

# Conference Report

Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2016

sef:

## Pathways Towards Coordinated African Migration Governance. The African Regional Organisations' Role

Rebekka Hannes

Migration has always been part of everyday life in Africa. According to the media coverage, people are on the move because of conflicts and violence, natural disasters, droughts or floods, or a lack of prospects. At the same time, informal and formal labour migration has stimulated economic growth and furthered cultural exchange in many regions. In 2013 alone, there were 15.3 million migrants in Africa. 70% remain on their own continent; most people even stay within their Regional Economic Communities (RECs). A number of migration policies and strategies have therefore emerged at continental, regional and national level in recent years. Existing and planned policies aim to harness the benefits of regular migration while lowering the risks and costs for migrants. During the Potsdam Spring Dialogues on 7-8 April 2016, hosted by the Development and Peace Foundation (sef), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Interna-

tionale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the journal WeltTrends, more than 70 migration experts from Africa and Europe took stock of existing mechanisms. The conference also scrutinised the aims and state of implementation of migration policies and their contribution to economic growth and development.

In current discourses, both on the African and on the European continent, migration is often regarded as a problem. At the start of the conference, the case was therefore made for a deeper understanding of the decision to migrate. As Andreas Gies, Head of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation Worldwide at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) put it, migration is always a result of the motivation to improve one's living conditions. Walter Lindner, Germany's Ambassador to South Africa, added: "If you see that people live better in other countries, you go there." In many communities, as some participants explained, migrants are even regarded as heroes because they have taken a risk to improve their lives.

However, people on the move and governments often have different perceptions of migration. Gibril Faal, Director of GK Partners and Chair of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD), therefore called upon policy-makers to recognise the significance of migration for economic development. To him, this is self-evident: "Migrants actively work on reducing poverty. Sometimes they are even more successful than international institutions or donor agencies have been." Migration governance must therefore be given higher priority, mainly with regard to the quality and content of strategies and protocols.



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2016 (from left): Andreas Gies, Klaus Brückner, Gibril Faal and Walter Lindner

## Migration Policies – a Fashion Trend?

Migration governance is of course not entirely new for African governments and the RECs. Some of the regional and continental instruments in place were established decades ago, e.g. the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (1979), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Abuja Treaty (1991). In 2006, the African Union (AU) adopted the Migration Policy Framework for Africa. Today, almost all the RECs have initiated protocols on the free movement of persons, which differ in their stages of integration, the East African Community (EAC) and ECOWAS being the most advanced. The most prominent continental endeavour currently is the plan for an African Passport to be established by 2018. Making freedom of movement one of the top priorities across the continent, its main aim is to reduce emigration from the continent and promote intra-African trade. In recent years, many countries have also drafted their own policies and instruments for dealing with migration and diaspora communities.

Is the formulation of migration policies simply a new fashion trend? For Professor John O. Oucho, Executive Director of the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Nairobi, this is clearly the case. To him, migration policies are springing up like mushrooms, just like population



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2016: Hailu Kinfe Bune

policies in the 1970, environmental policies in the 1980s and climate policies in the 1990. These policies should, however, not be an end in themselves: their aims should be scrutinised. For example, it should be determined whether free movement of persons is a realistic goal for the continent and specific regions. Oucho criticised the fact that many free movement policies in Africa neglect involuntary migration.

Furthermore, there seems to be a fragmentation of existing policies: some migration policies aim to achieve complete free movement, while others focus on the migration of specific categories of workers. As Marina Peters from Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service argued, this might lead to marginalisation of migrants who do not appear, at first glance, to benefit the host country. It must not seem as though some groups are denied the right to move. A further general point of criticism was that many migration policies focus on the aspect of immigration, thereby leading to a securitisation of migration: “Emigration is seen as a matter of human rights, whereas immigration is regarded as a matter of national sovereignty,” Oucho argued.

## Prerequisites for Policy Formulation

In order for migration policies to be relevant, certain prerequisites must be fulfilled in their formulation. One requirement that was mentioned time and again was adequate research; another was reliable data, both of which are often lacking on the continent. This has several dimensions: on the one hand, the protocols signed and the extent to which regions and states can and should benefit from their implementation are hardly ever evaluated in the regions. “African states need to ask what’s in it for us and our industry if we manage migration,” as Oliver Bakewell, Director of the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford, put it. Many participants also expressed their worries that without such general evaluation, blueprints from other world regions might be utilised for the formulation of new policies.

Furthermore, migration governance touches upon many policy areas that are lacking research themselves. One example is the Joint Labour Migration Programme (JLMP) being implemented by the African Union Commission (AUC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and other partners since early 2015. Until its establishment, however, there were no adequate labour market statistics, including the data on the characteristics and conditions of labour migration that are necessary for the formulation of policies in the area of labour, but also for enterprise development, investment, education and social protection. Similarly missing is basic research on diaspora populations, their skills and qualifications, which policy-makers need to know about – a gap that the AU Commission’s Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (CIDO) and several national Diaspora Engagement Bureaus are trying to close.

Besides research, evidence for policy formulation should also come from civil society. As Sophie Ngo-Diep from the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) pointed out, it is sometimes

forgotten that civil society should be included in policy formulation as well. Yet members of civil society are the ones who receive migrants, organise livelihood activities and shape the development of communities at the local level.

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### Lack of Implementation

The main problem with the many protocols and instruments that are already in place is their lack of implementation at national and regional level. As Chris Nshimbi, Deputy Director of the Centre for the Study



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2016: Takyiwaa Manuh

of Governance Innovation (GovInn) at the University of Pretoria, pointed out with regard to Southern Africa, many multilateral migration instruments have been established, but few countries have adopted them. On the other hand, bilateral agreements seem to have established a 'parallel' labour migration system in Southern Africa, a situation which he also criticised.

But implementation is sometimes slow, as the example of Ghana shows. This country is regarded as pioneering when it comes to adopting visa-free entry of African citizens. Numbers tell a different story, however: Ghana finally introduced the ECOWAS passport in 2010 – 31 years after the ratification of the relevant protocol.

As with the implementation of other policies as well, the overlapping membership of the RECs and the gap between countries' commitment and their actual technical capacity are hindering factors. Furthermore, securing general acceptance of the RECs seems to be a challenge. Many RECs have not managed to create a common spirit and therefore find little resonance with the people in the region, as some participants pointed out. They tend to be regarded as

a club for politicians who do not take local needs into account in the formulation of their policies.

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### Labour Migration as a Shock Absorber

As already mentioned, visa openness is one of the instruments that many states and regions have made their priority. To Dr Olumide Abimbola from the African Development Bank (AfDB), visa openness is a quick win for countries, being easy to implement, and is one of the prerequisites for coordinated labour migration: "The easier it is to access countries with business contacts, the more likely people are to invest in those countries." According to the first African Visa Openness Index, recently published by the AfDB, however, visa openness still has a long way to go: Africans need visas for 55% of African countries, whereas US citizens need visas for 45% of African countries.

With regard to estimates predicting a doubling of Africa's population until 2050, approximately 110 million new jobs will be needed to absorb the current and future labour force. Facilitating labour mobility should be an accompanying measure, participants agreed. Faal stressed the fact that often host communities and governments do not recognise the need for labour migrants. However, "they simply don't like the people". To counter this, migration and mobility need to be put forward more as a business case, as Takyiwah Manuh, Director of the Social Development Policy Division at UNECA, pointed out. In her view, the main weakness in implementing instruments on migration is the absence of regulation and protection for migrant workers, which is one of the goals the JLMP is working towards.

Matthias Busse, Researcher at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), pointed to the positive effects of labour mobility in the EU: in the financial crisis which started in 2007, it functioned as a shock absorber for the national economies mostly affected and is widely regarded as a practical and visible right. Policies should include recognition of skills, promotion of language training and dissemination of information. As Marcel R. Tibaleka, Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda to Germany, explained, it is not only voluntary migrants who can make a tremendous contribution to the local economy; the same applies to refugees if they are granted the right to work. However, they are often neglected in labour migration policies.

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### Lowering Transfer Costs for Remittances

Migrants' remittances actively contribute to economic development in their home countries. Remittances totalling USD 66 billion were sent through

formal channels to African countries alone in 2015. Nigeria and Egypt receive approximately two-thirds of African remittances. As Hailu Kinfe Bune from the AU's African Institute for Remittances (AIR) Project explained, however, only one-third of all remittances are accounted for, as much of the money is transferred through informal channels.

The main reason for this is the high cost of transfers to and particularly within Africa. A hindering factor is the lack of enabling legal and regulatory policies which would allow competition among transfer companies: the market is mainly dominated by banks – with only one licensed service provider in many African countries. What's more, the data collected are often unreliable. Since its establishment in 2011, AIR has managed to reduce the costs of sending remittances within Africa from an average of 20% to 13%, on a downward trend. However, AIR still has a long way to go to make the African remittance market cheaper, safer and faster. One of the aims of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted in 2015 is therefore to reduce costs to a maximum of 5% by 2030, with an average of only 3%.

### The Involvement of Diaspora Communities

In recent years, a frequent approach adopted by many African countries is not only to harness the economic resources of migrants living outside their home country but also to try to engage diaspora communities in the formulation and implementation of migration and development policies. Many African countries have therefore established Diaspora Affairs Bureaus at the domestic level and in consulates and missions abroad. As Emmanuel Enos, Director of the Ghanaian Diaspora Affairs Bureau explained, governments need to be proactive in order to engage with diaspora communities: "Don't wait for them to come but encourage them to be active," he emphasised. It has been proven in many countries that the engagement of qualified diaspora, for example in the public sector, can reduce the costs of traditional technical assistance and accelerate development. Kyeretwie Osei from CIDO summed it up: "Countries making the most of diaspora networks have a competitive advantage in our globalised world." However, any involvement should always go hand in hand with knowledge transfer to build local capacity.

One challenge of diaspora engagement is the rebuilding of trust. As people usually leave because of war, repressions, economic challenges or for political reasons, it may be difficult to convince them to believe in current government policies. On the other hand, knowledge transfer must also be accompanied by confidence building measures for local communities in the home country. "It is important to prevent them from feeling underprivileged when people who once fled are welcomed back with incentives," as

Cleophas Obino Torori from the UNDP Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) Programme in Liberia pointed out.

### The Role of Development Cooperation

Although, as already mentioned, there was general agreement on the importance of migration for development, the potential role of German and European development cooperation was also discussed at the conference. A key focus of BMZ's work in Africa at present is supporting the formulation of national migration policies, as Christoph Rauh, Head of the Division for Policy Issues of Development Cooperation with Africa and the AU at the BMZ, pointed out. Many participants criticised the influence external actors seem to have on migration governance in Africa. Considering the number of policies that are currently being drafted and implemented, some participants were concerned that certain aspects might be forced upon governments. A representative of GIZ, however, refused to accept this. Development actors proceed from local needs and such criticisms ignore the importance of the consultation and drafting process in many African states, which involves national debates with many stakeholder groups.

With regard to the role of development cooperation, Rauh pointed out that tackling the root causes of migration can also be regarded as a core element of its work. BMZ's projects are therefore designed to create prospects for local communities and to enable

#### Global Governance Spotlight 8|2015

##### The Valletta Dilemma. Why migration governance in Africa should take centre stage

*Mehari Taddele Maru*

November 2015; 4 pages

In light of the current migration flows, the EU had called a summit on migration in Valletta, Malta from 11th-12th November 2015. African representatives had been invited to participate in this meeting.

In the Global Governance Spotlight 8|2015, Dr Mehari Taddele Maru outlines the current crisis related to migration in Africa and identifies a number of discrepancies in the implementation of African migration governance. He further describes how the Valletta Summit could transform the migration crisis into an opportunity and makes recommendations as to how the Summit might contribute to effective migration governance and boost the EU-Africa Partnership's trade and development agenda.



home, transit and destination countries to make use of the benefits of voluntary migration. The notion of tackling the root causes of migration was, however, widely contested. As Anna Knoll from the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ecdpm) in Maastricht put it: “The term *root causes* ignores the individual decisions taken by migrants



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2016: Guided tour through Park Sanssouci

themselves.” Whether they are labelled *root causes of migration* or not, Manuh especially stressed that the most important goal of international cooperation should be to give young people and women better prospects by addressing gaps in education, training and employment.

## Implications of the Valletta Summit

The sense and purpose of tackling root causes of migration were also discussed against the background of the EU-AU Valletta Summit on Migration, which took place in November 2015. There was widespread agreement that the Summit and its outcome documents reflect the major differences in interests, aspirations and needs between the African and the European sides. The main difference identified by Dr Mehari Taddele Maru, Migration Consultant for

the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was the different prioritisation of migration: “In the EU, migration is high on the agenda, but in the AU it is not even in the top ten. This gap has to be narrowed down,” he argued.

Priorities and interests also differ widely among the EU and the AU Member States. Any divergences were exacerbated by the fact that the EU position was mainly determined by the current refugee situation around the Mediterranean and within the EU and by perceived security threats. This leads to a mismatch in urgency on both sides. Maru especially pointed to the fact that the EU’s short-term thinking will not tackle the root causes of migration at all: “Containment is not a solution to migration; it might be helpful on a short-term basis but not in the long run.”

In contrast, Dr Abdoul Aziz M’Baye from the European External Action Service, who was one of the negotiators at the Summit, explained why the meeting was actually different from previous ones: “For once, the EU accepted in front of Africa that it has a problem. Now Africa should act as a partner as well.” In his view, this new distribution of roles is manifested in the fact that Europe’s main concern – the return of migrants – was put last in the Action Plan while African interests – the development benefits of migration – were put first.

After all, both on the African continent and between Europe and Africa, “migration governance cannot be fast,” as Maru put it. Wherever possible, policy formulation should build on existing frameworks and initiatives. Although the harmonisation of policies was something of a vexed question in the debate, migration governance can never be regarded as a single issue. In order to achieve coordinated African migration governance, various policy departments at the national, regional and continental level need to work together with civil society and the private sector. The potential and impact of migration will depend on political will. Ultimately, to manage migration and harness its benefits while giving people prospects of a better livelihood, “much longer-term transformational issues need to be addressed,” Knoll concluded.

## Imprint

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