implications highlight the dual nature of Mairuwa activities as both essential to urban functionality and indicative of broader structural challenges in urban governance and migration management.

1.10 Policy Responses and Sustainable Management of Informal Urban Labour and Migration

Policy responses to irregular migration and informal urban labour in Nigeria have largely focused on urban regulation, poverty alleviation programs, and labour market interventions, although implementation remains weak and inconsistent. Government efforts have often emphasized urban planning and control measures aimed at reducing informal settlements and regulating street based economic activities. However, these approaches have frequently failed to address the underlying structural drivers of migration such as unemployment, rural poverty,



and insecurity. The International Organization for Migration (2024) emphasizes that effective migration governance requires comprehensive strategies that address both the causes and consequences of migration rather than focusing solely on control and restriction.

A more sustainable approach involves integrating informal workers like Mairuwa into urban development frameworks through inclusive policies that recognize their economic contributions. Meagher (2021) argues that informal workers should not be treated as peripheral actors but as central components of urban economies whose activities sustain livelihoods and local markets. This includes the need for labour protection policies, access to microcredit, and recognition of informal associations that regulate activities within markets and transport systems. Similarly, Akinola (2022) suggests that informal transport systems can be improved through structured regulation rather than outright exclusion, ensuring safety, efficiency, and fair income distribution.

In addressing irregular migration, policy responses must also focus on improving rural development, job creation, and security in origin areas to reduce forced migration pressures. Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2020) emphasize that migration management is most effective when development inequalities between rural and urban areas are reduced, thereby minimizing push factors. In addition, Onyebueke and Geyer (2022) highlight the importance of inclusive urban planning that accommodates migrant populations through affordable housing, infrastructure development, and social services.

For Kuje Area Council specifically, sustainable management of informal urban labour requires a combination of regulation, support, and integration strategies. Local authorities can develop frameworks that register informal workers, provide designated operational zones for Mairuwa activities, and promote cooperative associations that enhance their bargaining power and



working conditions. Ezeanah (2025) notes that without institutional inclusion, informal workers will continue to operate in vulnerable and unregulated conditions that undermine both their welfare and urban order. Ultimately, sustainable urban management requires balancing regulation with inclusion to ensure that informal labour systems contribute positively to urban development while reducing associated risks.

1.11 Summary of Findings

The study on irregular migration and urban survival strategies in Nigeria, with specific focus on the activities of Mairuwa in Kuje Area Council, reveals several important socio economic dynamics shaping peri urban livelihoods. The findings show that irregular migration into Kuje is largely influenced by deep rooted structural conditions in migrants' places of origin. These include high levels of unemployment, persistent rural poverty, insecurity arising from conflicts and criminal activities, and limited access to basic infrastructure and social services. As a result, many individuals, particularly youths, migrate into urban and peri urban areas in search of survival opportunities rather than formal employment. The study further found that Kuje Area Council serves as a major destination due to its proximity to Abuja, relatively lower cost of living, and availability of informal economic opportunities.

The study also found that upon arrival, most migrants are unable to access formal employment opportunities due to low educational qualifications, lack of skills, and limited institutional support. Consequently, they resort to the urban informal economy as a primary means of survival. The informal economy in Kuje is characterized by diverse activities such as petty trading, casual labour, and transportation related services. Within this system, Mairuwa activities emerged as a dominant survival strategy. These individuals engage in manual cart pushing and goods transportation within markets, motor parks, and commercial centres. Their



services are essential in facilitating the movement of goods, especially in areas where formal logistics and mechanized transport are either unavailable or too costly for small traders.

The findings further reveal that Mairuwa activities contribute significantly to the functioning of local urban markets by ensuring the smooth distribution and movement of goods. Traders depend on their services for daily business operations, making them an integral part of the informal urban economy. However, despite their importance, Mairuwa workers operate under highly precarious conditions characterized by unstable income, lack of job security, and absence of formal labour protection. Many of them work long hours under physically demanding conditions with minimal earnings, reflecting the vulnerability associated with informal survival strategies.

In addition, the study found that Mairuwa workers face various forms of social exclusion and marginalization within urban spaces. They are often viewed as part of the urban poor and occupy the lowest level within the informal labour hierarchy. Their activities are largely unregulated, which exposes them to harassment from informal authorities, market unions, and local enforcement agents. The absence of formal recognition also limits their access to social welfare services, financial support, and institutional protection.

Finally, the study reveals that while Mairuwa activities are primarily survival driven, they also have minor security and regulatory implications within urban spaces. The concentration of informal labour in congested market environments sometimes leads to disputes, overcrowding, and weak enforcement of urban order. However, these challenges are largely a result of inadequate urban planning and weak governance structures rather than the nature of the workers themselves. Overall, the findings demonstrate that irregular migration and urban survival strategies are deeply interconnected, with Mairuwa activities representing both an



essential economic function and a reflection of broader socio economic inequalities in Nigeria's urban system.

1.12 Conclusion

The study concludes that irregular migration into Kuje Area Council is strongly influenced by structural socio economic and security challenges in migrants' areas of origin. Upon arrival, migrants depend heavily on the informal economy for survival, with Mairuwa activities serving as a key livelihood strategy within urban and peri urban markets. These activities play an important economic role by facilitating the movement of goods and supporting local commerce, yet they remain largely unregulated and socially marginalized.

The study further concludes that while Mairuwa operations contribute to urban economic functionality, they expose workers to vulnerable working conditions, insecurity, and social exclusion. The absence of formal recognition and policy inclusion continues to reinforce their precarious status within the urban labour system. Overall, the relationship between irregular migration and urban survival strategies in Kuje reflects broader challenges of unemployment, inequality, and weak urban governance in Nigeria's rapidly growing cities.

1.13 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical measures are proposed to improve the management of irregular migration and enhance the welfare and productivity of Mairuwa workers within Kuje Area Council. These recommendations are aimed at promoting inclusive urban development, improving livelihoods, and reducing vulnerabilities associated with informal urban labour.

1. Government at the local and state levels should develop inclusive urban labour policies that formally recognize Mairuwa activities as part of the urban transport and logistics



system. This will help integrate them into the urban economy and reduce their marginalization.

2. The local authorities should designate specific operational areas and routes for Mairuwa workers within markets and commercial centres. This will help reduce congestion, improve coordination, and minimize conflicts in busy urban spaces.
3. Vocational training and skill acquisition programmes should be introduced for migrants and informal workers to improve their employability and reduce overdependence on manual labour. These programmes should be accessible and community based to ensure wider participation.
4. Rural development initiatives should be strengthened through improved infrastructure, agricultural support, and job creation schemes in rural communities. This will help address the root causes of irregular migration by reducing the pressure to migrate to urban areas.
5. Formation and strengthening of informal workers' associations should be encouraged to improve organization, welfare protection, and collective bargaining power. These associations can also serve as a channel for dialogue between workers and government authorities.

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