

Session One: Migration in Development Strategies

Introduction: Chair Martin Pluijm, from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, suggested that the audience keep two questions in mind when listening to the speakers: (1) How should efforts to coordinate migration and development be put into practice?; and (2) how do we make the best use of different types of capital generated by migrants.

Migration and National Development Strategies Richard Black, Migration DRC Director, University of Sussex

Richard Black's presentation focused on the extent to which migration has been considered in developing countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), based on a recent review by the Migration DRC of 24 of the 26 PRSPs created since 2005. Overall, there is still a lack of attention paid to migration in these national development strategies—and where migration is mentioned it is often portrayed negatively. For example, in the PRSPs reviewed there was a widespread absence of references to internal migration; frequent mention of migrants as problematic (as contributing to crime, urban overcrowding, or health problems); a continued lack of coordination on thinking about migration across different policy areas; and a reluctance to listen to 'migrant voices'.

In addition to these broader points, Black provided an overview of the PRSPs of two countries where the Migration DRC has been conducting research with partner institutions: Ghana and Bangladesh. In Ghana's PRSP (2005), 'migration' is mentioned 28 times, but 15 of these references occur in relation to trafficking, pointing to a largely negative portrayal of migration in the country's development strategy. Ghana's PRSP sees growth in the country's slums as a result of rural-to-urban migration and states that there is a need to, 'Develop policies to address seasonal unemployment and migration for young women and men' – again indicating that migration is a problem. Ghana's development strategy does mention that migrant remittances have yielded investment in real estate and argues that policies should be implemented to ease the transnational transfer of such remittances, but this recommendation does not appear in the PRSP's policy matrix. Also, the country's strategy for population management is conceptualised as involving family planning, fertility, and sexual health—but makes no mention of migration.

Bangladesh's PRSP (2005) offers a different approach for integrating migration processes into national development strategies. Although the document possesses some conflicting representations of rural-urban migration, it does stress the fact that migration (especially the international variety) has opened up new options for the country's poor, including women. There is a whole section devoted to 'Development of Services for Migrant Workers', including migrant training, support for returnee migrants, more effective regulation of migrant recruiting agencies, and financial initiatives to help migrants afford the initial move overseas. The PRSP also mentions the need to communicate safe migration practices to children, and to ratify International Labour Organisation conventions on international migration. However, Bangladesh's policies focus mainly on migration of workers to the Gulf, marginalising other forms of migration that occur. Nevertheless, the PRSP represents a model for other countries who are seeking to integrate migration into national-level development strategies.

Migration, Development and Poverty Reduction: The Case of Bangladesh Tasneem Saida Muna, Bangladesh High Commission, London

Tasneem Saida Muna discussed the role of migration in Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. She indicated that the introduction of services for migrant workers as part of Bangladesh's 2005 PRSP, as outlined in Richard Black's presentation, helped contribute to rural poverty alleviation in the country. A mid-term review of the PRSP in 2007 indicated that along with the country's new policies on nutrition and education, Bangladesh's policies to facilitate easier migration had contributed to rising household incomes and an overall reduction in rural poverty that outstripped the progress seen in many other developing countries over the same two-year period.

However, there are still a number of challenges the country faces in relation to migration. The increase in rural-urban migration has put a strain on the country's urban infrastructure and social services. Meanwhile, a large proportion of the country's youngest residents remained trapped in poverty. Thus, facilitating easier international migration will continue to be a key development strategy for the Bangladeshi government, as a means of generating adequate capital for continued development.

Policy Perspectives on International Migration and National Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Aderanti Adepaju, Human Resources Development Centre, Lagos

Aderanti Adepaju began by looking at the 'macro-setting' of migration in existing development strategies in sub-Saharan Africa by focusing on the three D's: demography, development and democracy. Overall, acute poverty in the region remains high, with many people existing on less than US\$1 a day, and much of the available employment is in the informal sector where earnings are low. Virtually no progress had been made toward the Millennium Development Goals by 2005 – in fact, many areas targeted by the MDGs have further deteriorated. This worsening situation has seen regional migrant-receiving countries increasingly become sending countries, with a rise in attempted south-north migration by residents of sub-Saharan Africa. Political instability in many countries has also been a problem (see Zimbabwe, for example).

These difficulties are exacerbated by a general lack of attention paid to migration in PRSPs drafted by sub-Saharan countries. Furthermore, any potential policies on migration that could be put in place by these countries are handicapped by the unilateral migration policies of the north, which seek to stifle the flow of low-skilled migrants, on one hand, and recruit African skilled professionals, on the other. The latter trend has posed serious problems for the health workforces of many sub-Saharan countries.

Adepaju offered a number of ways forward for sub-Saharan countries and northern countries alike to help ease the current stagnation of development in the region. African countries should make poverty alleviation and employment generation cornerstones of their development agendas, as these will help create an environment where migration is a less attractive (or necessary) option – and should establish policies to better facilitate overseas remittances. Partnerships between African and northern countries are needed to open up the potential of return or circular migration for African skilled emigrants, and development programmes sponsored by the north which target sustainable employment generation and poverty alleviation are also badly needed.

Discussant: Wies Maas, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Wies Maas provided a policymaker's perspective on the difficulty of building nuanced views of migration into development strategies pursued by northern countries. She stressed that migration today is discussed in a highly politicized environment and its analysis is in no way value-free. Given this, the role of academics is to try to change widely-held perspectives on migration that are often excessively negative and often inaccurate. She said that her ministry has focused on trying to understand a number of particular aspects of migration, including: the root causes of migration; brain drain and the potential for circular or return migration; and the potential for diaspora communities to aid development strategies. However, she added that it has been very difficult to introduce any policies that go beyond reinforcing border controls and limiting unwanted forms of migration—which have increasingly constituted the dominant priorities of northern countries' policies on migration. Maas also stressed that we should be cautious and not overemphasize the impact migration can have on development. She added that more emphasis should be placed on internal migration, which is often absent from policy discussions, and pointed out that engaging diaspora can often be a complex process for social or cultural reasons.

General discussion

Questions overview: Many of the questions from conference participants centred on the topic of remittances. The question of non-financial remittances (or social capital) was raised, as well as the exclusive nature of remittances, which typically flow specifically to families of migrants and are usually not used in community-wide development schemes. Participants also touched on the issue of brain waste among refugees and other groups of migrants—a phenomenon that is often absent from national development strategies and was not touched on in any of the presentations. Also, one participant cautioned that the call for increased focus on migration in development strategies might have the effect of making negative views on migration still more popular among governments—further hindering migration flows through official channels. The issue of overseas migrants' working conditions was also raised; in many cases, remittances would be far more substantial if minimum workers' rights were enforced, ensuring better pay for migrants, which would translate into greater material support for their families.

The panellists indicated that while there was clearly a discrepancy in the power relations between north and south—and that migration was only one aspect of development—there is still room for developing countries to establish their own agendas in relation to migration that suit their specific development needs. Black pointed out that Bangladesh's PRSP, in particular, represented an example of a country taking ownership of its own development strategy, something which sub-Saharan African countries and others in the developing world could potentially benefit from doing—even if this represents only one aspect of a successful national development strategy.