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Drivers of Migration and Urbanization in Africa: Key Trends and Issues

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1.0 Introduction

Urbanisation is increasingly being acknowledged as one of the defining issues of the twenty-first century. More than half of the world's population now live in towns and cities and that figure is projected to rise to 75% by 2050 (United Nations Population Division, 2014), with most of this urban growth concentrated in Africa and Asia. In the developing world, Africa's urban transition is proceeding rapidly, with the accumulated relative growth rate of its cities now among the highest in the world. Although in absolute terms, Asian cities still remain the world's fastest growing, the global share of African urban dwellers is projected to rise from 11.3 per cent in 2010 to a 20.2 per cent by 2050, with almost two-thirds of its population growth expected to occur in urban areas (UN HABITAT, 2014). Migration is a significant contributor to urban growth and to the urbanization process, as people move in search of social and economic opportunity and from environmental deterioration. However, the capacity of urban towns to plan for and cater for the increasing migrants by providing employment, access to land and basic amenities are limited leading to a largely negative policy position of governments, city authorities, and often host communities, on migration into urban areas.

Despite this largely negative view of urban growth in Africa, urban areas are “becoming not just the dominant form of habitat for humankind, but also the engine-rooms of human development as a whole” (UN-Habitat, 2014). Despite obvious challenges, growing cities in Africa also provide opportunities for migrants to create livelihoods, engage in entrepreneurship and accumulate assets, thus contributing to human capital development. This rapid urban growth presents opportunities as well as challenges, and Africa's economic, social and environmental development will depend on how this growth is handled. Despite the centrality of migration and migrants in the urbanisation process not much focus has been put on the interaction between urbanisation and migration in Africa.

This background note examines trends in urbanization and migration patterns in Africa and assesses their implications for the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and for Africa's sustainable development. It argues that if Africa is to harness its gains from urbanisation, then migration and how it is governed, should be at the frontline of urban planning and sustainable development.

2.0 Key Migration Trends In Africa

Migration has always played a central role in the livelihood and advancement strategies of both rural and urban populations in Africa. However past and contemporary migration trends and patterns have seen dynamic trajectories. This section provides a brief discussion of the key migration patterns and trends in Africa and how these have provided the context for rapid urbanisation in Africa.

Although the focus is often on African migration to Europe and North America, the bulk of African migration takes place within the continent, as people circulate within Africa, looking for economic opportunities. Contemporary African international migration flows therefore remains largely intra-regional in nature and not to the global north as media perceptions seem to portray. Although there is a dearth of adequate and reliable data, analysis using recent data from the Global Bilateral Migration data base and the migration and visa data bases from the determinants of international migration (DEMIG project) (Flahaux and De Hass, 2016) and census data from 15 ECOWAS countries (Awumbila et al, 2014) confirms that the majority of African migrants continue to move within the continent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, intra-regional migration is larger (67 percent) than migration to other regions. Major destination countries within Africa are South Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia. In West Africa in particular intra-regional movements make up 84% of migration movements making it the region with the largest intra-regional movements (SWAC and OECD, 2012). Many of these are labour migrants moving within the sub region

to take advantage of opportunities in other parts of the sub region, but also increasingly includes young people moving to take advantage of educational facilities in other parts of the region.

Linked to this, migration in Africa has always had an important cross-border component, partly reflecting the arbitrary nature of most national boundaries inherited from colonial administrations, partly drawing on the economic interdependence between ecological zones, and partly encouraged by the creation of regional political and economic alliances in the 1960s and 1970s (McGranahan et al, 2009). Increasingly, people also move between regions: for example, in the past decade relatively substantial numbers of West African citizens have moved, largely to the cities of Southern Africa. While it is very likely for these longer-distance movements to grow in significance, more localized regional dynamics will remain crucial in shaping specific patterns of mobility. In southern Africa, the end of apartheid and the integration of South Africa within the SADC region resulted in a major increase in cross-border and intra-regional mobility. High rates of rural and urban poverty and high levels of unemployment as well as differential levels of social service provision have contributed to make mobility an increasingly important livelihood strategy, with South Africa remaining the preferred destination for many migrants. (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008).

Despite this overwhelming dominance of intra-regional migration within Africa, recent data also indicates that since about the 1980s there has been an acceleration and diversification of emigration destinations from outside the continent, beyond colonial and linguistic patterns. Data from the Global Migration Data base (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016) indicates not only a clear increase in the number of African living in Europe, North America, and other countries such as Australia and India, but also a diversification of African emigration to non-European destinations, and particularly towards countries in the far east such as China, Japan and the Gulf states, as well as some North African countries like Libya, Egypt and Morocco, which have become major transit countries for migrants seeking to enter the European Union countries through irregular means. Therefore, generally Africans are continuing to move out of the continent both as regular as well as irregular migrants. This geographical diversification seems partly driven by the introduction of visa and other immigration restrictions of traditional destination countries (often former colonisers) and to a declining influence of the old colonisers and economic growth, labour demand and more liberal immigration regimes in the new destination countries, but also policies of African regional groupings such as ECOWAS, and SADC.

Thirdly, for African migration streams, although international migration has received more attention in recent debates on migration, internal migration within individual African states is far more significant in terms of the numbers of people involved and perhaps even the quantum of remittances and poverty reduction potential of these (UNDP, 2009). Within internal movements, the importance of temporary and seasonal migration for multi-local households and diversified livelihoods is especially critical. Seasonal, circular and other forms of short - term mobility is especially important in Africa as these are the migrants who are likely to be more vulnerable once they move to the city, and in need of specific social protection policies. Temporary movement, often but not necessarily on a seasonal basis, has long underpinned the diversification of income sources by rural households and, importantly, by urban households. Migration is a key element of income diversification. Research on rural–urban linkages in Mali, Nigeria and Tanzania found that about 50 per cent of rural households interviewed had at least one migrant member, and that remittances were a growing component of household budgets (Bah et al., 2003). In Ghana, a migration survey in five migration source regions of Ghana in 2013 and a follow up survey in 2015 indicated that 65% of households had at least one migrant member in urban areas and sending remittances home was a top priority for the majority of migrants (Awumbila et al, 2016).

Lastly, within these mobility flows within Africa, rural- urban migration remains a dominant migration stream. As people increasingly move to cities and towns in search of social and economic opportunities or as a result of environmental deterioration, migration has become a significant contributor to urbanization. Urban populations in Africa are expected to triple in the next 50 years, thus changing the profile of the region and challenging policy makers to harness urbanisation for sustainable and inclusive growth.

What is Driving Migration Trends in and Out of Africa?

Conceptualising Drivers of Migration

"Drivers" of migration have been defined as forces which lead to the *inception* of migration and to the *perpetuation* of movement (Massey *et al.* 1998, Van Hear *et al.*, 2012) and thus are the factors which get migration going and keep it going once begun. Explanations of the inception and perpetuation of migration have often focused on disparities in conditions between different places driving movement. Such 'Push-pull' models suggest that migrants were pushed by low incomes in their countries or regions and pulled by better prospects in more affluent areas (Lee 1966; Harris and Todaro 1970). Other explanations focus on the micro or meso level, in household decision-making and in social networks, where migration as a household strategy is motivated by the need to spread risk, rather than an individual matter (Stark 1991). Others have underlined the importance of chains, networks and culture in keeping migration going once the initial movement is made.

Poverty was at first held to be a key driver of migration. However, since the early 1990s it has been recognised that the poorest often cannot migrate since resources are needed to do so, especially for international migration (UNDP, 2009, Van Hear *et al.*, 2012). This has led to much debate about the relationship between migration and development, in particular whether development can reduce the pressures that drive migration or in fact can stimulate more migration by giving people the resources to move.

Thus, although the literature identifies several drivers of migration, economic opportunities is often highlighted as a major driver of migration. However well-acknowledged "drivers", creating the background conditions against which decisions to migrate are more likely to be made in Africa, includes social factors such as the search for educational opportunities or obligations to kin, such as marriage or inheritance practices, political factors which includes discrimination or persecution, conflict, levels of security and policy incentives, demographic factors which includes population density and structure and risk of disease. and environmental factors, including exposure to hazards and land productivity. On a smaller scale, personal characteristics such as age, sex, education, wealth or marital status may all have an influence on migration decisions. A study of migrant domestic workers in Ghana (Awumbila *et al.*, 2016) observes that marital status of female migrant domestic workers, particularly divorced and widowed women was a key factor influencing migration.

However as highlighted by several studies (Black *et al.*, 2011), drivers of migration do not occur in isolation from each other. For example, demographic factors are unlikely to drive migration alone, but high densities for example in combination with low income could well mean that people decide to leave, and environmental change for instance, by reducing agricultural productivity, can affect economic factors such as income, especially those of rural people. Thus, migration and urbanisation inter linkages in Africa are complex and highly context-specific social processes and phenomena, with multiple, multi-directional and multi-dimensional linkages.

Development Processes as Drivers of Migration in and from Africa:

Although the literature points to several drivers of migration in and from Africa, the focus tends to be put on poverty, violence and under development as the major drivers of migration. However recent studies (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016) indicate that the increasing trends of migration out of Africa and also large numbers circulating intra regionally seems rather to be driven by social processes of development and social transformation occurring in Africa which have increased Africa's capabilities and aspirations to migrate, a trend which is likely to occur in the future.

This is borne out by the fact that African countries with comparatively higher levels of development (such as in the Maghreb or coastal West Africa) also tend to have the highest intensity of extra-continental

migration, while the poorest countries (such as many landlocked Sub-Saharan countries) have lower levels of overall emigration and most emigration is dominated by short-distance migration to nearby countries, thus confirming the ‘mobility transition theory’ (Zelinsky, 1971), which argues that economic development and concomitant social transformation initially coincide with increasing levels and a larger geographical reach of emigration. Development processes typically expand people’s access to material resources, social networks, education, media and knowledge. At the same time, improvements in infrastructure and transportation, which usually accompany development, make travel less costly and risky, enabling migration over increasing distances. Thus, increasing income, education and access to information and networks generally increases people’s capabilities and aspirations to migrate.

Thus, recent increases in African emigration may rather be explained from processes of development and social transformation which have increased young Africans’ capabilities and aspirations to migrate, a trend which is likely to continue in the future. Based on the above recent scholars argue the need to focus on “migration aspirations” (Carling, 2002) rather than drivers as this allows a better understanding of how several factors can, depending on the situation, shape migration incentives (De Haas, 2007).

The Role of States and Policies as drivers of Migration

While levels of development seem to clearly affect immigration and emigration volumes and the distance of migration, state policies also play an important role both for the dominant intra-regional migration flows and the increasing African emigration trends. The role of policies in shaping migration flows in general and in Africa in particular has been understudied, partly due to the lack of appropriate policy data. However, the general increase in visa restrictiveness towards African citizens can be a partial driver towards an increasing spatial diversification of migration patterns away from colonial patterns. This reflects the broader argument that immigration restrictions change the character of migration rather than decreasing overall volumes of migration as such.

Migration and Urbanization Linkages: Key Issues and Prospects

Although data from recent population censuses (Potts, 2009, 2012) indicates that Africa is not the world’s fastest urbanising region, however, what is true is that Africa’s urban population has been growing at an historically unprecedented rate for decades. Again, although the rate of natural increase in towns, as well as re-classification of settlements into urban areas accounts for a large percentage of this increase, significant long-term migration into urban settlements accounts for a significant proportion of this growth. These have led many researchers to predict an increasingly urbanized future for Africa. Thus, the evidence indicates that African countries will continue to urbanise, with migration, particularly rural-urban migration continuing to play an important role in the urbanisation process.

Most of this projected urban growth will take place in intermediate and small cities and not in megacities such as Lagos or Cairo. Data indicates that on average the “million plus” cities typically absorb only some 25 per cent of countries’ urban growth, while intermediate-sized and smaller cities attract the significant balance of about 75 per cent (UN-Habitat, 2014). Thus, the vast majority of the additional urban dwellers will continue to add to the intermediate and small cities. This therefore implies that the need for urban management is greatest in these intermediate-sized and smaller cities (UN-Habitat, 2014).

Addressing drivers of Migration in countries of Origin and Destination

Until recently migration policies of major destination countries in the global north has tended to focus on border management, visas and barriers as a tool for controlling migration, and little attention is paid to migration as an opportunity for development of both sending and receiving countries. More recently a few

African countries have developed migration policies that seeks to maximise the benefits of migration for the country of origin. There is therefore the need for migration policies that will be beneficial to everybody.

This will entail addressing drivers of migration from perspectives of both countries / regions of origin and destination in a holistic way. To address migration drivers from this, inter linked perspective, the following questions are raised:

- How can we leverage and enhance the opportunities offered by the large flow of intra-regional labour migrants for Africa's development? What role can regional bodies such as ECOWAS and SADC and destination and origin countries play to facilitate intra-regional migration within Africa?
- How can we promote migrants as resources, beneficial to themselves as well as their communities, (not trapped in a camp) not as a burden on destination countries or lost brain drain on sending countries, but as a resource? How we transform migrant's capabilities into a resource? What is needed for this transformation?
- How can we build on brain gain initiatives in countries of origin and destination?
- How can we enhance development opportunities in countries of origin *through for example implementing programmess to reduce unemployment and poverty in migrant sending communities, skills development trainings and income generating activities, for youth in migrant sending communities and agricultural modernization and transformation and reducing spatial inequalities in development?*
- How can we improve systematic data collection (including collecting comparable sex- and age-disaggregated data) and analysis towards effective and informed policies that will address the drivers of migration in a holistic way tailored to different populations and contexts? This would include the collection of longitudinal data to adequately account for longer-term processes driving migratory patterns, such as climate change, demographic transitions, and structural transformation.
- How can we strengthen cooperation between and among States and other stakeholders on data collection to better predict, understand and address the drivers of migration?

Conclusions

That Africa is witnessing rapid urban growth, with migration, particularly rural-urban migration continuing to play an important role in the urbanisation process is not in question. Therefore, it is argued that in an increasingly urbanised world, the development challenges of the 21st century will be met in Africa's cities and towns and no longer in rural areas. Nevertheless, as UN-Habitat (2014) note, Africa's population is currently still well below the 50 per cent urban threshold. This implies that a major re-conceptualization of countries' approaches to urban development can still be undertaken. Fortunately, Sustainable Development Goal 11, commits to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030" (UNDP, 2015), and thus provides the opportunity for African governments to change the negative perception of "cities as vessels of problems" to cities as "accelerators and facilitators of sustainable urbanization and development" as UN-Habitat (2014) urges.

Whether African states can manage the urbanization trends in a way as to harness the benefits of migration and rapid urbanisation remains to be seen. As the World Migration Report (IOM, 2015, Awumbila, 2015) notes about two-thirds of the investments in urban infrastructure to 2050 in Africa have yet to be made.

Therefore, the scope is large for new, wide-ranging urban and migration policies and strategies which will turn African cities and towns into engines of sustainable structural transformation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2016 common African position on urban development provides the critical framework for understanding and addressing the drivers of both irregular and regular migration and to allow individuals to live and work in a healthy, safe and security environment at home or to choose to migrate safely.

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