

OVERVIEW OF WORK CONDUCTED BY THE
UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH
IN THE AREA OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

The work of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in the field of international migration is designed to support global processes of dialogue and sharing of ideas and practices initiated at the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and now continued through the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The Institute's migration-related training is an example of inter-agency cooperation on matters of critical relevance to United Nations Member States. It falls within the broader mandate of UNITAR to strengthen the United Nations system through appropriate training on social and economic development, peace and security issues.

A. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR SERIES ORGANIZED BY UNITAR IN
COLLABORATION WITH IOM, UNFPA AND THE MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

Through 2008, UNITAR as the main training arm of the United Nations system, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the MacArthur Foundation implemented the Migration and Development Seminar Series at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Launched in 2005, the series' role is to inform, educate and stimulate critical thinking on migration-related topics among New York's diplomatic community. It brings together various stakeholders involved in migration and development issues —governments, the United Nations and other international organizations, the private sector and civil society, including migrant associations, other non-governmental organizations and academics, and provides an informal platform for dialogue and networking.

Along with its partner agencies, UNITAR collaborated with the Government of the Philippines, the GFMD host in 2008, to identify migration-related priorities on which to train the international community. Since May 2008, the series hosted three seminars on the topics of: Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration; Countering Human Trafficking, and Labour Migration: Protection, Gender and Development. On the subjects of climate change and migration and labour migration, UNITAR and its partners convened informal expert group meetings prior to the respective seminars, which provided an opportunity for exchange of ideas and progress towards an inter-disciplinary understanding and approach to the issues.

In addition, a course on international migration law, facilitated by IOM, complemented the series, examining all international and regional legislation pertaining to international migration, while providing an inter-active and skills-based learning experience for delegates. Two more events are scheduled to take place in 2008: a seminar on Migration Data on 10 December 2008 and a panel discussion on the Political Rights of Migrants, celebrating the occasion of International Migrants' Day on 18 December 2008.

Looking back, the Migration and Development Series in 2008 was well received by the United Nations community and the discussions can be summarized under the following headers:

1. Causes and consequences of migration

When addressing the causes and consequences of migration, it became clear that the links between migration, development and environmental factors are varied. Two years after the High-level Dialogue, which stressed the win-win-win potential of migration for countries of origin, destination and migrants alike, discussions at the series in 2008 converged around the message that migration should not be overplayed as a factor in the development process and migration should be considered a symptom rather than a cause of development failure. It was underlined that the responsibility for development remains with states, not migrants. Migration cannot be the driver of development; rather, policy needs to create other options, including the option not to migrate. This skepticism was partly based on the observation that the transfer of economic and social capital from individual migrants to the wider society remains largely uncertain. Indeed, experts were cautious regarding the degree to which micro-level development gains deriving from migration, i.e. through remittances to individual households, translate into macro-level development and a transformation of society in countries of origin.

Targeted investments in migrants' skills and capacities under temporary labour migration programmes were considered a promising approach if combined with reintegration assistance in countries of origin. In addition, countries of destination should tackle the problem of underemployed migrants outside of managed migration programmes. Measures to reduce the costs for sending and receiving remittances, and support for pooled and matched remittance flows should be accompanied by incentives to reduce dependency behaviour and to create jobs in countries of origin.

While the interlinkages between development and climate and environmental factors are widely recognized, migration remains a mostly unknown variable in this equation. Indeed, the Migration and Development Seminars Series' discussion of this topic highlighted the need for further research on the ways in which environmental factors affect migration, and how migration can have an effect on environmental conditions. Current scenarios about future climate-induced mass migration flows were deemed highly speculative.

Evidence suggests that migration decisions are usually not mono-causal, but influenced by multiple factors. Socio-economic and political conditions in both the country of origin and destination, as well as intervening factors such as immigration policies and transport infrastructures shape migration decisions and outcomes. Since migration is already part of individual and collective adaptation strategies to climate change and environmental hazards, legal frameworks and policies should be designed to accommodate this reality and to ensure that it can happen in a legal and safe manner.

2. Rights, protection and the principle of shared responsibility

A major concern in the debate was the need for greater clarity about the legal frameworks applying and affording protection to those affected by environmental hazards. Human rights instruments and other standards such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹, identify relevant rights and obligations of states and other actors. However, despite the frequent use of terms such as "environmental refugee" or "climate change refugee" in academic and public discourse, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees does not apply in these cases.

In this context and others, the core responsibility of governments to guarantee, implement and enforce migrants' rights was underlined, even if non-State actors have an important role to play in ensuring that migrants are being protected. Based on the increasingly recognized principle of shared responsibility, clear international and bilateral agreements, for example on labour migration, were deemed essential, not least to mitigate power asymmetries between countries of origin and destination, and to ensure cooperation where incentives are low for receiving countries, e.g. in the case of health worker

migration. In addition, governments should exercise oversight of international recruitment agencies through a licensing and monitoring mechanism. This could help end abusive bond practices by ensuring that recruitment fees are being charged to employers and not to the prospective migrant employee.

While legal instruments should be gender-neutral, policies should be gender-sensitive and take the different situations and needs of male and female migrants into account. In the case of labour migration, this should translate into labour laws covering all forms of work, including domestic work. Also, labour rights should apply to all workers regardless of their status. In the context of the discussions on human trafficking, representatives of the private sector underlined the responsibility of businesses to tackle the demand for cheap labour and end exploitation. Also, shareholders and consumers were seen as important constituencies given their leverage for pressuring companies to manage and monitor their supply chains.

Experts stressed the fact that commitments to protection need to be backed up by adequate and predictable funding. Critical in this regard is ensuring continuity when assistance programmes are being transferred from international to national stakeholders, who often lack support or fail to allocate sufficient resources to effectively maintain operations and services. In addition, funding decisions must be oriented towards the needs on the ground and include the beneficiaries and their families as full stakeholders.

3. Participation, empowerment and the origins of vulnerability

Participation, coalition-building and collective action among a wide variety of stakeholders were seen during the debates as cornerstones of effective protection for migrants and the prevention of human rights abuses, including through human trafficking. Migrant workers must be granted the right to form associations and to participate in the social dialogue between governments, the private sector and trade unions. Migrant women, who often have considerable economic power, still face the challenge of transforming their enhanced provider roles into political power.

Throughout all events, evidence of the enhanced vulnerability facing those who are without voice underscored the importance of representation and participation. Far from being a fact of nature, the vulnerability of certain groups such as minority populations, women, children, the poor, the elderly, etc. to exploitation and abuse is often due to social, cultural, economic and political factors that can be addressed, including violent conflict inequalities, discrimination, lack of access to resources and information, lack of knowledge and skills, limited or no involvement in decision-making, etc. It will depend on the right policy choices to ensure that migration contributes to remedying such ills, rather than aggravating them further.

B. MIGRATION PROGRAMME OF UNITAR IN COLLABORATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN AND IOM

In 2009, UNITAR is relaunching its Migration Programme from its Governance Unit in Geneva, Switzerland. With the support of the Government of Spain, UNITAR and IOM will be implementing a multi-year joint project strengthening the capacities of the United Nations community in the field of international migration and development. The proposed set of capacity-development activities includes: (a) expanding the migration policy series to other United Nations locations and regional commissions; (b) follow-up to the recommendations and actionable outcomes of the GFMD; (c) facilitating the dialogue among regional and international migration policy processes, including regional consultative processes, and (d) strengthening the development dimension in these discussions.

In addition, a number of country-level pilot projects are envisioned. The pilots will explore new areas of activity and innovative approaches based on, and leading to, the development of long-term and large-scale projects at the country level. In addition, it is planned to transfer and apply existing initiatives and good practices from one implementation context to another. Areas for exploration include:

1. Engaging the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission² to consider the role of transnational communities in consolidating peace and development in the countries currently under the Commission's consideration and identifying formal avenues for the engagement of transnational communities in United Nations-facilitated peacebuilding processes, including potential interfaces between the United Nations system and transnational community organizations to facilitate participation in reconstruction, peacebuilding, development and reconciliation;
2. Strengthening migration and development data and research through peer-to-peer capacity-building among academic institutions. By bringing together representatives of universities and research centres from more and less developed regions, as well as civil society stakeholders, this project would initiate greater collaboration and capacity-building to collect policy-relevant migration data, facilitate access to and sharing of migration-related data and research and bridge the gap between research and policy.

NOTES

¹ See E/CN.4/1998/53/ADD.2 (accessed 3 March 2009).

² See <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/> (accessed 3 March 2009).