

Harnessing Nigeria-Egypt Bilateral Ties

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The Relationship between Nigeria and Egypt dates backs to and has continued to grow in leaps and bounds. Its most significant part of the bilateral relations is the direct advantages it has offered the citizens of the two nations.

Regarding people to people relationship, Nigerians from the Northern part of the country have been the demography that have taken the most advantage of the relationship between the two nations. A shared Islamic culture may have been responsible for many from that part of the country choosing to study in Egypt. It was not uncommon to hear a northerner say he was going to study Arabic or Islamic studies in Cairo.

But as frequent and prolonged strikes started to plague Nigeria's tertiary education sector, more people from the Northern parts started to send their wards to study courses other than Arabic or religion related. More opted to study medicine, engineering, pharmacy and others. Hundreds of Nigerians are studying Medicine in Egypt currently and according to Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 47 Nigerians are studying on Egyptian scholarships in mass media and agriculture. Egypt also offers 25 slots for scholarships for post graduate studies to Nigerians annually.

For several Northerners, Egypt is also the go to place for quality healthcare because of the excellent and affordable healthcare provided in the country. Egyptian doctors, although not so many in Nigeria, are also sought after. According to the website of Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are about 160 Egyptian doctors working in Nigeria and they have contributed to promoting medical tourism between the two nations.

Various firms from Egypt have also berthed and expanded in Nigeria in Abuja for example, Arab Contractors has been building a reputation for it-

self since 1962, and is known for the high quality of infrastructure for which it secures contracts. Other Egyptian firms that have carved their niche in Nigeria's business climate include Orascom Construction, Caterpillars, MCD , which constructs the frames for the BRT buses of Mercedes being used in Lagos, and some are involved in providing renewable energy.

The expanding ties resulted in Egypt Air increasing the frequency of its flights to 14 weekly from Kano, Abuja and Lagos easing movement between both nations and making Cairo the gateway to other nations.

The trade volume between both nations increased from \$73 million in 2008 and \$116 million in 2009 to \$150 million in 2012. But according to the Egyptian Ambassador, Mr. Ashraf Salama at the first Nigeria-Egypt Forum in Abuja in July 2013,

the figures are 'unimpressive' considering the capabilities of the economies of both countries.

The Ambassador was right, there are a lot of possibilities in the relations between the two nations. For instance with the number of Nigerians who travel to seek quality healthcare in Egypt, an Egyptian hospital ought to have been established in Nigeria by now.

There two countries can also explore collaboration in agriculture and irrigation which Egypt has a lot of experience in already.

A major step towards building stronger ties among the citizens would be the consideration of visa waiver requirements for citizens who travel between both countries. This would further facilitate trade and tourism especially from Nigerians to Egypt.