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SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES – LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR MKIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND COUNTRIES OF DESTINATION

Background

Inspired by pro-democracy uprisings across the Arab world, Libyan dissidents planned a "day of rage" for Thursday 17 February 2011 but the day was marred by the arrest of Fathi Terbil, who had represented families of some 1200 prisoners massacred by Libyan security forces in Abu Slim prison in 1996. Following his release later that day, Terbil mounted webcam overlooking Benghazi`s main square, where some families had been protesting and that singular action marked the beginning of an irreversible process leading to a chain of events, that orchestrated the monumental transformation that was witnessed in Libya in 2011.

Who are the African Migrants?

It is important to understand the composition and category of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Libya.

The first category of African migrants in Libya are those who want to use Libya as a route to get to Europe and to lesser extent Middle East. The second category are those who after finding it difficult to cross over to their intended destination decided for one reason or the other to remain in Libya and engage themselves in one form of labour activity or the other. This category of persons may also be in mixed migratory movement.

The third category are those who were recrui9ted directly into the Armed Forces of Libya and granted citizenship of the country who were dubbed as mercenaries and had to be forcefully displaced and had to return to their various countries of origin.

This classification is very crucial to the understanding of the implications and consequences of the Libyan revolution in sub-Sahara Africa, particularly in the Sahelian countries of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Tchad, Burkina Faso and to a lesser extent Northern Nigeria.

The classification also allows for the understanding of the individual challenges that these countries faced as a result of the uprising in Libya. It also inform us that as general solutions are being proffered, there is an equal need to explore country specific panacea, that speak directly to each situation.

Consequences

It is important to point out from the outset that most, if not all of the affected countries lack over arching policies in place to deal with the aftermath of the crisis. These countries lack emergency response mechanism to deal with sudden onset of crisis that require their responses, neither do they have in place any medium or longer term framework for the same purpose. It was therefore no surprise that the combine effect of the policy deficit have had its toll on the region.

It is also pertinent to also note that the situation has been further compounded by the humanitarian situation in the Sahel. The region is experiencing food insecurity, which is the combined result of failed rains, high food prices and the general effect of climate change. The situation has been further driven by the on-going conflict in Northern Mali which in itself has been fuelled by the fallout of the Libya crisis.

The scenario described here, presents a complex situation, which is multi-dimensional in nature, thereby requiring a different form and levels of intervention. On the one hand, national governments would have to put in place policies capable of redressing the negative effects of the situation on the returning migrants, including by providing appropriate social safety net contain their loss of cash and properties due to the sudden on-set of their displacement.

Alongside the proposed national efforts is the need for a sub-regional and or regional approach that examines the situation and explores ways and means of engaging and collaborating with both the countries of origin, transit and destination, within the context within the context of viewing collaboration and cooperation, aimed at addressing the challenge posed by illegal and or mixed migration in general and in this case the fall out of the Libyan crisis.

This point is crucial and of direct relevance to the Libyan crisis when it is considered that within the different categories of returning migrants, is divergent needs and therefore, requires different sets of responses.

It is instructive to point out that the category of migrants who naturalized and are former members of Ghaddafi's military outfit, pose the greatest challenge to peace and stability in the Sahel, particularly, in Northern Mali and to a lesser extent in North East Nigeria, where there is the Boko Haram insurgency. Majority of Malian dissident that had hitherto, found their way into Libya and were otherwise engaged by Ghaddaffi, were able to return to Mali, with their weapons, including with additional arsenal pilfered during the dying days of the regime. The sudden proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), in an otherwise ungovernable swath of the Sahara, combining with political discontent, fuelled by Al Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM) all coalesce together to

form the unstable recipe, exemplified by the fragility of the security situation in Northern Mali.

The importance of the regional approach at addressing the consequences of the crisis lay in part in the conflict resolution efforts of the African Union and ECOWAS. Furthermore, the African Union constituted a Task Force, at the instance of the Peace and Security Council, to address the issue of exploring different ways and means of designing and implementing a programme that assist Member States to address the immediate and longer term requirements of the returning migrants. The Task Force was composed of the relevant departments of the Commission as well as partner members from inter governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The more problematic and challenging effort at finding effective and durable solution is at the national level. Most of our Member States currently face the challenge of buying out poverty as a public good in their respective countries. There is also no social safety net to absorb those that are returning by way of social security that can guaranty a means of livelihood. It therefore becomes an uphill task to expect that these countries can put in place specialized policies capable of ameliorating the needs of these returning migrants.

Nonetheless, Member States must be encouraged to put in place a migration policy that covers the entire gamut of effective protection that takes on board, the elements of the African Union Migration policy. This will go a long way to better prepare for future eventualities in this regard.