



SCHEDA DI APPROFONDIMENTO N° 40

Which Migration, What Development?: Critical Perspectives on European-African Relations

**Written by
Loren B. Landau**

**and
Darshan Vigneswaran**

A cura di Sisifo Italia - Ufficio Stampa MIM

*Responsabile: Giuseppe Lanzi, 335.66.98.734 giuseppelanzi@scalabrini.net
Email: development@scalabrini.net WEB www.meetingloreto.it www.sisifoitalia.it
infoline: 071.7500256 – Fax 071.7501972*



University of the Witwatersrand
Forced Migration Studies Programme

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Written by

Loren B. Landau
Director
Loren.landau@wits.ac.za

and

Darshan Vigneswaran
Research Fellow
Darshan.vigneswaran@wits.ac.za

Paper drafted for panel discussion on

Migration and Development: Challenges to European–African Partnership

Brussels, Belgium

3 July 2007

Graduate School for the Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag X3, Wits 2050
South Africa
t: +27 11 717 4033 f: +27 11 717 4039
migration@migration.wits.ac.za
<http://migration.wits.ac.za>

Which Migrations, What Development?: Critical Perspectives on European-African Relations

Re-linking Migration and Development

In early 2006, the World Bank's *Global Economic Prospects 2006* considered the economic implications of migration and remittances for poverty alleviation in Africa and elsewhere. Since then, migration and development have served as primary themes in conferences, workshops, and policy debates. The High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (September 2006) and the forthcoming Global Forum on Migration and Development (July 2007) are but the two most visible illustrations of the interest in the topic.

Such positive vibrant discussions around migration offer welcome counterpoints to popular and political discourses painting migration (and migrants) as inherently threatening. It also represents the slow acknowledgement among the mainstream development 'community', that 'migration is an important parameter to be taken into consideration when planning development programmes in LDCs' (Oleson 2002:126). Where sceptics see challenges to stability and prosperity, the Bank and other celebrants speak about a hat trick of benefits with migrants, receiving communities, and sending countries all coming out on top thanks to labour, remittances, and skills transfers. With recent immigration-related riots protests, the rise of nativism in the United States, and the election of an overtly anti-immigrant President in France, the endorsement of migration by powerful institutions like the World Bank, the European Union, and the United Nations augurs well for migrants, those committed to protecting their rights, and those dedicated to improving the welfare of the world's poorest countries.

Without more careful attention to which migration and what kind of development these advocates are promising, migration and development may become yet another chimera. Such outcomes are all the more likely in Africa where data scarcity means there's little ground on which to make informed predictions and institutional incapacity means there are few resources for managing migration or capitalising on its potential benefits. Many admit that they do not have enough information to know just how migration will effect development in Africa, but this has done little to slow those driving the policy process from making broad pronouncements and promises. The wealthy countries and international organisations—most notably through the World Bank, DFID, and the IOM—have commissioned massive research projects on the effects of migration and development, but the limitations on what migrations they are considering and their version of development mean that these may not be enough to develop the policies needed to produce the triple-win. Even if such data were available, the forces shaping policy making in Europe and Africa make it all the more *unlikely* that migration policies will produce the desired effects.

The remainder of this paper surveys the main problems in this engagement between Europe and Africa on migration. It first provides a critical review of the origins of this discourse suggests that the interests of African migrants are unlikely to be reflected in resulting policy frameworks. The work then offers a basic summary data on the subject, highlighting the need to pay additional attention to the region where most African migrants are: Africa. This is followed with a brief attempt to use the available data to question whether migration will have the developmental impacts many pundits have predicted. The final section offers a sceptical position on whether the people most likely to be affected will be able to help set the agenda.

This work is largely intended as provocation for further discussion, deliberation, and research. Given its purpose and brevity, we cannot adequately reflect the heterogeneity of either research or policy discussions on migration development. Similarly, we have neither the space nor the data to fully substantiate our critiques or offer concrete alternatives. Indeed, one of our central arguments is that those offering anything more than speculation, are motivated more by aspirations and self-interest than facts. With that in mind, this paper should be read as a call for more careful and empirically informed discussions around migration and African development and for a more pragmatic understanding of the determinants of migration policy in Europe and elsewhere.

Interests and Origins

A broad-based and transnational consensus has begun to develop around the migration and development agenda. This consensus consists mostly of a) a recognition of the variety of potential linkages between the movement of people and global prosperity; and b) an acknowledgment of the failure of global migration governance to nurture and capitalise upon these linkages. In and of itself, this represents an important step. However, as was revealed in the UN High level dialogue in September 2006, Northern-based and Southern-based participants may have reached these same conclusions from very different directions (UN General Assembly: 2006). Perhaps more importantly, there has been little sense that this ongoing discussion will achieve agreements that genuinely reflect the interests of migrants from Africa. For rights-oriented migrant advocates in developed countries, this discourse can be seen as a welcome departure from the focus on the security dimensions of migration. By framing the concept of migration in terms of its generally diffusely distributed collective gains, documents like the GCIM Report (2005) dilute the strength of unhelpful arguments about the threats to immigration that have characterised much of the debate until now. However, this does not mean that the responses that will eventually be advocated will reflect previously marginalised concerns.

Many of the themes of the current discussion have been afforded prominence in developed countries because of their convenient linkages with pre-existing preferences for immigration control. For example, the Western European version of the migration and development discourse reflects many of

the commitments of the control-oriented policy-makers that were responsible for drafting the Schengen Accords and subsequent policy agreements (Bolten 1991; Neuman 1993; Steenbergen, 1991). For these actors, such acknowledgments meant recognising that a) Western Europe was already contributing to the development of African partners in the form of remittances; b) that there were strong rationales for controlling migration from the global south because it helped to prevent brain drain; c) there was a need for greater 'burden sharing' amongst migrant receiving countries; and d) that increasing the collective capacity of states to regulate immigration could, by helping to combat the problems of smuggling and trafficking, actually promote human development. The themes of remittances, brain-drain, burden sharing, and anti-trafficking measures, have remained prominent features of the migration discourse to this day. Advocates for African migrants are entitled to ask whether these issues are being highlighted because they refer to genuine potential for measures to generate African prosperity, or because of a convenient 'fit' between emergent fads and the more deeply rooted and historically prior interests of developed states in ensuring immigration control (see, for example: Lavenex, 2001).

Policy-makers in regions like Southern Africa may interpret a commitment to migration and development in different ways. In some respects this merely reflects an assessment of a long-standing reality for a workforce that has always had to move in search of improved livelihoods. The impacts of the region's geographically uneven development, combined with the political history of enforced segregation and exploitation have meant that people have usually had to travel and live long distances away from their homes and families in order to find work (Kotze and Hill 1997). Policy-makers are well aware that this not only constitutes a key facet of national integration, but also a prominent form of regional interdependence across countries with minimal interests in cross-border trade (see, for example UNDP, *et al*, 2000). At the same time, in a region that lacks a strong record of multilateral decision-making, and worrying degrees of public xenophobia there has been little sense of urgency to construct of common positions on migration, or realise potential developmental gains in this way. Instead, policy has been characterised by inertia and a generalised reluctance to generate agreements that will capitalise on this key dimension of the region's economy. The Southern African Development Community's efforts to produce a Protocol on the movement of persons across borders is a case in point. The movement to establish a free movement protocol in the mid-1990s created prospects to substantially deregulate a sector that was riddled with corrupt enforcement bureaucracy. However, the concerted lobbying of migration-sceptics in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia eventually ensured that these ideas were scrapped and while leaders in their less powerful neighbours who's citizens stood to gain the most (in terms of improved labour standards and wages) (Crush *et al*, 2000, Rogerson, 1999) from an agreement chose to secure their own bilateral deals with migrant-receiving countries instead of rallying in support of longer-term collective interests (Oucho and Crush, 2001). In this context, it is difficult to imagine the emergence of a migration and development discourse that genuinely reflects the interests of migrants from Southern Africa in Southern Africa. A more likely scenario for the region involves external partners using the leverage of

aid to encourage local governments into viewing certain (pre-determined) topics as coterminous with their own development interests.

Which migration?

Current debates on migration and development are dominated by discussions of migration from relatively poor Southern countries to members of the OECD and the oil states of the Persian Gulf. However, the South-North migrations privileged in policy discussions do not accurately reflect human mobility patterns in the world, nor their developmental impacts. Recent estimates are that only about half of the 74 million international migrants from developing countries reside in significantly wealthier, Northern countries. If one removes Latin and North American migration from these figures, the percentage remaining in 'the south' jumps dramatically. According to data cited in a recent World Bank report (Ratha and Shaw 2007:8), only 3% of international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa go to high-income non-OECD countries, another 27% to High Income OECD countries, while 69% stay within the region.² Most of this migration happens between contiguous countries where there are only small differences in average income. In real numbers, this means there are roughly 3.1 million African-born people (including North Africans) in Europe (Hugo 2006:70-71) and 18 million international migrants within Africa (Society for International Development 2006:16). This is not to say that those in Europe are insignificant, but that we must be careful not to exaggerate their potential developmental impacts.

Other migration statistics, while imprecise, reveal other forms of human mobility with far more immediate effects than those stemming from long-haul movements. For example, data published by the Society for International Development (2006: 16) and the UNHCR (2006) show the number of refugees in Africa is almost equal to the number of Africa migrants to Europe (3,023,000 in 2005). Many of these are housed in massive camps that attract millions of dollars worth of aid funnelled through international organisations, non-governmental organisations and host governments. The results of such flows vary, but can be rapid and transformatory: generating crime, insecurity, and social tensions while potentially reshaping patterns of economic exchange and political authority (Juma and Suhrke 2003; Landau 2003; De Waal 1997). As Lindley (2007) and others note, many refugees also maintain linkages to sending communities through remittances or other forms of support. These can be valuable resources in post-conflict reconstruction, but may also help promote continued or renewed conflict (Collier 2000; Haas 2005: 1275).

International migration is important, but if there is one area where more attention is needed it is in responding to the movements of people who never leave their countries. Estimates vary, but the number of people displaced by war, conflict, and natural disaster is probably close to double the number of refugees (IDMC). Large scale urbanisation is perhaps the most significant and pressing

² Further support for this point can be found in House of Commons International Development Committee (2004)

migration and development issue in Africa, an issue that evokes Malthus' worst nightmares among city planners across the continent (Kaplan 1994). The United Nations estimates that between 1995 and 2000, Nigeria alone had 5.4 million rural to urban migrants, Tanzania had 2.0 million, Kenya had 1.8 million, and South Africa another 1.28 million (United Nations in ouare 2006). Although the actual outcomes are unlikely to be as dire as some fear, the long-term significance of ongoing urbanisation on health, education, housing, income, family structures, and political institutions can hardly be overstated (Simone 2004).

Given the dramatic numeric imbalance between Africans in Europe and African migrants who remain in Africa, the most developmentally significant forms of migration are those taking place within the continent. Unfortunately, few of the potential benefits of such movements have been realised due to the inability or unwillingness on the part of African governments to measure, predict, and proactively respond to these movements. As the Global Commission for International Migration notes in summarising its Africa regional hearing, even where African states have good migration policies, they usually lacked 'the trained personnel, as well as the systems, procedures and technology required to implement them in an effective and consistent manner. The monitoring and evaluation of migration policy was also non-existent in many parts of the continent' (GCIM 2005:9; see also Society for International Development 2006: 13).

What has come on to the agenda is the issue of human trafficking, a concern effectively promoted by the International Organisation for Migration and Western governments. Over the last two decades in Europe trafficking in persons has risen sharply on the political agenda, acquiring broad-based popular attention and demands for public action and legislation. Trafficking undoubtedly represents a) a gross transgression of variety of human rights; and b) a potentially issue for monitoring within the Southern African labour market. However, there is little evidence to suggest that trafficking is a crucial area of regional migration policy reform. Robust research on the sex industry in the Western Cape suggests that trafficking is either not as prevalent as previously thought, or not in the sectors most commonly presumed (Gould and Fick 2007). Even those research projects deliberately designed to track and trace instances of the phenomenon have failed to report significant numbers of cases across the region.³ The framework of criminal laws across the region is sufficiently broad to ensure that a variety of crimes (kidnapping, unlawful, labour exploitation) that commonly form a part of a trafficking operation are effectively sanctioned. Despite these factors, there has been a relative frenzy of activity, punctuated by the IOM media campaign against trafficking and the South Africa's recent drafting of legislation to counter this disturbing form of international trade. For researchers and advocates of migrant issues across the region this outcome seems out of proportion given the well known and widely documented problems having to do with other less-well publicised migration-related forms of hardship and exploitation (e.g. abused deportees, unaccompanied minors, and refugee victims of refoulement). The point here is not that new legislation will not help migrant advocates to detect and

³ For example, the Southern African Counter Trafficking Assistance Program run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported 194 Victims assisted from January 2004 to May 2007.

act against the trade in human beings, but that, in a fashion that Southern Africans are all too familiar with, policy processes initiated by external partners seem to neither reflect nor respond to realities on the ground.

The point on the capacity of African states to adequately implement a developmental migration policy bears further reflection. As noted, above the emerging development agenda is at least in part a reflection of the global acceptance of state's collective incapacity to adequately regulate international movement and settlement patterns. Yet, many of the policies, such as local efforts to combat 'brain drain' and 'human smuggling/trafficking' presume increased state intervention by African partners. Here, one must pause to ask whether it is responsible to be promoting a more active migration policy given the region's record on migration management to this point. Borders between countries tend to be less reflections of political or economic boundaries and more self-sustaining 'economies' extracting vital market resources for the gain of individual officials (Coplan 2001). While accepting the growth and/or persistence of a substantial informal sector in Southern Africa (Lund 2002; Lund and Skinner 2004), there are few measures in place to realise developmental gains from international migrants' largely informal commercial and financial activities (Truen, *et al*, 2005). When the state has become overzealous unmitigated disasters have ensued. 'Crackdowns' on those living in the margins of cities like Johannesburg and Harare exacerbate poverty and disenfranchisement while contributing little to urban regeneration (COHRE 2005).

What development?⁴

The people and perspectives driving recent public debates around migration and development have generated a series of incomplete if not inaccurate set of predictions related to migrations' developmental effects. Given what little we actually know about migration within Africa or from Africa to Europe (and elsewhere), we must treat any promised consequences with considerable scepticism as the recommendations to achieve such ends will most likely serve the one making the promise. There is also a need to problematise what kind of development is being offered.

Much of the discourse on migration and development is shaped by the micro-economic perspectives favoured by both the World Bank and many scholars (see, for example, World Bank 2006; Lindley 2007; Jacobsen 2005). Even when viewed from such micro-economic perspectives, much of the discussion fails to mention the potential negative economic consequences of migration. Apart from brain drain and its potentially (but by no means certain) consequences for the health, teaching, and technology sectors, the movement of people out of Africa represents an effective transfer of cash resources to the North. An International Organisation for Migration report on migration in 2005, for example, finds that South Africa spends USD 1 billion in training health workers who have left the

⁴ This section draws heavily from discussions with Caroline Kihato, formerly a policy analyst with the Development Bank of Southern Africa.

country. It is unlikely that the remittances received by skilled workers will match the direct and indirect public investments made in training skilled workers.

We must also be cautious to presume that policies to liberalise regional financial markets would automatically translate the fruits of migrant labour into regional development. A variety of social factors, including level and nature of attachment to one's place of origin (Englund 2002; Cliggett 2003, 2005), strength of personal relationships with families and friends (Andersson 2002), and incorporation into consumer culture in the region's production centres (Walsh 2003), impact on whether migrants will remit funds at all. While there is evidence that remittances are not used exclusively for consumption (Haas 2005), given the poverty in many African countries, much of it is used for basic necessities or to repay a migrants' debt, such as a loan for the expenses of going abroad (Maphosa 2004). Importantly, this is not simply a one way process, as urban residents can draw on rural resources to establish themselves and survive, or return home during periods of unemployment (Francis 2002, Frayne 2004, Frayne and Pendleton 2001). There are even hints that relatively poor or recent African migrants in Europe continued to be sponsored by family members at 'home' or elsewhere in the diaspora.

More problematic is the degree to which the micro-economic approach promoted by the World Bank and others puts poverty alleviation in the hands of private citizens. The irony of this is that the Bank's own *World Development Report 1997* emphasised the need for strengthening state capability in advancing human welfare. Remittances cannot replace public sector investment in critical sectors such as health, and education, the amounts are not enough, and would not be able to reach the most vulnerable, a point recently made by a high ranking Bank official (Bourguignon 2006). Perhaps more importantly, households may receive remittances that allow them to spend on health and education, but with many of the doctors and teachers gone, such services are not only more expensive but they may simply be unavailable. This is not because immigration restrictions are too lax, but because employment opportunities within the public sector are too few or too poorly remunerated.

There is also reason to suspect that the moneys sent home might never reach those who are most in need. Migration, particularly the kind resulting in remittances is an investment requiring high initial capital outlay and the costs escalate proportionally to the distance travelled. Those garnering the resources to move outside their country or region are already relatively privileged. Those with the resources to move to Europe—to say nothing of meeting the criteria for legal entry—are among the most privileged. People who move across borders in Africa are typically from urban areas and middle class households and the remittances they send are likely to go to close family and kin located in urban areas. Some of these may reach poorer rural relatives, but this is far from certain. Remittances may, therefore, help middle class families in need and further their relative advantage. This can have positive multiplier effects, but may also increase inequality and further marginalise vulnerable populations. Research in Mexico suggests that such inequality may reduce over time, but Africa lacks many of the social institutions that might promote such effects.

Given the inherently political facets of international migration, debates over migration and development should also consider more than economic matters, something they rarely fail to do. While an absent relative may send money, for example, migration may have significant social by-products that are far less desirable including the separation of families and the removal of figures who would ordinarily be role models for future generations. Perhaps most fundamentally, promoting migration of the middle classes has potentially long-term negative political effects in sending countries. The combination of an absent middle class and remittances to relatives left behind may well be what has enabled Robert Mugabe to maintain power in Zimbabwe. Somewhat more benignly, remittances used to secure private sector health and education services may help short-term poverty alleviation while doing little to encourage the state to fulfil its service provision mandate (Haas 2005: 1275). Indeed, remittances potentially undermine pressure on political leaders for service delivery and accountability, creating states that are even further disconnected and disinterested in their people.

Given that African migration is often stimulated as much by persecution and conflict as economic calculations, there is also a need to question whether the environments into which remittances flow are conducive for development. While Lindley (2007) argues that remittances have helped rebuild a semblance of life in Hargeisa (Somalia), Collier (2000) and others warn that remittances may promote the re-emergence of conflict. At the very least, there is a need to consider carefully if the social, political, and financial institutions required for development—not just survival—exist in many sending communities.

In line with the comments on the nature of migration in Africa, some of the most important—and most overlooked—developmental effects of migration are likely to be in other African countries and communities that host significant numbers of international and domestic migrants. In Johannesburg, where certain neighbourhoods are comprised almost entirely of recent arrivals from near and far, international migrants are some of the primary drivers of small business development. However, ignorance, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination are threatening local government efforts to build an inclusive, safe, and prosperous city (Landau 2007).

Agenda setting: who matters?

Proponents of migration and development pledge benefits to both sending and receiving countries. Many also demand ongoing dialogue between these countries and, occasionally, demand the inclusion of migrants already in the North. Surely, all parties will only benefit from human mobility if they are equally able to equally influence policy and practice that structures it. However, one does not have to subscribe to the precepts of *realpolitik* to guess who will exert the most influence on eventual policy outcomes. There are at least three sets of reasons why this is unlikely to happen. The first relates to the difficulty of securing migrants' participation. The second emerges from the nature of

economic and political relations between Africa and Europe while the third stems from who actually controls migration policy in the latter.

1. Many of the migrants—in Europe and elsewhere—are either willing or effectively unable to participate in policy debates. Not only does their absence from countries of citizenship mean their influence there is reduced, but their tenuous legal status or other socio-legal restrictions prevent them from political participation in their countries of residence. In many cases, they see themselves as temporary residents unlikely to benefit from long-term policy shifts. Others simply do not have the time between their two or three jobs
2. In terms of relations between Europe and Africa, the first point to keep in mind is that Europe has clearly articulated interests regarding migration and development and strong political constituencies on these issues. Alternatively, few African countries have clearly stated objectives (let alone policies) in this area. African migration debates are far more likely to focus on issues of asylum, humanitarian assistance, or other forms of intra-regional movement. Even more importantly, the European Union has a relatively unified administrative body that more or less reflects the will of various countries within the EU and can advocate for particular policies at multiple levels of decision-making. Despite the existence of the African Union and other regional bodies (e.g., SADC, ECOWAS, EAC), the continent lacks a unified voice or negotiating strategy on migration, as it does on many other issues. In the absence of such a body, individual countries are likely to accept European policy proposals in exchange for short-term gains or promises, as they have done with regards to trafficking. Most fundamentally, while Europe can select migrant labour from multiple world-regions, the only real option for many Africans leaving the continent is to go to Europe. Once again, the North scores the upper-hand
3. We must also ask how much room there is for development advocates to shape migration policies within Europe.⁵ Despite the best efforts of development agencies and advocates, concerns over poverty alleviation have rarely trumped security interests in structuring foreign policy. Given the continued preoccupation with terrorism and high levels of xenophobia across Europe, politicians seem unlikely to stake their reputation on migration policies intended to benefit Southern countries.

In addition to the reasons outlined above, there is a need to question just how effective immigration policy can be at structuring movements into, through, and out of Europe. If the American experience is any guide, efforts to carefully control, plan or manage do not result in significantly fewer migrants coming. Instead they result in increasing numbers of deaths by drowning, starvation, and other means. Already we are seeing signs of this at Ceuta and Melilla. Short of death, they will produce

⁵ This point stems from a comment made by Aurelia Wa Kabwe Segatti at the Fourth AFD/EUDN conference. 'Migration and Development: Mutual benefits?' (Paris, 8 November 2006.)

practices and human rights violations that reflect poorly on Europe's liberal commitments. Second, they may only encourage people to stay permanently rather than to migrate circularly or to return 'home' when they are not working. The expense and distance of travelling to Europe already accomplishes this for many, but it may affect those from North Africa or elsewhere.

Conclusions

If current debates around migration and development are to be something other than another development fad, we need a far deeper understanding of the impact of migration on receiving and sending societies. This requires a broader framework of analysis that includes critical political and social consequences. We must consider who is promoting this policy and who is likely to benefit. Of the benefits that accrue to African countries, we must recognise that greatest part will likely to go to the middle classes and the politically connected. But even the benefits they accrue will be minor compared to those gained by people in Europe, North America, and Australia who are benefiting from one of Africa's scarcest resources: highly skilled labour. While it is true that remittances are providing much needed relief for households in developing countries, we should be careful about accepting a whole-scale embrace of remittances as the answer to poverty issues in Africa as there are many potentials costs as well as benefits.

If the real interest in migration and development is the development of African economies and communities, we must shift the locus of debate and deliberation away from migration to Europe. Rather, we must begin to develop the data needed (and the people needed to collect such data) to understand migration and displacement within Africa. We must also begin to generate nuanced models that consider the developmental contexts and needs of countries and communities, as they exist in contemporary Africa with all of their conflicts, corruption, and resources. Unless we do this, it is likely that this promising and renewed dialogue on international migration will result in continued policy failures in Africa.

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