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Migration between Africa and the European Union: Development and Cultural

Introduction

The relationship between migration and development has been a subject of social science research since the 19th century. But little has been done on the cultural relationship with migration. Labour migration and 'brain developers' from Africa has been a subject of research interest since the 1950s. The concept 'brain developer' is loosely used here to define youths who emigrated for educational reasons. The existing statistics show clearly that the bulk of these migrants went to the Europe Union (EU). The Africa-EU patterns of movement are largely influenced by historical links between these continents. The primary motivator and effect of these movements were (and still are) economic. The role of traditional culture in this process may be significant; but it is not comparable to the contribution of economics. What may be equally comparable are the cultural changes that migrants experience during the period of residence in destination countries. Multiple migrants may undergo so many cultural changes while attempting to adapt to new 'home' and work environments that the resulting educational status may induce alienation from the ancestral home society or culture. This is more likely to occur among the highly skilled who emigrated at early ages. However, a crucial obstacle to the study of migration and culture is the diverse definitions and perceptions of culture itself. Given the association between culture and community, a reasonable definition of culture is "highly placed systems of meanings which are learned and shared by a people or identifiable segment of a population." Culture represents designs and ways of life that are normally transmitted from one generation to another (Betaucourt and Lopez, 1993). But the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the effects of culture on migration or vice versa; it is designed to present an overview of the migration and economic and social development.

International migration is primarily done for economic reasons (employment and higher income). It was initially argued that migration decisions were made by the migrant alone; but it became increasingly clear that there is strong family participation in these decisions (Taylor, 1999). This is mainly designed to assist households to maximize their incomes partly from financial and other remittances from migrants. Hence migration rewards migrants as well as family members who remain at home. The great majority of African emigrants go to the European Union (EU) due partly to distance and the effects of colonization. The history of migration from Africa to the EU goes back the early 19th century. It followed European movements from the EU to Africa for administrative, commercial and industrial purposes. Since the 1990s migration of skilled and unskilled labour from Africa to the EU has attracted increasing attention because of the remarkable rise in the volume of irregular migration through the Maghreb and the extreme risk that young men (and women) take in order to seek better living conditions in the EU. Most of these migrants are aided across to convenient destinations in Spain and Italy by networks of people smugglers. The major destinations of irregular migrants from the Maghreb are France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and Germany and the major sources Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria in the Maghreb and Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa. The most popular transit routes in the Maghreb are Morocco and Tunisia while the corresponding routes in the EU.

North America (United States of America (US) and Canada) also attracts a high percentage of African migrants. In both internal and international migrations, intergenerational wealth flows (mostly through remittances) play crucial roles in the development of families at home. Indeed many families would have been poorer without the economically cushioning effects of remittances. The on-going debate on the impact of remittances on development does not nullify the reality that education and remittances contribute considerably to household incomes especially in rural areas. International migration is generally more rewarding to origin areas because of the effects of developed economies. Brain drain, previously perceived as a curse, is now recognized for its positive contribution to economies of sending countries through the effects of remittances, the new diaspora and brain circulation. The increasing volume of remittances from migrants over the past two decades was largely due to an astronomical rise in generation of financial capital especially in the US, EU and Asia. But, as is now clear, these financial gains occurred at the expense of negative effects of deregulating banks and other financial centres in developed countries. The current global financial crisis is likely to impact negatively on the flow of

development aid and remittances to Sub Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, increasing unemployment and poverty in the sub continent could accelerate irregular migration flows with accompanying security risks and xenophobia.

Brain Drain and Brain Circulation

The brain drain from Africa Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) to the EU, USA and other African countries began in the 1960s following the advent of political independence in the region. It was mainly borne out of reckless political and economic ambitions of African leaders. Several governments in SSA instituted economic approaches that tended to relegate citizens from being subjects to becoming objects. Decades of rampant corruption, blatant flouting of laws and human rights by unscrupulous politicians reduced economies of Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe to permanent states of national poverty. Citizenship rights became associated with the accumulated wealth of individuals. The net effect of this was highly repressive, anti-developmental political systems that rewarded sycophancy and punished honesty, hard work, patriotism and independent thought (see, among others, Cline-Cole, 2003). The psyche and aspirations of the population were abused by a new order that excluded rationalism. By 1975 in Sierra Leone, 1980 in Ghana and 1990 in Nigeria, education became a distant second to income maximization. In the 1990s the economies of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi were affected further by several years of ethnic conflicts which had devastating effects on education, health, nutrition and morale of the general population. In countries, such as Sierra Leone and Rwanda, where governments perceived the educated as obstructionists who belonged or sympathized with opposing ethnic groups, the virtues of being educated were systematically stifled, creating a situation where it seems unlikely that the government ever recognized the existence of the concept brain drain. Professionals, whose exit gave rise to this concept, were swiftly replaced with poorly qualified party stalwarts.

One of the positive effects of brain drain is brain circulation, a process that has been observed since the 1980s. Brain circulation occurs when international migrants who left the home country with acquired skills to live and work elsewhere return to the home country (Saxenian, 2000). A major asset in this process is the additional skills that migrants return home with, having acquired new and advanced skills during their stay in host countries. It provides opportunity for the returnees to contribute considerably more to the development of their home country than they may have done if they had not moved. However, while brain circulation may successfully operate within developed regions of the world, there are several social and economic factors that could inhibit its usefulness in developing regions, especially SSA (Wickramasekara, 2002). It works within developed nations' socioeconomic systems because the environment for setting up the networks required for profitable professional, academic and commercial ventures are quite advanced. Moreover, the populations are highly heterogeneous, highly skilled and development-oriented. This environment favours performance, competition and all else that is required to maximize profit. On the contrary, populations in SSA are transitional and still somewhat committed to traditions that breed undue suspicion, mistrust, selfishness, petty jealousy and insecurity. Returnees often contend with remarks generally reserved for non-citizens.

It is however to the credit of few countries that efforts have been made to attract lost brains back to the homeland. President Obasanjo traveled to the USA, Europe and Asia to meet professional Nigerians studying and working there and passionately appealed to them to return home. One of the incentives that are already in place is permitting Nigerian citizens to hold dual citizenship (Oyelaran and Adediran, 1997; Honoré, 2004). President Mbeki of South Africa pledged about US\$71 million to encourage highly skilled citizens to stay in (or return to) the country. In 2005 the government of Sierra Leone amended its Citizenship Act to allow its current and former citizens to hold dual citizenship. The existence of numerous African diasporas in the EU and Africa and their remitting effects on family development in Africa has encouraged many African governments to develop links with them in order to benefit from their economic development potential. However, though the diaspora has contributed dramatically to economic and social development in host countries African governments are apparently more interested in the contributions they would make to economic development in the ancestral home. This approach to improving Africa's development has been met with mixed feelings. While the optimists hail it as a way to

go, pessimists view it as a joke. Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana and Mozambique are among the countries that are adopting policies to engage the diaspora in dialogue and investment practices.

Remittances

About the most effective contribution that the new diaspora makes is the remittance of money and goods from host countries to the ancestral home. Remittance is both determinant and consequence of migration. Though African receives the smallest amount of remittances made throughout the world, the rate of increase of remittances to the continent over the past five years is the highest in the world. To keep alive the vision of returning home someday, links are strengthened with the homeland through visitations and transfer of money and goods. These are frequently invested in the home-based household, buildings, farms, commercial enterprises and maintenance of good personal relations. Indeed, the propensity of Africans emigrants to remit money home is high. In 1912, the island of Brava, in Cape Verde, received about ten thousand US dollars in remittances from descendant of Cape Verde living in diaspora in the USA (Pires-Hester, 1999). In 1999 Nigerians in diaspora remitted over US\$1 billion home, while Senegalese and Malians remitted almost US\$100 million (ILO, 2003). Ghanaians remitted US\$400 million home in 2000. In 2002 remittances increased remarkably to US\$1.3 billion, nearly the total revenue from merchandise exports. Much of this originated in SSA countries. Over half of SSA migrants in South Africa, especially males, make financial remittances home on regular basis. The anticipated use of much of this is construction of houses, etc. Most migrants from southern Africa make frequent visits home. But few of those from countries that are farther off (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal) visit home frequently (McDonald, et al., 1999). Similar situation exists in Botswana where the opportunity to remit all of one's income assists in the maximization of remittances to home countries (Oucho, 2000).

Frequently, migrants remit money and goods to relatives they left at home. This practice obtains in the opposite direction where migrants require assistance from the source; but the volume of remittance is generally much smaller than when it occurs from migrants. In theory and practice, remittances occur because of social relations and economic behaviour (Mooney, 2003). Beside its economic benefits, it plays an important role in maintaining cultural, familial, kinship and community/home links and, as is being increasingly stressed, the economics and culture of remittances are strongly tied (Cliggett, 2005; Rigg, 2007). The new economic theory of labour migration (NELM) explains much of the relevance of remittances with economically disadvantaged households in sending areas. It considers the contribution of altruism and self-interest in the desire to remit (Lucas and Stark, 1985; Taylor, 1999). The NELM argues that such decisions are actually taken by the household (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Massey *et al.*, 1993) and not individuals, as was thought before 1970. The idea of altruism within this context is associated with the intergenerational wealth flows theory which explains fertility decisions in Africa (Caldwell, 1978, 1982; Dow et al, 1994).

Though studies of remittances in Kenya by Rempel and Lobdel (1978) and Lucas (1982) challenge the role of remittances from internal migrants on human development, there is substantial evidence that the recipients do find these remittances useful (Campbell, in press). However, the literature on remittances from internal migrants in Sub Saharan Africa is very scant. Some research has been done in the area of international migration; but there is much room for improvement. The Southern African Migration Project has studied this phenomenon in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and there is need to extend this study to cover the African continent. Presently, the available data on migration, remittances and poverty are inadequate for policy formulation in the continent.

Irregular Migration

Illicit entry of immigrants into national territories and staying there without valid travel documents is an area of growing concern to the public and governments in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). The history of irregular migration in SSA is rooted in the 19th Century, but became prominent during the post-colonial period particularly due to policies developed by the Republic of South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria (among others) to regulate immigration in the country (Crush, 1999; Mattes *et al.*, 1999). While the most prominent issues in South Africa was the granting of amnesty to irregular immigrants, in Ghana and Nigeria it focused on the mass expulsion of this category of migrants. Currently, the focus is on irregular movement of West Africans through the Maghreb to Europe and its effects on the health and security of the migrants

(Briscoe, 2004; Van Moppes, 2006). Much publicity is being given by the news media to the frequent life-threatening conditions in which desperate young men cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach the coasts of Spain, France and Italy. The deaths of thousands of migrant youths have left many parents and relatives worried about the safety of those who have risked the hazardous boat journeys to Europe from West Africa. But notwithstanding the dangers associated with irregular migration, the risk is considered worthwhile by millions of Africans who live below poverty line. In addition to the personal economic and social benefits to the migrants, the families at home gain from the remittances that the migrants make from Europe and South Africa.

It is not worthwhile to attempt to estimate the number of irregular migrants in SSA, not even those in South Africa or those who move to Europe because the nature of the subjects makes it very difficult to obtain data on their volume and characteristics. It is known that Mozambicans form the bulk of all irregular migrants in South Africa with Zimbabweans being the second highest. In Botswana the largest volume of irregular immigration is from Zimbabwe. Both Mozambicans and Zimbabweans left their countries due to crushing economic problems which were the result of war and poor governance, respectively. The major sources of movements through the Maghreb to Europe are Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana. Apart from the economic benefits to migrants and their families, irregular migration also contributes significantly to economic development of host countries in Sub Saharan Africa and Europe (Buraway, 1976; Pendleton et al, 2006; Van Moppes, 2006). However, there are health problems associated with this category of migration. Prostitution abounds within human trafficking and the accompanying sex trade and South Africa is a major market for this (Woolman and Bishop, 2006). Its implication of the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, contributes to the poor opinion nationals have of irregular migrants. Much more research has been done on the health impact of irregular migration in Europe than in SSA. In Europe the transfer of malaria and tuberculosis is among the health problems associated with this category of migration (Cuadros *et al.* (2002); Gushulak and MacPherson, 2006). Unlike Europe, many countries in SSA do not extend health services to irregular migrants and this should change. But it requires data on the real situation to develop policies to this effect.

Xenophobia

It is unfortunate that among the costs of emigration is the existence of a disturbing phenomenon – xenophobia. It is relevant to individual migrants as well as those in the diaspora because it is among the risks taken when implementing migration (even though it may not have been factored into the decision-making process.) Africans living in the EU are occasionally exposed to racism, which is a more specific form of xenophobia. Xenophobia is not new as it dates back over many centuries. What is new is its increasing strength and the current global economic crisis may fuel it further. In Sub Saharan Africa, South Africa Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia are among countries which have historically been the most affected by ethnocentrism. Given the broad educational exposure of the Creoles and their easy interaction with Europeans, they became the dominant force in the politics, administration, economy, Christian priesthood, education and society of Sierra Leone (Wyse, 1987; Kandeh, 1992; Dixon-Fyle and Cole, 2006). They perceived the people of other ethnic groups (the indigenes) with disdain. Kandeh (1992: 83) puts it quite succinctly when he wrote that Creoles referred to indigenous Sierra Leoneans as “natives, savages, naked barbarians and many other kindred epithets”. In Liberia, the Americo-Liberian (a minority ethnic group of freed slaves from the US) gained full political and economic control of Liberia in 1841 and steered the country towards a republic in 1847. They ensured that the indigenes did not receive much in terms of development, partly by refusing them full citizenship (Dalton, 1965; Akpan, 1973). There was also gross physical and sexual abuse of the indigenes.

As people become more sensitive to growing unemployment and poverty in Africa, there may be fears of discrimination associated with ethnic and national identities. Ghana and Nigeria are perfect examples of how economic decline could trigger a bust of xenophobic attitudes and policies (Campbell, 2008). A major concern in Botswana and Namibia is that immigration would lead to over-population of the country (Campbell, 2003; Frayne and Pendleton, 2003). Hence the 1990s witnessed increased intolerance for immigrants throughout Africa, especially in southern Africa. Still, notwithstanding this development, the pace of research on xenophobia in Africa is slow. Most of the studies on this subject are clustered around South Africa and the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) has contributed most to what is known about the subject in the region. Understandably, it is a sensitive subject in the sense that many individuals

and governments in Africa feel guilty about it and apparently prefer to believe that what was done, and is been referred to as xenophobia, is justifiable. However, xenophobia tends to attract unexpected and dire consequences. The fall of Germany during World War II would most likely not have been if the Nazis did not harbour so much hatred of the Jews.

In the case of Sierra Leone and Liberia the inherent emotional conflicts between the settlers and indigenes erupted over a century later in violent and bloody ethnic wars (Abraham, 2001). According to Boas (2001), the xenophobic divide created by neo-patrimonial politics is a common determinant of the wars which raged on throughout the 1990s. Whitaker (2005: 111) also warned that xenophobia “plants the seed for future political conflict and possibly even war”. There is also an economic dimension to the effects of xenophobia. In the 19th Century the Haitian economy suffered largely because Haiti’s Constitution was designed to prohibit whites, especially the French, from owning land and becoming citizens of the country (Lacerte, 1981). The seizure of white farms in Zimbabwe and its catastrophic effects on the national economy is reminiscent of the experience in Haiti. The expulsion of illegal immigrants from Ghana and Nigeria did not help the human rights and economic record of these countries. The declining Ghanaian economy reached a critical stage in 1975 when inflation rose by over 100 percent within a few months as basic imported commodities vanished from the market, forcing many to revert to traditional methods of survival. By the end of the decade emigration of skilled labour from the country reached alarming proportions, giving strength to the concept “brain drain” as many young and not so young professionals left for greener pastures in Nigeria, Europe and America. The effect was similar in Nigeria with the value of its national currency (Naira) toppling while poverty increase accelerated accompanied by an exodus of highly skilled professionals to Europe, US and southern Africa. In Botswana it was observed that xenophobia and low performance of nationals were among the factors militating against foreign direct investment in the country (Modise, 2006).

Conclusion

Labour migration between Africa and the EU has evolved into a pattern that is likely to influence future economic policies in Africa. The cultural dimension of these movements is a frequent source of conflict that affects migrant and recipient communities (and individuals) differently but significantly because it involves the physical as well as the psychological. Its political implications make it a sensitive and urgent area for policy action. However, it is the economics of migration that has increasingly become prominent in national and regional policies because these movements are not only increasing but are contributing substantially to economic development at both the source and destination areas. The economics of international labour movement generally recommends that development of source areas of migrants would stem south-north migration. Partly due to globalization, the flaw in this approach has been exposed as it is now evident that developing source areas contributes to accelerating human emigration. There is much to be done in the areas of migration and economic and cultural development; and it is expedient that these become immediate research priorities.

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