



Public Private-Partnerships: An International Perspective

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Abstract

This study presents the trend of international child adoptions from Sub-Saharan African countries to the U.S. Since adoptions involve administrative services in order to determine the eligibility of prospective parents, it demands the collaborative operations of government and private agencies thereby necessitating public-private partnerships.

The regression results (with the exception of one variable) are significant indicating that independent variables, such as per capita GDP, population size, freedom score, and child dependency ratio to be associated with the number of adopted children (dependent variable). The independent variables corresponding to these countries being unfavorable--as push factors--affected the dependent variable. Analogous to the theory of the push and pull factors of migration, the independent variables triggered the occurrence of child adoptions from the African countries (sending countries) to the receiving country (the U.S.).

Introduction

Child adoption is an alternative living arrangement for adequate upbringing of children who encounter difficult circumstances. Involving an accommodative arrangement, which requires legal and administrative services, adoption demands the partnership between government and private organizations. This is particularly so because governments alone cannot provide services to meet the ever-increasing demands of citizens. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDESA (2010), the number of international adoptions has been increasing globally. UNDESA indicates that: "There are over a quarter of a million adoptions every year (p.1)." Since adoption is a global phenomenon, its trend displays the need to work in collaboration to facilitate child adoption services, requiring the concerted efforts of government and private agencies, which entails public-private partnerships (PPPs). Akintoye and Beck (2009) state that: "Public-private partnerships (PPS) are long-term alliances formed between the private sector and public bodies...in the provision and delivery of public services (p.3)." When governmental and non-governmental



organizations work in collaboration to provide services involving overseas operations, this would constitute international PPPs. It is under this context that inter-country (international) child adoption is carried out.

The objective of the study is to examine whether or not there has been an association between the number of adopted children (dependent variable) and the identified independent variables (per capita GDP, population size, freedom score, human development index, child dependency ratio, and English as an international language). Hence, this article presents the analysis in light of pertinent concepts indicated in the conceptual framework, which is followed by the methodology, results and analysis, and the conclusion sections.

Conceptual Framework

Esposito and Biafora (2007) define the term adoption as follows: “Adoption is a social practice, a solution to a social problem, and an act of making a family at a particular moment in time (p.18).” According to Herman (2008), Davis (2011), Askeland (2006), Dorow (2006), adoption can take many forms. There is a foster childcare arrangement where abandoned or neglected children are given institutional care. When relatives such as stepparents or grandparents become adoptive parents, this arrangement is called a kinship-based adoption. Spatially, adoption can also be classified as within-country or inter-country adoption. The latter entails international adoption involving the US as a receiving country.

According to the UNDESA (2009), there are a number of international conventions, which regulate inter-country adoption in order to protect the welfare of children. UNDESA points out: “The main aim of the United Nations Convention on the reduction of Statelessness of 1961, for instance, is to protect the interest of minors and, in particular that children adopted through inter-country procedures do not become stateless” (p.55). Similarly, The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children obligates signatory states to ensure the child’s best interest in matters of international adoption. These conventions require that the sending and receiving countries work towards the smooth relocation of adopted children. The website of the Department of State shows that the United States



has been a signatory of these two conventions and explains that: “Over the last decade, U.S. families have adopted on average approximately 20,000 children from foreign nations each year” (Retrieved on March 20, 2012).

Davis (2011) delineates successive waves that depict the history of international child adoption in the U.S. The first wave marks the adoption of children orphaned by World War II, which devastated Europe and Asia. The second wave marks child adoption from Latin American countries, which suffered from an adverse economic predicament at the beginning of 1970s. The third wave refers to child adoption from Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Socialist Republics and the subsequent economic and political turmoil, which affected that region. The fourth wave revolves around China and its involvement in international trade in the 1990s, the period which marks the beginning of child adoption from that country to the U.S. The fifth wave of international child adoption is concerned with Africa. Davis points out African countries already suffered from a political and economic catastrophe exasperated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted in an orphan crisis. These circumstances created a new supply of children to the U.S. child adoption enterprise.

Biafora and Esposito (2007) write that international adoption is the result of the growing number of children who lack caregivers. They explain that: “The causes are many, but a majority of these children are the product of civil war, overpopulation, famine, [and] poverty...” (p.39). Similarly, Selman (2006) points out poor countries are unlikely to be able to support children due to food scarcity, disease and civil unrest. Hence, these unbearable conditions push the primary victims—children---to migrate from countries with insufficient economic resources to wealthy countries. In other words, international adoptions are associated with economic and political conditions attributed to the push and pull causes, which is concurrent with the theory of international migration. Akin to this, Davis states: “The structural push factors of adoptions, similar to migrations, are based on the household scarcities...influenced by economic, political and military factors” (p.130).



According to Naerssen et al. (2008), the neoclassical theory of migration postulates that people are attracted from places that lack resources (e.g. unemployment, low pay) to places experiencing labor shortages and where higher payments are available. Messina and Lahav (2006) divide the neoclassical theory into macro and micro theories of neoclassical economics.

The macro theory includes the assumption that for international migration to occur wage differentials exist between the sending and receiving country. Another assumption is that under no wage differences, there would not be labor movement, and thus the occurrence of migratory trends would be insignificant. The micro theory associates international migration with an individual's decision based on a cost benefit analysis that is, people migrate to places where they can earn more. If they are convinced of the financial utility of migration, they are willing to stay in another location while searching for job opportunities. Part of this endeavor includes weighing the costs and benefits of coping with the new environment such as learning another language as well as new societal norms. This proposition shows that people migrate with the expectation of economic gains after they determine the pull factors outweigh the push factors. As U.S. adopting parents are presumably more financially secure, they can be considered relatively wealthy (as compared to the situation of the sending African countries) and represent pull factors.

Following the increase in the demand of international adoption, private organizations began to provide services for prospective adoptive parents. Biafora and Esposito (2007) explains that: "In reaction to the growing demand for international babies, a number of adoption service organizations and private attorneys have emerged to offer specialized services for prospective parents" (p.41). Several authors, for instance, Akintoye and Beck (2009) Ram (2000), Plummer (2002), Kettl (2002), Monsma (2004), and Frisch (2002) note that governments alone cannot provide services successfully; they need the cooperation of private organizations including nonprofit organizations. When government agencies work in partnership with nongovernmental entities, they utilize the expertise of the private sector fostering a greater assurance of public



support to make a particular intervention more sustainable. Consequently, the U.S. inter-country child adoption procedures reflect the requirements of the government, which then guide the operations of the private adoption agencies involving collaborative efforts. This study focuses on international adoption trends from 31 Sub-Saharan African countries (sending countries) to the US (a receiving country) from 2001 to 2010 relative to the identified variables discussed herein.

Methodology and Data

The theory under consideration here is the push and pull factors with particular emphasis on the push factors relative to international adoptions. The dataset was constructed from existing data that was gathered and compiled from several appropriate websites. Since the dependent variable of the study-- number of children adopted (*ca*)--takes a form of count data, it is appropriate to use the Poisson regression model. Kutner et al state that: “The Poisson distribution can be utilized for outcomes [dependent variable] that are counts...” (p.618). In order to furnish analysis, the Poisson regression model has been conducted in line with the statistical model indicated as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * pcmean + \beta_2 * popmean + \beta_3 * fsmean + \beta_4 * hdmean + \beta_5 * cdepend + \beta_6 * year + \beta_7 * war + \beta_8 * drought + \beta_9 * English$$

In the model, *Y* denotes the log of the average number of children adopted (dependent variable). The model comprises nine independent variables, i.e. mean per capita GDP (*pcmean*), population mean (*popmean*), mean freedom score (*fsmean*), mean human development index (*hdmean*), and the mean child dependency ratio (*cdepend*), and years covering the study. The following dummy variables *war* and *drought*, and the English language (as an international/major working language relative to each country) have also been included in the model.

The data concerning the GDP per the countries capita (which measures the wealth of a country in relation to its population) was collected from the website of UNDATA (last visited on July 17, 2012). As posted on its website (last visited on July 15, 20012), the Freedom House indicates that freedom score is a measure of democracy in relation to civil liberties and political rights. The score



ranges from 1 to 7; a higher number indicating the less freedom that exists in particular country. The human development index is a statistical measure, which rates a country's development in terms of literacy, life expectancy, educational attainment, and standard of living. The UNDP website, from which the data was collected, defines the term as: "...a new way of measuring development by combining indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income into a composite human development index, the HDI" (Last retrieved on June 8, 2012).

The UNDESA website displays data on child dependency ratio, and defines the term as: "The child dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 0-19 to the population aged 20-64" (Retrieved on June 8, 2012). In other words, the term indicates the proportion of population aged 0-19 (who are presumed not working) divided by the proportion of population aged 20- 64 (who are presumed working).

The collected information matching the variables (independent, dependent, and dummy) comprise 10 years of duration from 2001 to 2010. The mean value of each measure, corresponding to each variable analogous to each country under study, has been part of the dataset. The dummy variables--war and drought--have also been included in the dataset. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. (on its website) indicates that: "Severe drought and persistent civil strife and insecurity in many countries in the region have displaced large numbers of people and disrupted food production" (retrieved on July 25, 2012).

Results and Analysis

Since the dataset is an aggregate information source compiled for the study, the aggregate results have been yielded rather than a description of the condition of each individual country. In other words, the dataset is prepared in such a manner that a regression computation can be done in order to determine the association between the mean of the measures of the independent variables,



and the dummy variables, and the dependent variable (mean of number of adopted children) of each country from the year 2001 to 2010.

According to the data collected, the number of adopted children from 31 Sub-Saharan Africa from 2001 to 2010 is 13,712. Out of this number, the proportion of children adopted from Ethiopia is the highest (70%), followed in descending order by Liberia (10%), Nigeria (6%), Ghana (3%), Uganda (2%), and Kenya and Sierra Leon about 2%. The proportion of adoptions corresponding to the rest of the countries constitute a maximum of approximately 1% . The data illustrates that the Ethiopian situation is unique, indicating the prevalence of severe social problems that increase the supply of child adoption. UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) indicates: “There are an estimated 5 million orphans in Ethiopia. Of these, around 650,000 have been orphaned due to AIDS. According to national statistics, over 2 million orphans live below the poverty line” (retrieved on July 19, 2012).

In addition to the above cited figures concerning orphans, the push factors such as drought, less wealth or less freedom are plausible causes for the departure of children from Africa through adoption. It is apparent that “...most Africans are severely impoverished and suffer from high levels of poverty and material depravation” (Kieh, 2008, p.119). Since the study focuses on the general trend of adoption from the region to the U.S., the analysis is based on the aggregate statistical analysis (based on the dataset) in order to determine whether or not the push factors affected the number of adoptions.

The regression was conducted using SAS computation method and by employing the following SAS Code: “proc import out= test”, the subsequent statistical results have been obtained, and displayed as follows on the next page:

**Statistical Results**

| Parameter | Estimate | Standard Error | 95% Confidence limits | | Chi-Square | p-value |
|------------|----------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| | | | lower limit | upper limit | | |
| Intercept | -543.004 | 8.8481 | -560.346 | -525.662 | 3766.22 | <.0001 |
| Year | 0.2762 | 0.0044 | 0.2676 | 0.2847 | 4015.76 | <.0001 |
| Fs | 0.3777 | 0.0113 | 0.3556 | 0.3998 | 1121.51 | <.0001 |
| Pc | -0.0007 | 0 | -0.0007 | -0.0006 | 711.97 | <.0001 |
| Population | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 668.95 | <.0001 |
| Hd | -0.0002 | 0.0003 | -0.0008 | 0.0004 | 0.55 | 0.4591 |
| Chdp | -0.0375 | 0.0015 | -0.0405 | -0.0345 | 590.91 | <.0001 |
| War | -1.586 | 0.0381 | -1.6607 | -1.5113 | 1732.81 | <.0001 |
| Drought | -3.638 | 0.0257 | -3.6883 | -3.5877 | 20087.9 | <.0001 |
| English | -1.8112 | 0.0556 | -1.9203 | -1.7022 | 1059.65 | <.0001 |

Hence, with the exception of *hd*, all the *p*-values, concerning all the parameters under consideration, are smaller than .05, this indicates statistical significance. All of the independent variables including the dummy variables (*war* and *drought*)--as push factors--impacted the dependent variable. Hence, there is a significant association between the independent and dependent variables, i.e. the relationship between escaping difficult circumstances and seeking better living conditions.

In corollary with the model of the push and pull factors, adoption certainly is an escape valve for a better life, particularly with regard to children who encounter existentially untenable situations; for instance, orphans. According to the information posted on SOS Children's Village, "There are currently an estimated 53.1 million orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of those children, 30%



lost parents to the AIDS epidemic. An estimated 12% of all children in Sub-Saharan Africa are orphans. Of those children, 5.7 million were orphaned in 2010 alone (Retrieved on July 15, 2012).” The appalling preceding data indicates the supply side is very large. This corresponds to the statistical significance (at $p < .0001$) of the association between the independent variable (population size) and the dependent variable (adoption), which shows that the population size can increase the number of children to adopted thereby capturing the attention of adopting parents (demand side). The demands of adopting parents ought to be addressed through a proper service delivery mechanism founded and operated on the moral principle that all children deserve nurturing family environment. The prospective parents have the responsibility, therefore, to treat adopted children as full members of their family, for instance, by encouraging them to participate in shared household activities. Moreover, prospective parents are obligated to provide a caring and safe environment for adopted children to grow up healthily and to be socialized properly according to societal values and norms.

According to the U.S. Department of State, an interested individual citizen who would like to enter an international adoption request should approach the United States Immigration Services (USCIS). This office would provide guidance following appropriate procedures commensurate to the legal requirements of both the sending and receiving country. In order to determine whether or not a prospective parent would be fit for adoption, an assessment, known as “home study” would be conducted.

A home study is a review of you [a potential adoptive parent], your family and your home environment. It assists U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as well as a foreign country's adoption authority, in determining whether you and your home environment would be suitable for a child (Retrieved from the U.S. Department of State on 6/6/2012).

The assessment, among other things, requires that the potential adoptive parent should be in good health and financial states. Through a background check, which includes fingerprinting, the eligibility of the person will be



determined. His/her record should be clean from anti-social and/or criminal charges such as, for example, child abuse and domestic violence. According to The Hague Convention of Adoptions, accredited private adoption agencies should ascertain the suitability of the potential adoptive parent through a home study. The procedures are put in place in order to protect the rights of the child and the prospective adoptive parents.

Thus, an international adoption involves private adoption agencies, the U.S. Government, and the governments of sending countries to help children obtain stable accommodating families through adoption, which signifies public private partnerships. The whole purpose of the partnership is inherent in the principle of the welfare of the child. PPPs have become not just an option; it has become a necessity in order to provide services adequately. This is particularly the case because of the incapacity of governments to be solely responsible in such an area of intervention.

Summary and Conclusion

In the U.S., child adoption underwent successive waves of evolution in order to reach its current state of affairs, which upholds the principle of the best interest of the child. The regression results show that there has been an association between the number of adopted children and the push factors such as less wealth, less freedom, war and drought relative to adoptions conducted between the years 2001 to 2010 from the Sub-Saharan African countries to the U.S. This concurs with the theory of the push and pull factors; the emphasis of this study is on the push factors. English being the major working international language, its association with the dependent variable has been significant (at $p < .0001$). It can be argued that adopting American citizens would be conformable to use the English language more easily to complete the adoption process. This can also reduce the transaction cost required for adopting a child from overseas.

Child adoption is a practical choice for both children under difficult circumstances and prospective adoptive parents to come together in one



dwelling. To facilitate the choice, the provisions of services rendered through child adoption organizations are important. As it has been explained herein, PPPs are strategic tools utilized to deliver services in connection with a government-private joint effort to provide child adoption services; the provisions of services involving overseas operations entail international partnerships fostering collaboration among concerned bodies. The partnership needs to be successful in order to rescue children from intolerable conditions and eventually transform them into self-sufficient citizens. Whether or not the adoption services have been successfully rendered thorough PPPs requires a thorough investigation to ascertain the results. Nonetheless, the investigator asserts that the independent variables, including levels of per capita GDP, population size, level of freedom, and child dependency ratio have affected the number of children adopted (dependent variable). In general, the independent variables are analogous to the push factors contingent to less wealth, high population size, and less freedom, and thus have triggered adoption from the Sub-Saharan African countries to the U.S. The high proportion of adopted children from Ethiopia, constituting the highest in the region reflects the fact that the country is facing exacerbated social problems. In order to assess the magnitude and the nature of the push factors prevalent in that country, a meticulous research is necessary. As a contribution, this study reinforces the reviewed literature showing factors that affect international migration would also have a bearing on international adoptions from the Sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S.

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